

MARKET

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If possible, customers are asked to come alone (no children or dogs).

Although these restrictions do bring changes to the market, Wijayratne encourages the community to support the businesses that depend on the market.

"These local vendors are small businesses," Wijayratne said. "With COVID, everyone has taken a financial hit. It's great we can provide a place for them to operate. The only way we can get through this is to come together."

New this year is the Double Up Food Bucks program, which matches EBT purchases. Shoppers using an EBT need to first stop at the market booth to get tokens for the amount they want to spend. The Double Up pro-

gram doubles that amount.

Confirmed vendors for this season include:

- Jen's Garden (fresh greens and produce)
- My Roots Farm (strawberries, tomatoes, fresh greens, squash)
- Aichele's Berries (strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries)
- Hedge Farm (all fruits, vegetables, jams, and sauces)
- Rockin 2 Ranch LLC (USDA Beef, burgers, and jerky, birdhouses, quilted items, and handmade masks)
- Rising Phoenix Metalworks/Celtic Cauldron (Kettle Korn, jewelry, metal sculpture, scarves, photography)
- Clear Creek Beef (USDA Beef)
- Baker City Farmers Market starts table (locals have donated extra plant starts to be sold by donation as a market fundraiser)

SCHOOLS

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Witty credited Gill for the work he has done to try to prepare for the reopening, but questioned whether those in the governor's office are willing to listen to the points of view coming from the school administrators and staff represented by Findley and Owens.

"Colt Gill has been working at least 18 hours a day," he said. "He's been working really hard to get structure and strategy in place for something that hasn't happened in our lifetime."

Nevertheless, Witty said the districts banded together with their legislative leaders to emphasize to the Salem bureaucrats the importance of working within communities to find solutions that are best suited for their needs.

"Our sense is we need to remind them that local control is important and that Eastern Oregon has a different situation than the I-5 corridor between Eugene and

Portland," Witty said.

As of Sunday, just 37 people had tested positive for coronavirus in the five counties Owens represents in Oregon House District 60. Malheur County accounted for 32 of those. There had been no deaths attributed to the coronavirus in any of the five counties as of Sunday.

"Moving forward, we have to have a more fine-tuned tool toward local statistics," Witty said.

"We're hopeful the governor will recognize that it's not advantageous to shut everything down school-wise and economically across the state if the numbers don't support it."

Witty said that as of late he has seen a change in the attitude of the high-level school policy group regarding recognizing the voices of rural schools of Eastern Oregon.

"We want a two-way conversation and to make sure we're looking at it with more specificity and not one size fits all," Witty said.

'Freedom Rally' brings crowd to Hermiston

■ Event in defiance of COVID-19 guidelines prompts opposing protest

By Alex Castle
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — More than 100 people came out to the festival street in downtown Hermiston on Saturday in defiance of COVID-19 guidelines against large gatherings for a "freedom rally," subsequently sparking a protest in opposition elsewhere in the city.

The rally was billed by organizers as a peaceful and apolitical "information sharing event" that would feature about a dozen speakers from across the state. Though organizers said they felt the event could have provided more detailed information for its audience, the rally remained peaceful despite concerns over potential conflict.

"It could have been better. I didn't know exactly what every person was going to talk about," said Colin Hodges, the event's primary organizer. "I just thought, let's bring in as many different people as possible from different positions in different communities and let them speak and see what happens."

Community members and law enforcement expressed specific concerns about the appearance of Joey Gibson, who spoke first Saturday and is the founder of the far-right Vancouver, Washington-based group Patriot Prayer, but Hodges said he felt the event ultimately wasn't defined by Gibson's presence.

"As you can see it wasn't all about Joey Gibson, and Joey's a great guy," Hodges said. "He's a great, peaceful guy. He has a bad rap for some things, but that's because the media spins things and portrays people certain ways."

Reports have detailed Gibson and Patriot Prayer's history of violent clashes with leftist protestors, particularly in Portland, and previously associated themselves with groups like the Proud Boys, an extremist



Ben Lonergan / East Oregonian

Rallygoers on Festival Street in downtown Hermiston during the "Hermiston Freedom Rally" on Saturday.

"I just thought, let's bring in as many different people as possible from different positions in different communities and let them speak and see what happens."

— Colin Hodges, primary organizer of Saturday's rally in Hermiston

group that has been labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and whose members describe themselves as "Western chauvinists."

Gibson currently faces felony charges for inciting a riot for his role in a Portland street fight last May between Patriot Prayer members and members of the anti-fascist community that resulted in a woman being knocked unconscious and sent to the hospital with an alleged vertebrae fracture.

Joshua Linn is a teacher at Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston and attended the beginning of Saturday's rally after he said a coworker texted him about its connections to white supremacist groups.

After standing and watching a few speakers from the back, Linn said he found most of them interesting and didn't see any associations with white supremacy.

"It doesn't seem like a white supremacist rally to me," he said.

Gibson was joined by local speakers like HollyJo Beers, the local lead for the Three Percenters who is also running for Umatilla County commissioner. Beers didn't use the rally as an explicit campaigning event but focused her time on the stage to discuss the Constitution and how she believes current restrictions are threatening the freedoms secured within it.

"We were pleased with the turnout and the people were dynamic speakers," Beers said after the rally. "None of it was racist, none of it was non-inclusive."

About three blocks away from the "Hermiston Freedom Rally," a protest labeled "Essential not Sacrificial" started at the same time.

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