

FAIR:

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stick on for a number of years to something special." It hasn't come cheap and the fundraising isn't over yet. He said there is another \$1.2 million to raise in short order.

"Our finish line is March 1," Barnett said.

That was enough talk about money. The rest of the night was all about honoring standout volunteers, announcing the grand marshal and introducing the fair court and new fair manager.



VanHouten

This year's grand marshal, Pilot Rock 4-H leader Lea VanHouten, is accustomed to spending fair week behind the scenes, encouraging members of the Pilot Rock Woolly Wranglers as they compete. This year, she will be the face of the fair as she carries out her grand marshal duties.



Slone

VanHouten, who is an instructional aide at the Pilot Rock Elementary School, brushed away a tear or two as she accepted a bouquet of roses and a plaque.



Luke

Robert Luke, a retired civil engineer from Hermiston, was named male volunteer of the year. Luke volunteers hours and hours as fair photographer, seeing the events mostly through his camera lens. Board member Gay Newman, who presented the award, said Luke was an easy selection.

"This is someone who understands the fair is more than one week. He's a man who takes no payment," Newman said. "He's a man who a lot of people in town call the historian and he does so

through his craft of photography."

Female Volunteer of the Year June Mills wasn't able to attend. Mills, of Stanfield's Mills Mint Farm, is a fixture at the fair, doing a variety of volunteer jobs such as overseeing the Kids' Corner.

The board also presented an award given out rarely - the Business Partnership Award - to Noble Panel & Gate of Milton-Freewater. Presenter Dan Dorran said he could remember only three other partnership awards given out. Owners Don and Pat Noble accepted flowers and plaque.

The crowd got a look at new Umatilla County Fair Manager Don Slone, who took the mic and said a few words. Slone, who managed the Harney County Fair for 25 years, replaces Peggy Anderson who resigned in August to become the Josephine County Fair Manager.

Incoming Umatilla County Fair royalty received their crowns. The trio of princesses are JaNessa Prewitt, of Hermiston, Raylee Lehnert, of Pilot Rock, and Kira Krumbah-Kuhar, of Milton-Freewater.

Fair organizers announced a partial list of musical entertainment for the 2016 fair. On Tuesday night, A Thousand Horses will perform and the Bellamy Brothers will take the stage on Wednesday. Entertainment for Thursday, Friday and Saturday is yet to be announced. Concert tickets will go on sale in March.

The board also unveiled the 2016 Fair logo, designed by Sofi Smith of Master Printers Northwest.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Umatilla County Fair Princesses Kira Krumbah-Kuhar, of Milton-Freewater, JanNessa Prewitt, of Hermiston, and Raylee Lehnert, of Pilot Rock, were introduced and crowned at Saturday's Fair Appreciation Dinner.



STAFF PHOTO BY GARY L. WEST

Guests line up at the buffet during the Umatilla County Fair sponsor appreciation dinner Saturday at Thompson Hall. The guests got a preview of the 2016 fair logo, met the new court and the next grand marshal.

RATES:

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"When we start seeing a kid not being successful, early intervention is key," Spoo said.

He said another key is building relationships with students. It's important to look at each student's individual circumstances, he said, and connect them with staff members and resources and interesting extra-curricular activities that will help them have a positive experience whenever they come to school.

Another thing the district has increased its focus on is parental involvement. Spoo said district staff have been trying new strategies this year such as changing the schedule for parent-teacher conferences and partnering with the city's Hispanic Advisory Committee to provide translators for parents who come to conferences.

"It's not enough to get kids through the door, we need to get parents involved too," he said.

For students who are struggling to get through school, the Innovative Learning Center provides another option.

Spoo said there are several reasons a student might be assigned to the smaller, alternative high school or a blended schedule at both schools. Some are exhibiting behavioral problems that continually disrupt students at the main campus. Some are teen parents or have other family situations that call for a more flexible schedule. Some have anxiety disorders that make the bustling halls of Hermiston High School overwhelming. The vast majority, however, end up there because they are "extremely credit-deficient," meaning they are behind in their course work.

Online programs and smaller classes can help

those students work at their own pace to catch up, Spoo said, but many still end up earning a GED instead of a high school diploma. Eleven percent of the alternative school's students earned a regular diploma by the end of their senior year, but that number jumps to 48 percent if students who earned a GED or modified diploma are factored in.

Spoo said it's something for the district to improve, and the fact that some of the students transferred into the district already far behind is no excuse. Once a student enrolls at the high school, "they're ours," he said, no matter where they came from.

At the end of the day, Spoo said he believes that continued hard work will see the district's graduation

rate continue to go up.

"There is no easy answer to it, but I think if we keep working things

are going to improve," he said.

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