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Hermiston Herald

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2015

YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

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Council OKs energy rate increase

New meeting format to make public comment more 'user friendly'

BY SEAN HART
 HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston Energy Services customers will see an increase in their electricity bills in June.

At the Hermiston City Council meeting Monday, council members unanimously approved higher rates for HES customers, but HES Superintendent Nate Rivera said the city utility will still offer lower rates than the other two service providers in Hermiston.

The new rates, which take effect on bills calculated after May 1, will cost an average residential customer who uses 1,500 kilowatt hours of electricity about an additional \$11 each month. The monthly fee will increase from \$6.50 to \$10.50, and the rate per kilowatt hour will increase from \$.0633 to \$.068. For

SEE RATES/A10

TODAY'S WEATHER



A few showers
 High: 66° Low: 45°

OUTLOOK

- THURSDAY
 Sunny
 High: 69° Low: 37°
- FRIDAY
 Mostly cloudy
 High: 70° Low: 46°

A complete weather forecast is featured on page A2.



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FOR LOCAL BREAKING NEWS

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Port signs significant water deal

Up to 100 cfs could be used for agriculture

BY SEAN HART
 HERMISTON HERALD

A significant agreement was reached Tuesday that could provide more water to the area and millions of dollars to the local econo-

my. After several years of work, the Port of Umatilla Board of Commissioners signed an agreement to lease the port's unused water rights from the Columbia River to the Umatilla Basin Water Users Group.

Craig Reeder, a representative of the water users group, said the agreement was an important step toward securing infrastructure funding for the Uma-

tilla Basin water project included in the governor's proposed budget that will provide more water to area agriculture. He said, however, the water rights will not be secured until after public comment periods on documents that must be approved have taken place. The next step, he said, will be filing the water right, the water management conservation plan and secure agreements with Wa-

terWatch, a water protection agency.

"What the signing of this document does is activate a very long, further distinguished to-do list," he said. "... Our biggest hurdle will be clearing the public comment periods on the water management conservation plan and the water right. ... It's not over until it's signed, and the public comment periods are the open wound for any

of that process."

The approval process usually takes about six months, he said.

After meeting with legislators, including Oregon Senate president Peter Courtney and Gov. Kate Brown, Reeder said the water project, including the infrastructure portion, has momentum, and he expects to know whether it

SEE WATER/A7

IMPROVING CARDIAC HEALTH



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

Gene Berrey works out on an arm endurance machine Thursday at Good Shepherd Medical Center's cardiopulmonary rehabilitation center.

GSMC rehabilitation program helpful to many residents

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
 HERMISTON HERALD

Less than a year ago, Hermiston resident Gene Berrey said he couldn't climb a set of stairs without having to pause to catch his breath after reaching the top.

He and his wife went to the doctor at Walla Walla Veteran's Medical Center where, at the time, he said he presumed the prognosis would be lung cancer. The news he received, however, was much more surprising than he originally anticipated.

Berrey's doctor checked his blood and lab work and told him those looked great, but after checking his heart rhythm, the doctor's facial expression immediately changed.

"I could see it in his eyes that something was really wrong," Berrey said.

Berrey's doctor immediately sent him to a specialist at the Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Tri-Cities, Washington. Doctors found that Berrey's heart was pumping at a rate of 10 to 15 percent, which is much lower than the normal range of 55 to 70 percent. At any point, he could have died.

Following his appointment, Berrey's doctors



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

The Good Shepherd Medical Center's cardiopulmonary rehabilitation center features state-of-the-art exercise equipment, in addition to a live monitor feed, which tracks patients' heart rates as they exercise.

booked him for a quadruple bypass surgery that included valve replacements only a couple of days later. His surgery was successful, but he said he wasn't

prepared for the battle he faced afterwards.

Following his procedure, Berrey could barely

SEE HEALTH/A7

HSD prepares for 'insufficient' state funding

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
 HERMISTON HERALD

The only thing preventing the Hermiston School District from making budget or staffing reductions next year is the projection that the district will grow by at least 50 students.

The state's most recent education budget proposal is \$7.235 billion, which Deputy Superintendent Wade Smith said is still far less than what districts across the state need to maintain current program and staff levels. He said if the Hermiston School District grows by at least 50 students next year as expected, under the current proposed state education budget, it will have enough revenue coming in to cover its total projected operations costs.

That, however, may not be the case for districts with stagnant or declining enrollment.

"This number, right here, is truly catastrophic for a lot of schools," Smith said. "If you are a district that is not seeing any increase in enrollment, you are going to have less money next year than you are this year ... This is clearly an inadequate budget to even maintain status quo."

Smith told Hermiston School Board members Monday night during their regular meeting that even though the proposed \$7.235 billion budget is higher than what was allocated in the current biennium, with addition of full-day kindergarten, that number will amount to less dollars per student.

SEE FUNDING/A7

Local student raises money for children with heart problems



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

McNary Heights Elementary School fifth-grader Blake Wickers jumps rope in his driveway Friday afternoon. Wickers has raised more than \$7,000 since he was in second grade for the American Heart Association through Jump Rope for Heart.

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
 HERMISTON HERALD

When McNary Heights Elementary School fifth-grader Blake Withers was in the second grade, his physical education teacher, Lee Cody, showed students a video that moved Withers so much that he broke down in tears.

The video depicted how many children across the nation are born with heart problems including those that cause severe illness and even death. After watching the video, Withers wanted to make a difference so much that he was impacted emotionally, his mother, Gail, said.

"I remember him getting into the car and telling me about these kids with holes in their hearts, and he just started cry-

ing," she said.

Beginning that year, Withers said he dedicated everything he had to help the children he felt needed it the most. He participated in a fundraising campaign McNary Heights did through Cody's physical education class. The effort was part of a program called Jump Rope for Heart, which allowed Withers and his classmates from all different grade levels to raise money for the American Heart Association by jumping rope, which encouraged them to keep their own hearts healthy. The students didn't have a set amount of time they needed to jump rope. They were just encouraged to practice at home and then also jump rope during their PE classes. That

SEE WITHERS/A10

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