

Serving others is a family tradition

Volunteers and attendees from near and far enjoy holiday meal

By SEAN HART
Staff Writer

Wearing an apron and armed with tongs to serve turkey to hundreds in Hermiston, Sam Johnson celebrated Thanksgiving the same way he did when he was child.

The 23-year-old said he and his wife Karina now live in Rexburg, Idaho. While back in town for the holiday, he said it felt natural to spend part of the day volunteering at the Community Fellowship Dinner.

"We've done this since I was a kid," he said. "I love it. It feels great to come and do this."

Once the plates were loaded with turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, vegetables and rolls, James Furches was among the volunteers delivering the free food to the tables. Furches, 17, said this is the sixth Thanksgiving he has helped with the meal. After his older brother volunteered seven years ago, he and his mother signed up the following year and have been back ever since.

"I enjoy it," he said. "When you're not busy serving food, you can talk to people. I get a lot of interesting stories."

Through the years, Furches said he has met a Vietnam veteran who talked about his war experience and another veteran who had to have a limb amputated after an injury in Iraq.

Hermiston veteran Dave Bosley was sitting at a table



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

From right, Sam Johnson and his wife, Karina, serve a meal to another volunteer after she finished her shift at the Community Fellowship Dinner on Thanksgiving Day at the Hermiston Senior Center. Sam Johnson said his family has volunteered at the dinners since he was kid, and although he and his wife now live in Rexburg, Idaho, the family tradition lives on.

this year, enjoying his first Community Fellowship Dinner.

"I thought I'd come and see what the community is all about," he said, and added he planned to be back next year.

Across the room, Tri-Cities resident Luann Harle was dining with her mother, Leona Harpster, a Hermiston resident who attends every year.

"This is one of the most wonderful things could happen," Harpster said. "The meal was wonderful, and I make so many friends here."

Harle said it was her first time attending and she was glad she came. She said the food was excellent.

First-time volunteer Morgan Winchester, 16, of Stanfield, waited tables. Her aunt thought it would be a good idea to serve others in order to be more thankful for what they have, Winchester said.



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

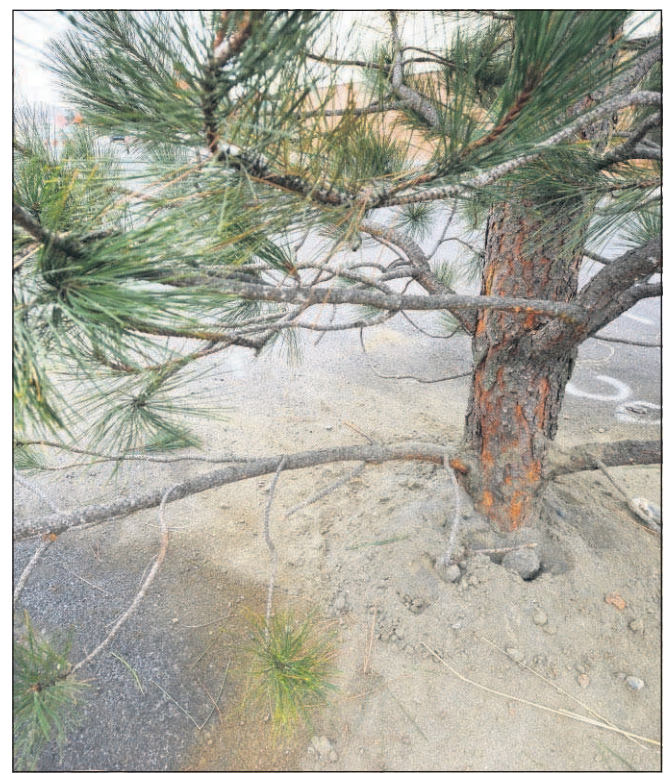
Families enjoyed a Thanksgiving meal at the Community Fellowship Dinner Thursday at the Hermiston Senior Center.

"I would definitely come back and do this again," she said. "To see all these people smile was a great experience."

At the dessert table, serving apple and pumpkin pie and cupcakes, 23-year-old Nathaniel Scott said his family had been volunteering on Thanksgiving since they

first moved to Hermiston 11 years prior. He said he plans to move to Portland soon and hopes he will be able to find a similar place to volunteer for the holidays.

"It's really nice, because you get to connect with other members of the community," he said. "I couldn't imagine doing anything else."



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The city of Hermiston used jackhammers to dig a hole in the pavement of Northeast Second Street to plant a Christmas Tree for the holiday season.

TREE:

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tor Larry Fetter announced the light show in October, he said he planned to utilize "as many of the festival lights as possible" from the now-disbanded Eastern Oregon Festival of Lights, along with the long-empty RoeMarks storefront, to help draw shoppers downtown.

"I hope people say, 'We have 25 minutes to kill before the next show, let's look around,'" he said.

Eventually the city of Hermiston plans to make the block of Second Street between City Hall and East Main Street a permanent "festival street" with decorative brickwork, landscaping, benches and gates that could be closed to block off the street for events. For now, however, the street

will reopen in January after the tree is removed and the hole covered.

Revitalizing downtown is one of the top priorities Hermiston residents listed in a recent survey asking what "livability" issues the city should prioritize.

One group that has been working to do so is the Hermiston Downtown Association. The city is holding a tree-lighting ceremony on Thursday in conjunction with the association's First Thursday event.

The lighting ceremony for the Christmas tree in the middle of Second Street will be Thursday at 6 p.m., featuring Santa Claus and live entertainment. The light show will also premiere that night. It will continue each Thursday, Friday and Saturday every 30 minutes from 5-9 p.m. until Dec. 26, with live entertainment on Thursdays.

FOOD:

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which adds up quickly. Each child gets the same set of food, chosen after considering factors such as nutrition, convenience and the ease with which a small child could transport it home in one piece.

"Since we have to purchase specific food it's a strain on our resources," Hughes said.

Deb Sprong, counselor at West Park Elementary, said she worries about what will happen to the children she sees if the program's funding continues to drop.

"It's a such a wonderful program," she said. "The kids benefit so much from it, you can just tell. They will literally run to my office if they know they are getting food."

To donate

The Agape House uses specific foods to pack the bags for children participating in the backpack program. To obtain a list of the foods used, or to make a monetary donation so that the food can be purchased in bulk, call 541-567-8774 or visit agapehousehermiston.org.

She said children will tell her that they fed their family with the food they brought home, and teachers will tell her the student passed on some of their food to a friend who they knew also wasn't going to get three meals a day over the weekend.

She encouraged people to give whatever they could to allow more hungry children to be fed.

"Even if it's five dollars, any little amount whatsoever would help," she said.

Heidi Sipe, principal of Umatilla School District, said she is extremely grateful to the Agape House

for its help in her district, where nearly 90 percent of students qualify as low-income.

The Agape House can serve only a handful of McNary Elementary School

students with food for the weekend, but during the week the district uses federal grants to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students, as well as dinner to students who participate in the after-school STEM program.

"During those formative years, nutrition is critical for kids," Sipe said.

She said if a child doesn't know if they are going to be able to eat for the next couple of days it's hard to

concentrate on schoolwork or anything else.

"If that's not something they have to worry about over the weekend they can focus on other things," she said.

For anyone interested in helping the backpack

program, Hughes said the easiest way is to make a tax-deductible monetary donation specifically earmarked for the program. If people would rather have a food drive he said he could provide a list of items used in the food bags.

HEALTHY FRIDAYS
Free health screenings: blood pressure checks, weigh ins, body mass index, cholesterol and glucose.
Every Third Friday of the Month
December 18 • 9:00 - 11:00am
GSMC Education Department

EARLY PREGNANCY
One FREE class focusing on the first six months of pregnancy. Healthcare professional speakers will provide presentations on topics that include medication use, exercise, diet, breastfeeding and many other helpful subjects. Free, but please pre-register.
December 10 • 6:30-8:30pm
GSMC Conference Room Center 2

BIRTHING CLASSES
Two-day course to prepare each mother and birth partner for a knowledgeable, rewarding and sharing childbirth experience.
December 11 & 12
Friday: 6:30 - 8:30 pm,
Saturday: 9:30 am - 3 pm
GSMC Conference Room

BREASTFEEDING CLASSES
One class covers breastfeeding benefits, pumping and much more. Come to this FREE class taught by a certified lactation consultant, and learn techniques that make for a successful experience. Free, but please pre-register.
December 2 • 12:00pm - 1:30pm
GSMC Conference Center 3 & 4

Working every day to promote a healthy community
GOOD SHEPHERD
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
Education and Wellness Services 667-3509
For information or to register for a class, call (541) 667-3509 or email healthinfo@gshealth.org

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Medicare Open Enrollment Oct. 15 - Dec. 7
Join us for this FREE event! FREE Medicare Counseling & Information from trained SHIBA volunteers.
December 4th
Trained volunteers are available in the SHIBA office all year round, call for an individual appointment.
GSMC conference rooms 5 & 6 (by the GS Cafeteria)
*Bring a list of all the medications you take.
For information call (541) 667-3507 or email shiba@gshealth.org
SHIBA Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance

Winter WONDERLAND
RICHLAND, WASHINGTON
Join us for Winter Wonderland, presented by BMW of Tri-Cities. Tree lighting, performances, family-friendly activities and festivities for all ages!

DECEMBER 3 FROM 5:00 P.M. TO 8:00 P.M.
Uptown Shopping Center Open House
• Featuring luminaries outside participating store fronts
• Central United Protestant Choir
• Special customer treats, specials, and gift certificates
• Visit Santa

Uptown Theater 6:00 p.m.
Free Holiday Classic Movie: White Christmas

DECEMBER 4 @ 6:00 P.M.
Warming Fire by the Lee Blvd. Dock Lighted Boat Parade
Santa House, with Santa, the Grinch, Olaf, and an elf too!
Horse Drawn Carriage Ride - Vendor
Food Vendors

Richland Community Center
• Model Railroad Display
• Mid-Columbia Ballet: Nutcracker Excerpt and Photo Opportunity
• Professional Entertainment
• Bingo with Santa's Elf
• Holiday Movie

DECEMBER 5 @ 5:00 P.M.
Holiday Mini-Parade and Tree Lighting
Warming Fire and Entertainment by the Lee Blvd. Dock Lighted Boat Parade
Santa House, with Santa, the Grinch, Olaf and an elf too!
Horse Drawn Carriage Ride - Vendor
Holiday Movie on a Giant Outdoor Screen: Polar Express
Food Vendors
Richland Community Center
• Bouncy Land
• Model Railroad Display
• Bingo with Santa's Elf
• Holiday Crafts

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