



Hermiston Herald

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2015

YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

HERMISTONHERALD.COM

Parking, restroom planned at Victory Square

Dog park sites being evaluated

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

A 2010 grant application may finally pay off this year with anticipated upgrades to Victory Square Park in Hermiston.

At the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting Thursday, Director Larry Fetter said the city plans to install a parking lot and a permanent restroom this year at the park on Southwest 10th Street between Hermiston and Orchard avenues.

The project may also include a durable roof for a picnic structure, landscaping and lighting, he said, and the \$149,000 projected cost will be funded from a state grant already secured. To qualify for the grant, however, Fetter said the city was required to convert more land to park uses, and he believed the city now qualifies.

"We're going to be taking care of some

SEE PARK/A6

TODAY'S WEATHER



Sunny
High: 74° Low: 40°

OUTLOOK

- SUNDAY
Sunny
High: 76° Low: 40°
- MONDAY
Sunny
High: 80° Low: 45°

A complete weather forecast is featured on page A2.



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FOR LOCAL BREAKING NEWS

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Oxbow trees improving wildlife habitat

Plant survival far exceeding expectations

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

In the years to come, trees planted near the Oxbow Trail site, near Riverside Park, in Hermiston will provide enhanced fish and wildlife habitat.

A year ago, members of the 2014 Leadership Hermiston class and about 200 volunteers planted 5,000 trees on 20 acres near the Umatilla River, and Umatilla Basin Watershed Council board member Ken Thompson said even more survived the first year than anticipated.

"We did some mortality surveys last fall after the growing season,

and we had 83 percent survival, which we were very pleased with," he said. "We were thinking it was going to be as low as 65 or 70 percent."

Thompson said about eight native varieties were planted after invasive Russian olive trees were removed, and the Ponderosa pine, cottonwood and poplar trees planted are faring best at the site. When they mature, he said, they will provide shade on the river for cooler temperatures for fish habitat, as well as benefits to wildlife, such as pheasants, quail and deer, that use the site.

Thompson said the council built upon the plan of the Bureau of Reclamation, which manages the land, and partnered with the agency to enhance the area.

SEE TREES/A8



SEAN HART PHOTO

This is one of 5,000 trees planted last year on 20 acres of Bureau of Reclamation land near the Umatilla River at the Oxbow site in Hermiston. More trees survived the first year than anticipated, and when mature, they will provide enhanced habitat for wildlife.

MOURNING A FRIEND



PHOTO COURTESY KIM LAPLANT

Flowers from the community have been placed at the site of the car crash on Westland Road in Hermiston where McNary Heights Elementary School first-grade teacher Elisabet Flores died April 11.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Top: McNary Heights first-grade teacher Elisabet Flores, second from left, holding 'Kids at Work' sign, relaxes with her colleagues in McNary Heights' Principal Bob Lorence's office, feet on his desk, in this contributed photo. While Flores, who died in a car crash April 11, was described as a strict and loving teacher to her students, she is also remembered by her friends and colleagues as being funny and playful.

Above: McNary Heights Elementary students shared their love for Elisabet Flores, the first-grade teacher who died April 11 in a car crash, by writing notes on flowers and posting them on a bulletin board at the school this week.

Colleagues of teacher killed in crash remember her fondly

JESSICA KELLER
HERMISTON HERALD

"Determined," "funny," "loving," "caring," "prankster."

Colleagues of McNary Heights Elementary School used those words when describing first-grade teacher Elisabet Flores, who died in a car crash the

evening of April 11. Mostly, though, they described Flores not as a coworker, but as a friend.

"She was my best friend," McNary Heights Elementary School fourth-grade teacher Teresa Russell said Friday. "She was just willing to drop everything and listen to you. We shared personal things with each other. She would come in and talk to me and close the door, and I would do the same when I needed to talk to her."

Russell said what struck her most about Flores from the start was her determination and perseverance.

Memorial set up for Flores family

A memorial account has been established in Elisabet Flores' name following her death April 11 to help pay for funeral and other expenses and support the teacher's three children. Donations can be made at any Banner Bank branch in Oregon or Washington to the account FBO Elisabet Flores in care of Zulema Murguia, who is Flores' sister.

She said she first met Flores when they were getting their teaching certificates through Eastern Oregon University years ago. At the time, Flores already had two children, and was pregnant with her third.

Russell said her friend never considered dropping out, and, despite missing a year to care for her son, she returned and got her teaching certificate.

Russell said Flores also was determined to get her

master's degree despite encountering setbacks through the years that forced her to temporarily abandon her plans, including the death of her youngest son. Russell said, just prior to her death, Flores had re-enrolled in a master's degree program, and they spoke two weeks ago about what her focus was going to be.

"Education was so important to her, and it was very important to her to pass that on to her kids, and she was proud of them, oh my God, she was so

SEE FLORES/A18

Showing the power

HHS graduate highlights God's strength in demonstrations

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

The Power Team breaks chains, physically and metaphorically.

Hermiston High School graduate John Kopta broke the chain on a set of handcuffs behind his back during the Power Team's Thursday night performance in Irrigon,

while delivering the message that acceptance of Jesus Christ can break through the chains holding people back.

Kopta punched through boards and tore apart a phone book. Other members of the Power Team demonstrated similar feats of strength by breaking a bat, bending a steel rod and rolling up a frying pan during the performance. The message, however, was the strength of God.

"There is one thing God cannot do," Kopta said. "The one thing

SEE POWER/A6

Kopta: strength in Christ

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

John Kopta graduated from Hermiston High School in 1983, joined the Power Team in 1985 and has been using his strength as a tool for the Christian ministry ever since.

"I went to school here, graduated from here, played football and wrestled here," Kopta said Friday while working out at a gym in Hermiston. "Wrestling was a real important thing in my life, but when I put that

to the side and started pursuing the ministry, God gave me a ministry in athletics."

Kopta recalls the exact day he "accepted Christ" into his heart and life during high school: Dec. 2, 1981. After graduating, he spent a year as a missionary in Tahiti after training in Hawaii.

When he returned, he enrolled at Blue Mountain Community College and soon had his first encounter with the

SEE KOPTA/A6

Hermiston Herald \$1.00



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