

County backs \$1.5 million loan to EOTEC

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The Umatilla County Commission has agreed to back a \$1.5 million loan to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center with full faith and credit, if the city of Hermiston is willing to make the same guarantee.

The EOTEC fundraising committee is attempting to raise \$2 million for construction of the new fair and rodeo grounds outside of Hermiston by March 1. For donors who want to break up large contributions over two to five years, the committee plans to access the full sum upfront by taking out a loan

for the pledged amount and then using those pledged contributions to pay back the loan.

Committee member Nate Rivera told the commission that the Hermiston School District had used a similar tactic to raise money for Kennison Field and as of the fourth year no donors had defaulted on their promised contribution.

He said so far the EOTEC committee had raised about \$450,000 and expected to be able to raise more once the loan program was in place.

“We’re working the phones, and people have been great,” he said.

The original plan was for the loan to be backed using the EOTEC property as collateral, but county council Doug Olsen pointed out in December that EOTEC — formed by an intergovernmental agreement between the county and the city of Hermiston — could not do that. Since the state constitution prohibits counties from using land as collateral for loans, EOTEC couldn’t do that either.

The resolution on the agenda at Tuesday’s meeting offered full faith and credit backing for up to \$750,000 in loans to EOTEC, with the assumption that the city

of Hermiston would back the other half of the loan. But Rivera told the commission that the banks needed both partners to officially back the entire \$1.5 million on paper, however they might end up splitting it up in the event of a default.

Commissioner Bill Elfering proposed that the number be increased to \$1.5 million and that a clause be added that made the backing contingent on the city of Hermiston’s willingness to also guarantee the \$1.5 million. Commissioner Larry Givens voted with Elfering in favor of that resolution, with Commissioner

George Murdock absent.

If the EOTEC fundraising committee raises at least \$625,000 by March 1 it will add a third livestock barn to the project. Another \$600,000 will buy 2,000 permanent seats at the rodeo. The next \$700,000 will buy panels and pens for livestock instead of renting them. And the last \$75,000 of the \$2 million goal would be used to add electrical and water hook-ups to the RV sites provided for exhibitors.

The EOTEC board’s regular meeting, originally scheduled for Friday, has been postponed until Jan. 29 at 7 a.m. at the Stafford Hansell Government Center.

IN BRIEF

No leads in cow slaughter

Oregon State Police are still looking for information to track down whoever shot and killed a 2-year-old heifer in a winter pasture along Feedville Road.

Trooper Mitchell Goldman said several people have called with tips since local rancher Terry Anderson found the animal butchered late last week, but no serious leads.

“We’re just kind of hoping someone will speak up,” Goldman said. “It’s a pretty big deal to shoot somebody’s cattle like that.”

The culprit could face extensive fines or prison time if caught. Theft of livestock is a Class C felony in Oregon, dating back to the old days of cattle rustling.

Anderson reported someone butchered his cow in the field before apparently making a hasty getaway, leaving most of the body to waste. He is offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to a conviction. The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association has offered an additional \$1,000.

Goldman said there is the possibility more than one person was involved.

Anyone with information should contact OSP at 541-567-3215 or call 1-800-452-7888.

Heritage Station hosts local author

Heritage Station Museum will host local author Peg Willis as she introduces her new book, “Rise Above: The Heppner Flood of 1903.”

The author will be on hand for a Terrific Tuesday event Jan. 26 at 7 p.m. at 108 S.W. Frazer Ave., Pendleton. Regular museum hours are Tuesday through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Willis will share about the unexpected cloudburst that turned an otherwise mild day into one that the little community of Heppner would never forget.

For more information, call 541-276-0012 or visit www.heritagestationmuseum.org.

Cultural center group serves breakfast

The Irrigon Multicultural Arts Center committee is hosting a fundraising breakfast.

The meal is Saturday, Jan. 30 from 7:30-10:30 a.m. at Stokes Landing Senior Center, 195 N.W. Opal Place, Irrigon. The cost is \$4.50 per person. The group of volunteers is raising money in hopes of preserving Irrigon’s 1921 school building. For more information, call Peggy at 541-567-3806.

State will revamp Highway 395 this spring, summer

Traffic delays and detours will affect nearly 17,000 cars a day

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

As the Oregon Department of Transportation gears up for a summer of construction on Highway 395 in Hermiston, the department is putting an emphasis on driver safety.

The corridor through the center of Hermiston will be the subject of a major repaving project from March through the end of August.

The department will grind out the old asphalt and place two inches of new pavement on the six-mile section of highway from Southeast Fourth Street to Highway 730. All intersections will get ADA-compliant wheelchair ramps and a cement median will replace the yellow traffic delineators at the intersection of 395 and Elm Avenue.

ODOT public information officer Tom Strandberg said as much work as possible will be done at night to reduce the impact on adjacent businesses. One lane in each direction will always be open, but the work will disrupt traffic flows through the corridor, which sees an average of 16,850 vehicles per day.

Strandberg said safety along the busy stretch of highway has been an increasing concern for ODOT, especially after two serious crashes north of town late in 2015.

“Whenever you have a situation like that where it’s heading out of town but you still have all those businesses along there and there’s five lanes, it’s tricky,” he said.

Strandberg urged drivers who use the Highway 395 corridor to pay extra attention to their surroundings and to reduce distractions while driving, which will be especially important during the construction period.

“ODOT will continue to work with the city of Hermiston to improve safety, but it is paramount that all motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians take extra caution and be mindful of each other,” he wrote in a news release. “Safety is everyone’s responsibility.”

Between 2010 and 2014 there were 450 crashes reported on Highway 395 between milepost 10 (just north of Stanfield) and Highway 730. Ninety percent of those occurred in the six-mile stretch between Southeast Fourth Street and Highway 730.

According to ODOT data, those crashes resulted in two fatalities, 15 serious injuries, 90 moderate injuries and 228 minor injuries. The full data set isn’t in for 2015, but there was another fatality reported on Highway 395 near Bag-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Vehicles pass a turn-lane barrier at the intersection of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue on Wednesday in Hermiston.

ODOT has identified the Highway 395 corridor from Stanfield to Umatilla through Hermiston as one of the busiest — and most dangerous — in Eastern Oregon. Here are the numbers from 2010-2014.	
Vehicles per day	16,850
Total crashes	450
Fatalities	2
Serious injuries	15
Moderate injuries	90
Minor injuries	228

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said in a statement that in June 2015 the department reverted to having an officer on a motorcycle dedicated full-time to traffic violations. In the next six months the officer issued 863 citations, mostly along Highway 395.

“Law enforcement can impact traffic with either education or enforcement,” he said. “We would much rather educate our citizens that distracted driving as a result of passengers, electronic devices, etc., is preventable.”

He said the highway is unique because it has so many business entrances and exits along it — as well as a high speed limit. Edmiston said it would be important for drivers to be especially cautious and practice good defensive driving during the period of construction on the highway.

One particular section of the highway that has come under scrutiny is the intersection of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue. The intersection is the busiest in northeastern Oregon and is considered by

ODOT to be the second most dangerous in Eastern Oregon based on number of crashes per vehicle. There were 34 crashes reported from 2011 to 2013.

In an attempt to reduce the number of crashes there each year ODOT put up temporary barriers at the intersection to keep people from turning left out of surrounding businesses. The plastic barriers will be replaced with a concrete median during the repaving project.

gett Lane in October 2015.

The majority of crashes reported between 2010 and 2014 were classified as rear-end crashes or crashes during a turning movement. Half of the reports listed following too closely or failure to yield as the primary cause, while excessive speed or distracted driving were cited as a cause in 20 percent of the crashes.

Thirty-three of the crashes happened on ice or snow-covered roads. Most were two-vehicle crashes. Fridays had the most crashes at 87, while Saturdays had the fewest at 46.

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