



### ABOUT TOWN

## City gives EOTEC permission for \$1.5 million loan

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston City Council gave permission Monday for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center to take on up to \$1.5 million in debt to finish its project south of town.

The EOTEC board will ask Umatilla County Commissioners to do the same today.

The money is part of a financing plan that will allow private and corporate donors to pledge large donations that can be paid off over a course of two to five years while still giving EOTEC the capital to move forward with construction immediately. If a donor promised \$5,000 a year for five years, for example, EOTEC would borrow \$25,000 upfront and pay it off with the \$5,000 a year.

City Manager Byron Smith said the EOTEC board is going to unveil the details of the plan — including how interested parties can donate — to the community tonight during its public outreach meeting scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center.

He said the board envisioned the loan representing a “potential conglomeration of donors” and would use the EOTEC property as collateral.

City Councilor Doug Smith voiced a concern about property, which was originally donated by the city for the express purpose of the EOTEC project, falling into private hands in the case of a default, but Byron Smith said if the board anticipated a default they would be having a conversation with the city before any decisions were made.

“They can’t sell the land without our permission,” he said.

EOTEC vice chairman Dan Dorrnan said the project started out as a “privately funded effort” to build a new fair and rodeo grounds on land donated by the city, so it made sense to be seeking private donations now.

“I think this is just a natural process step,” he said.

So far the project has been almost entirely funded with public dollars, including \$7 million in lottery funds, \$3 million from the county from the sale of the fairgrounds, \$1.5 million from the state legislature and \$600,000 each from the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County earlier this fall.

The City Council approved the board’s request for permission unanimously, and also approved a request for permission to double the Tourism Promotion Assessment.

Local hoteliers had previously agreed to pay \$1 per room per night or 50 cents per RV space per night toward mar-

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# Local ‘stars’ to dance

for charity



FILE PHOTO

Kristi Smalley of Hermiston practices the waltz with dance instructor Seth Ward of Keizer while preparing for the Dancing with Hermiston Stars 2015 competition.

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**  
Community Editor

The newest group of Hermiston “stars” will take the stage in hopes of dancing their way to victory while raising money for a handful of local nonprofit organizations.

Presented by Desert Arts Council, local residents will be partnered with members of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company during the third installment of Dancing with the Hermiston Stars. Those learning dance moves from the professionals include Dan Briscoe, Debbie Cissna, Blaine Ganvoa, Cam Preus, Jesus (Chuy) Rome and Shannon Snyder.

The event is Saturday, Jan. 9 at 7 p.m. in the auditorium at Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St. The box office opens at 6 p.m. and the doors open at 6:30 p.m. Advanced tickets are \$35 for adults and \$17.50 for those under 18. Admission at the door is an additional \$5.

Event chairs Mary Corp and Karen Davis said the event has become a highlight of the Desert Arts season. Corp said the community is great at helping local nonprofits. The show, she said, provides a fun way to provide financial support.

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Briscoe



Cissna



Ganvoa



Preus



Rome



Snyder

PHOTOS OF THE CONTESTANTS CONTRIBUTED BY LUKES PHOTOS

## City partners in NOWA’s ‘bureaucratic miracle’

### First of three water project phases gets underway

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston City Council has signed on to help increase irrigation capacity in the region, which could bring as much as \$1 billion in value to the Umatilla Basin.

The council approved an inter-governmental agreement that will make improvements to the regional water system and help the Port of Umatilla certify its water right.

On Monday, Craig Reeder of the Northeast Oregon Water Association gave the City Council “very much the Cliff Notes version” of why the

move was an important one during an hour-long work session before the council’s regular meeting.

“There is nothing not complicated about what we are doing,” he said.

During the work session he explained that Hermiston is the focal point of one of the premier places in the world for growing non-citrus crops. The region is under-utilized, however, due to restrictions on the amount of water that can be drawn out of the Columbia River.

That’s about to change, thanks to a landmark funding package passed by the legislature this year allotting \$11 million in grants and \$22 million in loans for Umatilla Basin water projects.

“We can add another billion dollars back into the regional economy,” Reeder said.

The project is divided into three

phases. Reeder said that getting water to crops involves a combination of irrigation infrastructure and water rights, so the first phase will improve the infrastructure and get the Port of Umatilla’s water right certified. That will allow the port to lease part of its water right — 100 cubic feet per second — to boost agriculture in the region.

The port signed an agreement in March to lease the water right to NOWA, capping nearly three years of negotiations.

The second phase will involve water conservation and mitigation projects further upstream, and the third will push water into storage areas, like dam reservoirs, when water flow is high so that it can be used later.

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