



# Hermiston Herald

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YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

HERMISTONHERALD.COM

## Flags to be flown at half-staff

BY SEAN HART  
HERMISTON HERALD

Flags will be flown at half-staff twice next week to honor two local leaders who recently passed away.

At the Hermiston City Council meeting Monday, Mayor Dave Drotzmann will honor Joe Burns and Chet Prior with proclamations detailing the contributions the men made to the community. He will request that all flags be lowered to half-staff in Hermiston on Tuesday for Burns and Thursday for Prior.

Burns died Feb. 5 after residing in Hermiston for more than 60 years and accumulated a long list of accomplishments. He served as the president of the Hermiston Development Corporation for 29 years and on numerous other boards.

Prior died Feb. 15 after living in the Hermiston area for almost 40 years. He contributed to many economic and agricultural development efforts and gave back to the community in a variety of roles.

Former Gov. John Kitzhaber approved lower-

SEE FLAGS/A8

## TODAY'S WEATHER



Mostly sunny  
High: 52° Low: 24°

### OUTLOOK

- SUNDAY  
Sunny  
High: 46° Low: 22°
- MONDAY  
Sunny  
High: 48° Low: 26°

A complete weather forecast is featured on page A2.



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FOR LOCAL BREAKING NEWS

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## County vaccination exemption rate one of lowest in state

### Majority of families immunize children

BY MAEGAN MURRAY  
HERMISTON HERALD

While Oregon has the greatest number of people who choose not to vaccinate children based on religious and non-medical reasons in the nation, Umatilla County actually has one of the lowest non-medical exemption rates in the state, which is more aligned with the national average.

According to numbers reported by the Oregon Health Authority, 2 percent of kindergarten students had a vaccination exemption in Umatilla County in 2013-14 com-

pared with the state average of 7 percent. The national average from last year was about 1.8 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sharon Waldern, clinic nurse supervisor at Umatilla County Public Health, said people who choose not to vaccinate their children are not only endangering their own families but others as well who may not have the choice to do so or not for medical reasons. The number of exemptions granted in Umatilla County has held fairly steady at about 2 percent for the last several years, which she said is encouraging.

Through the years, the county has also sent fewer numbers of

SEE VACCINATIONS/A16



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

Compared with the rest of the state, Umatilla County has a much lower vaccination exemption rate, meaning more people are choosing to get vaccinated than the rest of the state.



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

From left, Lauryn Journot, Anna Lougee, Hope Cameron and Makayla Chewning, Clara Brownell Middle School's The Nerdy Girls team members, look through their robotics engineering notebooks Friday morning before leaving for the super qualifier competition in McMinnville. They join team Smarties, another all-girl team, and another team from Umatilla.

## Umatilla all-girls robotics teams prove themselves equal to the boys

BY MAEGAN MURRAY  
HERMISTON HERALD

Members of the robotics teams at Clara Brownell Middle School featured a little more teal and purple and were a lot more chatty this year as the two all-girls teams made it their mission to compete successfully in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field.

Team 7499 — "The Nerdy Girls" — and team 9060 — or "Smarties" — are the school's only all-female teams out of the seven at CBMS that competed this year in the eastern Oregon FIRST Tech Challenge Robotics League, which largely

featured high school teams from all over the region.

"Most of the robotics teams are made up of boys," The Nerdy Girls team member Anna Lougee said. "That's just the way it is. It is intimidating at first, but as you learn and get better, you get used to it."

The girls proved themselves just as capable as the boys, as both teams will compete in the super qualifier tournament this weekend in McMinnville, Oregon, along with another team from Umatilla.

The effort didn't come without a lot of work throughout the season.

Members of both teams said, for the most part in the beginning of this season, they did not know how to program their robots or even the names of the tools they were using. As the season progressed, however, they threw themselves into their

SEE ROBOTICS/A8



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Clara Brownell Middle School robotics team 7499 members discuss their robot design earlier this year. The all-girls team is competing with team Smarty Girls at the super qualifier tournament this weekend in McMinnville.

## Council OKs agreement with port

### Umatilla to purchase disputed land, determine its zoning designation

BY SEAN HART  
HERMISTON HERALD

The city of Umatilla has no immediate plans for the land it agreed to purchase from the Port of Umatilla to settle a year-long zoning dispute.

At their regular meeting Tuesday, Umatilla City Council members unanimously approved the agreement to purchase about 16 acres of land east of Big River Golf Course

on the west side of Bud Draper Road, but City Manager Bob Ward said the fate of the property has not been determined.

"I think it's important, at this point, for everybody to sit back and take several deep breaths," he said during the meeting. "We have no plan for any of those parcels, and when we come up with a plan at some point in the future, that plan will be developed collaboratively with the city, the Port of Umatilla, the adjacent property owners, both residential and industrial, and we will, together, determine what the future of those properties might be."

The dispute originated last spring when the

city denied the port's site review application for a \$1.5 million state-funded industrial warehouse on a parcel of land west of Bud Draper Road. Although a city map indicated the land was zoned for industrial use, city officials discovered an error years before had inadvertently changed the zone from residential without following proper procedures. The port appealed the decision to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals, but with the agreement, the appeal will now be withdrawn.

Ward said after the meeting people have differing opinions as to whether the property should remain zoned res-

idential or be changed to "some level of industrial," but not heavy industrial. He said, however, unless a developer approaches the city seeking an immediate determination, the issue will be considered "at the convenience" of the Planning Commission, which is currently preoccupied with a project rewriting commercial zoning language.

"It's been difficult getting where we are," Ward said. "It won't be any less difficult getting where we need to be after this, but it will be a public process getting to where we need to be. There is no imperative, at this point, to leap

SEE AGREEMENT/A16

## Safety, beauty improvements for Highway 395 discussed

### Committee presents report detailing problems and solutions

BY SEAN HART  
HERMISTON HERALD

Although the Highway 395 corridor between Hermiston and Umatilla has been improved since it was dubbed the "five ugliest miles in Oregon," a local group hopes to make the area even more attractive.

Umatilla County officials and the North Highway 395 Economic Enhancement Technical Advisory Committee presented a report Wednesday that identified problems and possible solutions for the unincorporated area in the county between Punkin Center Road and Bensen Road.

Committee member and County Commissioner Bill Elfering said the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development awarded a grant that was used to hire a consultant, Eric Hovee, E.D. Hovee & Company, who outlined different options to improve the area. Elfering said DLCD hoped the project would serve as a model that could be replicated in similar areas around the state.

"We don't have a plan for anything right now. We have a start," Elfering said. "It's up to all of us here to make it what it's going to become."

Committee member Steve Watkins, who owns Columbia Court Club in the 395 stretch, said the corridor represents "a unique opportunity" with "tremendous potential," especially with its proximity to Washington and Oregon's lack of a sales tax. He said the goal of the effort is to improve the safety and beauty of the area.

Hovee said the corridor considered in the report was comprised of 861 acres on 267 tax parcels between the urban growth boundaries of Hermiston and Umatilla. He said 709 acres are zoned for industrial use and 152 designated commercial, primarily right along the highway, and the area has an assessed value of \$51.7 million. Businesses in the area employ 1,173 people, 9 percent of the total Hermiston zip code, he said.

After conducting inter-

SEE HIGHWAY 395/A16

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