

Economic activity keeps grant dollars flowing to airport

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The Hermiston Municipal Airport may look unassuming, but there is more economic activity going on there than meets the eye.

"There is a lot more corporate traffic out there than people would assume," assistant city manager Mark Morgan said.

No one keeps track of every single touchdown and takeoff at the airport, but there are an estimated 30,000 "operations" at the airport each year. Summer months are busier than winter months thanks in part to traffic from three agricultural operations that use the airport as a base.

People tend to think of airports the size of Hermiston's — with its 4,500 foot runway — as the domain of single-engine hobby planes, but Morgan said a significant amount of the traffic coming in and out of the airport is agricultural or corporate. Crop dusters come and go, and corporate planes deliver executives for companies like RDO Equipment and DuPont Pioneer.

The airport also hosts a UPS freight plane 10 times a week, handles traffic created by construction projects and sees helicopter traffic for things like firefighting and medical transport.

Hermiston Aviation, which is contracted to run the airport on behalf of the city, only has three employees, but a 2014 report from the Oregon Department of Aviation stated the airport supported 80 local jobs and 26 elsewhere in the state, combining for a total of \$2 million a year in wages. It also stated that aviation-dependent commercial activity in the vicinity of the airport generated \$205 million in sales statewide.

That type of economic impact is why the state and federal governments are willing to continue investing grant money into the airport when there are larger airports with more infrastructure just a brief flight away in Pendleton and the Tri-Cities.

In September the city plans to begin a \$3.3 million project, paid for almost



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

United Parcel Service employees load an Ameriflight Metroliner cargo plane with overnight packages recently at the Hermiston Municipal Airport.

entirely with grant money, to build a new taxiway at the airport.

The current taxiway is out of compliance with Federal Aviation Administration standards, which state that the center of the runway and the center of the parallel taxiway must be at least 240 feet apart.

The project will also include pavement upgrades, moving the fuel station and installing larger fuel tanks. It will cost the city about \$42,000 out of its general fund.

Morgan said the city usually puts about \$40,000 a year toward the airport. The airport also gets revenue from the federal and state government, fuel sales and hangar leases. About 40 airplanes are housed at the airport, all indoors.

Susie Rawe, manager of the Hermiston Municipal Airport, said aviation has changed quite a bit since Hermiston Aviation took over the airport management 31 years ago. Hermiston has grown much larger, but at the airport some of that growth has been balanced out by other developments. Rising fuel and insurance costs have decreased private plane use and technological advances mean corporate managers don't have to fly out on location as often to sign documents or examine a piece of property.

Technology has changed the way pilots do business,

too. Gone are the days when pilots used the airport lounge to spread out paper charts and plot their course.

Navigation information, fuel prices at nearby airports, hotel and restaurant booking, weather conditions and other information is now at pilots' fingertips. The Hermiston airport even has an Automated Weather Observing System that gives pilots up-to-the-minute information on crucial information like wind speed and direction via phone.

"Pilots are so much more independent these days," Rawe said. "Smartphones have changed everything."

As for the airport's future, the taxi realignment project could help pave the way for an expansion sometime in the future. Morgan said there are a number of hurdles, however, to extending the runway to 5,000 feet, starting with the fact that Ott Road would have to be moved to comply with FAA standards.

"Even if the stars aligned perfectly it would be at least eight years out," he said.

One upgrade that has been on the city's capital improvement list for years that will be started at the airport this year is an Airport Geographic Information System mapping project, which will help pilots land in poor weather conditions. Morgan said the FAA offered the city discretionary grant funds to complete the system two years ahead of schedule, freeing up funds for some other airport upgrade in 2017.

Owner investing in Hermiston Plaza

New landscaping planned before the holidays

By **SEAN HART**
Staff Writer

Dickerhoof Properties has been investing in Hermiston Plaza since it purchased the retail center last year.

Darren Dickerhoof said the family-owned company bought the plaza anchored by Safeway in November 2014 and has already spent about \$500,000 on maintenance projects with more improvements planned. The company primarily buys and remodels older properties with the intention of owning them for 20 to 30 years, he said.

"It's a good long-term investment," he said. "In our opinion, that's the dominate retail center in the market."

The facility consists of about 150,000 square feet of retail space and features about 17 tenants. The property, however, was in need of repair, Dickerhoof said.

Many of the roofs were old and leaking, so Dickerhoof Properties began replacing them with membrane roofing about five months ago. He said the company also replaced about 15 heating, ventilation and air conditioning units.

"We've been systematically going through and cleaning it up," he said. "We're probably about two-thirds of the way through. A lot of the big stuff that you can't see is done. The visual stuff we're not very far along with."

In the next several months, Dickerhoof Properties plans to improve the center's aesthetic appeal. Parking lot and retaining wall enhancements are planned during the next six weeks, Dickerhoof said. Once complete, he said the entire property will then be landscaped before the holidays. The company is also remodeling a portion of the property for a Club 24 expansion, he said.

Hermiston Plaza was Dickerhoof Properties' largest acquisition, but the company also acquired the property and constructed the building for Big 5 Sporting Goods in Hermiston in 2008. Dickerhoof said the company spe-



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

Ron Monkus, left, and Cameron Beers from Knerr Construction work on a handicap access Tuesday at Hermiston Plaza. Dickerhoof Properties, which purchased the center anchored by Safeway in November, plans to complete maintenance and landscaping on the property by the holidays.



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

Dickerhoof Properties is in the process of renovating Hermiston Plaza. The company plans to complete new landscaping at the center by the holidays.

cializes in smaller markets and also owns Melanie Square in Pendleton and Columbia River Center in The Dalles.

For more information about Dickerhoof Properties or Hermiston Plaza, visit dickerhoof.com.

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Walchli named Columbia Basin Realtor of the Year

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Eight years after she joined her mother in the real estate business, Nancy Walchli has been named the 2015 Realtor of the Year by the Columbia Basin Board of Realtors.

Walchli, a Hermiston Realtor with American West Properties, said she was a stay-at-home mother to four girls before her mother, Shirley Parsons, convinced her to get her real estate license and come work with her.

The mother-daughter team works together, and if one isn't available when a client stops by, the other will step in and take care of them. "It makes it kind of nice,"

Walchli said.

This year she is serving as the president of the Columbia Basin Board of Realtors, so she said she was "shocked" when the rest of the board told her they had agreed to give her the award despite her position.

Walchli said the method of selling houses has stayed pretty much the same since

she joined the industry, but the market has changed substantially.

"When a house is on the market and you like it you'd better jump on it, and it didn't used to be that way," she said.

She said her favorite part of real estate is helping first-time home buyers.

"They're so excited, and you get to help them with

that," she said.

Walchli grew up in Hermiston, and married her high school sweetheart, Patrick, after graduation from Hermiston High School. Together they raised four children and now have two grandchildren.

Walchli said she "cannot think of a better community" to help people fulfill their dreams of homeownership.



CONTRIBUTED BY JEANA BECK

Nancy Walchli was recently named the 2015 Columbia Basin Realtor of the Year.

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