

Committee will research options to make city a better place to live

New group will plot out city’s next 10-20 years and future of Conference Center

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The future of the Hermiston Conference Center will be only the first order of business for a new short-term committee approved Monday by the City Council.

Councilors expressed a reluctance to continue subsidizing the conference center once the city starts contributing \$50,000 a year toward operation of the

Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, and created the Community Livability Asset Oversight Committee to come up with a solution.

The new committee also will look at community assets that are already in place or others that residents would like to see built.

City Manager Byron Smith told the City Council Monday that citizens approach City Hall all the time with ideas the city should invest in to make Hermiston a more livable place. He said the committee could prioritize a list of ideas so that the city can start saving money or jump on grant opportunities that arise.

“I think this is a great

opportunity to look into the future more than one budget at a time,” he said.

Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said the committee could research ideas that have been put forth and put some “hard economic data” to them. He said the citizen input gathered from the process also will help the city have a better idea of what is important to residents.

“This gives us an opportunity to step back and say, ‘What does the community want from us in terms of these big investments?’” he said.

To facilitate the process, including gathering community input, city staff have selected consulting

firm Barney & Worth, Inc. According to a staff report the process will cost the city \$48,000 and staff are pursuing two grants that could cover the cost.

Staff recommended 20 prominent community members sit on the Community Livability Asset Oversight Committee. At the suggestion of Councilor John Kirwan, the City Council voted to add five more seats to the committee in order to include residents who are not already heavily involved in other community boards and committees.

Applications for the committee are available at City Hall and on the city’s website at www.hermiston.or.us and are due by 5 p.m.

Oct. 10. The committee is expected to last four to six months and produce an action plan for the city to pursue over the next 10-20 years.

During Monday’s meeting, the council also approved an intergovernmental agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation, which is starting a \$750,000 project to add a traffic signal to the intersection of Orchard Avenue and Southwest 11th Street.

Acting as the Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency, the council also approved a \$40,000 facade grant to Richard Hunsaker for brickwork and stucco on the outside of the

new Holiday Inn Express that will be constructed on the corner of Hermiston Avenue and Highway 395.

City planner Clint Spencer said facade grants were usually capped at \$10,000, but considering the “substantial investment” the hotel will be to the urban renewal district and the fact that the developer was spending extra money to help the hotel blend in with surrounding architecture, he recommended approving the \$40,000.

The agency had budgeted \$60,000 for grants this year and there are no other applications currently submitted.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Feves gallery hosts ‘Not Simply Here’

Renee Couture and Heather Goodwind are featured in the re-opening exhibition of the Betty Feves Memorial Gallery after the summer break.

The opening reception is Thursday, Sept. 24, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at the gallery, located in Pioneer Hall at Blue Mountain Community College, 2411 N.W. Carden Ave., Pendleton. It’s free and open to the public.

“Not Simply Here” features the work of Couture of Glide and Goodwind of Portland, who depict landscapes, human responses to them and experiences with them.

Couture explores the connections and relationships people have with their surrounding landscapes. Her technique combines digital collage and drawings to create depictions of relationships people have with nature.

Using paints, ink and graphite, Goodwind creates abstract landscapes that physically embody emotional experiences. Her work has been influenced by her time spent living in New York, Argentina and China.

The exhibit runs through Oct. 22. The gallery is open Monday through Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and by appointment by calling 541-278-5952. The Betty Feves Memorial Gallery is a nonprofit exhibit space showcasing emerging and established artists. The gallery will celebrate its 25th anniversary this winter.

BMCC offers Zumba in Boardman

A fall Zumba class offered through Blue Mountain Community College in Boardman will encourage participants to get moving.

Zumba is a dance fitness program that features salsa, hip-hop, mambo and other types of upbeat music.

Instructor Joy Bittinger will lead sessions Monday, Wednesday and Thursdays from 4:15-5:15 p.m. The class starts Monday, Sept. 21, and runs for eight weeks. The cost is \$60 or \$34 for seniors 62 and over.

To register or for more information, call 541-481-2099, stop by BMCC Boardman at 300 N.E. Front St., or visit www.bluecc.edu.

School district recruits people with experience in professional fields

No teaching credentials, no problem for those with real world knowledge

By **SEAN HART**
Staff Writer

A shortage of trained teachers is leaving school districts short-handed, so replacements without educational backgrounds are being recruited from other professions to fill the gap.

This school year at Umatilla School District, two science teachers are embarking on a new career after years of real-world experience in the subject.

Dan Durfey at the middle school and Amy Jewett at the high school are two of 52 in the state who have received three-year alternative route licenses to teach while they complete master’s degree programs in education.

Jewett worked in Arlington as a chemist for Chemical Waste Management of the Northwest for eight years. She said her first two weeks managing a classroom have been difficult, but she believes she will learn the skills necessary to teach.

“I can already sense some improvement in my teaching style from last week to this week,” she said. “As time passes and I get more experience, I’ll definitely get better.”

Durfey, 43, worked as the Umatilla County Weed Control supervisor for the last 10 years, with a total of 20 years of experience in the profession. He said he was asked if he was interested in becoming an educator.

“I’ve done a lot of education in the other (weed control) job with the Watershed Field Days and Earth Day,” he said. “So it was like I could just carry this on over. And the opportunity just presented itself, and I wanted to be with my kids more so I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Both teachers already had

bachelor’s degrees in science, which were required to obtain the three-year license. They also were required to pass a test on national and state civil rights laws and professional ethics, as well as a rigorous state test required for the grade-level and subject-matter area.

“I had to study for it,” Durfey said of the science test. “It was like going back to school again. It was pretty difficult. There was a lot of stuff in there that I did in college, so it wasn’t that bad. But a lot of the stuff I forgot.”

Durfey said his first two weeks as a teacher went fairly well. He is teaching two standard life sciences classes and five science, technology, engineering and math-based science classes for seventh- and eighth-grade students. He said the STEM classes allow him to design the curriculum, and he plans to utilize his real-world knowledge.

“I’m going to bring 20 years of experience in here from everything I’ve seen that you don’t see in the textbook,” he said. “If you go to school and graduate, this is exactly what you will be doing in a job.”

Durfey, who is also a coach, said he plans to start his master’s program after football season. He said the school district has been very supportive, helping him in the classroom and with his own ongoing education.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe, who also chairs the state licensing commission, said the alternative route license requires a dual application from both the educator and the district.

“It’s the school district committing to help train this person,” she said. “We understand that they didn’t come through a



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

First-year science teacher Dan Durfey, left, works with seventh-grader Eli Meza at Clara Brownell Middle School in Umatilla Friday. Durfey was the Umatilla County Weed Control supervisor for 10 years and had a total of 20 years of experience in the industry before becoming a teacher this year.

traditional route, and we’re going to provide the supports needed to make this successful.”

Sipe said the district must also complete dual applications for many of the other nontraditional license types. She said the district can also help obtain temporary emergency licenses for people who are missing a required component.

Sipe said the different paths to licensure are not new, and she did not believe the percentage of nontraditional teachers dramatically increased this year. However, she said that funding has forced her to cut positions in six of the eight years she has been an administrator. If education funding improves and the district is able to re-establish those positions, Sipe said finding qualified people to fill them may be difficult.

“When that happens, I’m really concerned about finding educators because a lot of people left the profession altogether due to the stress of budget cuts,” she said. “We’ve had fewer people entering education prep programs.”

Why are they going to enter a program from which people are being laid off left and right?”

According to federal Title II reports, 4,203 Oregon students were enrolled in teacher preparation programs with 2,221 completing the program in 2008-09. The most recent report from 2012-13 shows only 1,891 students enrolled with 1,672 completing the program.

Oregon is not the only state in which students are electing not to become teachers. National Title II reports show 719,081 students were enrolled in teacher prep programs in 2008-09 and only 499,800 were enrolled in 2012-13.

Sipe said more teachers will likely be needed to fill the void, and she encouraged people to consider the profession.

“One of my jobs as an educator is to be sure people understand what an amazing career this is and how awesome it is to impact students,” she said. “Yes, there are absolutely stresses in this profession, but the benefits far outweigh the stress.”

Power outages blamed on border blaze

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Staff Writer

Firefighters worked through the night Sunday and early Monday morning battling a 10,000-acre wildfire along the Columbia River at the Oregon-Washington border.

The blaze, which erupted at about 2 a.m. Sunday in northern Umatilla County, raced through dried grass and sagebrush, closed Highway 730 for most of the day and threatened homes in nearby Wallula, Washington.

Preliminary evacuation orders were issued for Wallula and Port Kel-

ley as the fire bore down on 30-40 structures, and fishermen were also told to leave the river. Crews from multiple agencies did back burns around Wallula to protect the community, and managed to contain the flames overnight.

Firefighters finished mopping up by 6:17 a.m. Monday, said Liz Jessee, director of Walla Walla County Emergency Management.

Nobody was hurt, and the cause of the fire remains under investigation.

“It was an amazing response. A lot of resources were put on the fire very

early,” Jessee said. “A 10,000-acre fire is significant, but it could have been much worse.”

Highway 730 was reopened Sunday evening, and all evacuations have been lifted. The fire temporarily knocked out a

230-kilovolt power line and caused power outages for 3,950 Umatilla Electric customers, though power was restored by the afternoon.

Another Eastern Oregon wildfire has grown to nearly 20 square miles.

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