

NEWS IN BRIEF

### Hermiston gas prices lower than state average

Average retail gasoline prices in Oregon have risen 0.3 cents per gallon in the past week, averaging \$3.14 per gallon on Sunday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 1,307 gas outlets in Oregon.

This compares with the national average that has fallen 0.6 cents per gallon in the last week to \$2.77 per gallon, according to gasoline price website GasBuddy.com.

The lowest price in the Hermiston was area was \$2.96 at the Space Age and Pilot stations off Interstate 84, according to the GasBuddy app. Multiple stations were selling regular unleaded for \$3.00 a gallon. The highest price in the area was listed as \$3.20 per gallon at the Texaco station in Umatilla.

Including the change in gas prices in Oregon during the past week, prices Sunday were 83.6 cents per gallon lower than the same day one year ago and are 11.8 cents per gallon higher than a month ago. The national average has increased 1.2 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 88.5 cents per gallon lower than this day one year ago.

"From LA to Chicago to New York, motorists saw a promising trend at the pump this past weekend that continue to edge lower today," said Gregg Laskoski, GasBuddy senior petroleum analyst. "That may run counter to consumer expectations but this is what we've seen in recent years when summer prices showed nominal but gradual decline through June and July.

### Financial advisor receives award

Hermiston-based financial advisor Kacie A. Levy of financial services firm Edward Jones has earned the firm's Century Award for outstanding performance during 2014.

Jim Weddle, the firm's managing partner, said Levy is a leader in the firm and an example of what a dedicated Edward Jones financial advisor can achieve. Levy was one of only 503 of the firm's more than 14,000 financial advisors to receive the Century Award.

"Kacie has demonstrated unyielding dedication and enthusiasm for her business," Weddle said. "I am proud to call her an Edward Jones financial advisor."

Levy said she is honored to receive the award. "I am one of those fortunate people who gets to make a living doing something I truly enjoy," Levy said. "This industry is always challenging and sometimes difficult, but I enjoy helping the people of Hermiston meet their financial goals. It is a pleasure to be recognized for my work."

Edward Jones, a Fortune 500 company, provides financial services for individual investors. Levy works in the Edward Jones office at 204 E. Main St., Hermiston.

### Substation fire causes a power failure

A failed voltage regulator caused a power failure for 1,344 Umatilla Electric Cooperative customers July 1.

A regulator at the Columbia Substation caught fire, causing an outage that lasted from about 4:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. east of Hermiston.

UEC wants to remind the public to call immediately to report a power outage so crews can get to work diagnosing the problem and repairing it. Umatilla Electric customers can call 888-465-5701.

If the power goes out, turn all lights and appliances except for the refrigerator to the "off" position.

Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. A freezer that is at least halfway full can keep food from spoiling for 24 to 48 hours during a power outage if no one lets warm air in.

Grills can be used to cook food if the power is off but should only be used outdoors.

# Water dollars to start flowing

## \$50M funding package passes Legislature

BY GEORGE PAVLEN  
STAFF WRITER

Oregon's budget will include \$50 million for water development and efficiency projects in a funding package approved Friday by the Joint Committee on Capital Construction.

That's good news for northeast Oregon farmers trying to pump more irrigation water from the Columbia River to expand the region's agricultural economy.

Prior to his resignation in February, former governor John Kitzhaber called for \$51.6 million in a state-wide water development account to help pay for new water supplies and restoration. Gov. Kate Brown also backed the request after her appointment.

What the committee ultimately

approved was \$20 million in lottery bonds and \$30 million in general obligation bonds to accomplish that goal.

Part of the money could be used for pipes and infrastructure to pump additional Columbia River water onto farms between Hermiston and Boardman, growing high-value crops such as potatoes and onions.

The proposal, crafted by the Northeast Oregon Water Associa-

tion, has taken months of careful negotiations to make sure they balance conservation interests. Now, state dollars are officially in place to move forward with the project's first phase.

"The legislature has worked so hard on our region's behalf, and on behalf of the state of Oregon to provide a pathway for sensible, multi-beneficial water development efforts to move forward," said Bob Levy, a Hermiston farmer and secretary of NOWA.

WATER

# Heat wave ripens melon crop

## High temperatures have been good news for melon growers

BY GEORGE PAVLEN  
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston watermelons are showing up at area farm stands and will soon be arriving at supermarkets throughout the region, thanks to this summer's hot start.

Growers like Jack Bellinger couldn't ask for better weather to grow the Hermiston area's signature fruit.

"Everywhere I go, I'm seeing a lot of melons in the field," said Bellinger, owner of Bellinger Farms in Hermiston. "This could

be a year for the books."

The juicy secret lies in the region's unique desert climate, said Phil Hamm, director of the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, said the Columbia Basin's desert climate make for a longer growing season and the combination of hot days and cool nights means higher sugar content in the fruit.

Watermelons spend all day taking in heat, which is turned into sugar as a source of energy, Hamm said. At night, the respiration process slows down and all that sugar becomes stored. Hamm said nights in Hermiston are cool enough to allow the melons to retain more sugar, giving local fruits their distinctive sweeter flavor.

"Basically, the net gain on the sugar they make is much higher than in other places," Hamm said.



Armando de Robles sorts watermelons by weight Friday at the Bellinger Farms sorting warehouse outside of Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS



Farmworkers collect watermelons from a field owned by Bellinger Farms on Friday outside of Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS



Hunter Dodson, left, and Brooks Bellinger cull watermelons before the melons are weighed and sorted at the Bellinger Farms sorting warehouse Friday outside of Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Crews began picking melons early last week at Bellinger Farms, about two weeks ahead of schedule. Harvest typically lasts through early October, Bellinger said, with sales peaking around Labor Day.

It will be late this week or early next week before Hermiston watermelons start showing up at major grocery stores, but they are already available for sale at local produce stands.

Bellinger hires between 80-85 seasonal workers to harvest roughly 260 acres of watermelon fields on the farm, from Hermiston to Irrigon.

Working quickly, a pitching crew is usually able to fill a truck in 20-30 minutes. Selling Hermiston watermelons comes with a marketing advantage, as well as a responsibility, Bellinger said. Customers expect the best, and this year growers expect to deliver.

"I think it could be a year with really high quality and really good yield," Bellinger said. "This is the signature of our town."

In 2012, watermelons ranked as Oregon's 25th largest crop by value, worth 27.7 million.

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## MEET THE AUTHOR! MARY A. JOHNSON, PH.D.



- Speaking briefly and signing her book, "A Caregiver's Guide: Insights into the Later Years"

Thursday, July 9, 5:30 pm  
Hosted by Raphael Hoffman  
at Sundown Grill  
233 SE 4th St., Pendleton

FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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