

Entry road to event center named for Chet Prior

Board sets rates for EOTEC rental

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board will honor former board chair Chet Prior by naming the project's entry road after him.

Board member Dan Dorran said during Friday's meeting that after the years of hard work and leadership Prior put into the project before his death, he wanted Prior's name to be the first thing people saw while heading into EOTEC. Other board members agreed.

"I think it will be a great honor for him," board chair Byron Smith said.

After some disagreement over whether to use the name Chet — which

most people knew Prior by — or his given name Chester, the board approved a motion that would name the road after Prior but leave it to his family to choose between Chester and Chet.

On Friday the board welcomed Angela Young as the new project manager for EOTEC. Frew Development Group hired Young, of Hermiston, to manage construction of EOTEC and the Blue Mountain Community College bond project in coordination with Frew's vice president and senior project manager Rob Dreier.

Dreier reported construction of the event center was on schedule and contractors were "putting on the finishes and starting to clean up places." G2 Construction plans to turn over the keys in March.

EOTEC business manager Heather Cannell said

people have begun calling to inquire about reserving the center. She presented a proposed rate schedule, which the board approved.

The rate schedule would charge \$1,200 for rental of the 12,000-square-foot center, plus \$400 for set-up and tear-down, \$300 for janitorial and \$150 for kitchen use for a total of \$2,050. That compares to a total of \$1,850 for the 8,000-square-foot Hermiston Conference Center and \$1,100 for the 13,216-square-foot Pendleton Convention Center.

Renting a meeting room would cost \$150 for one room or \$250 for two, and \$100 for the smaller board room.

Cannell said she planned to cut rates in half for nonprofits.

On Friday the board also approved a \$2,000 grant to the Hermiston Horse Sale Extravaganza out of

its marketing fund. Owner Randy Cole requested the money to pay for building pens on the fairgrounds so that he could afford to continue having the sale in Hermiston. He said the event brings between 2,000 and 3,000 people to town three times a year.

"It's the biggest sale in the Northwest and people associate it with Hermiston," he said.

The board got an update from fundraising committee chair Dennis Barnett, who said they had raised \$509,000 as of Wednesday.

"We have a \$2 million goal and we still think that's reachable," he said. "Nothing's changed our mind about that."

The largest donation was from an individual who donated \$100,000 in stock, he said.

Barnett said the committee had been busy traveling to cit-

ies outside of Hermiston that were less aware of the project's details and its potential to benefit the region. He said many people said the information had been "eye-opening" for them and donations were coming in from around Umatilla County and even outside the county.

To help with future fundraising for the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo, which will be held at EOTEC upon its completion, the board passed a resolution supporting a bill sponsored by Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, that would allow Friends of the Fair and Rodeo, Inc. to enter into an agreement with the Oregon State Lottery Commission to administer a raffle for its behalf.

Dorran said if the bill passed in its proposed form people would be able to go into any lottery location in

the state and fill out a form guessing the day and time the temperature would next hit 100 degrees in Hermiston. The money raised would go to the Friends of the Fair and Rodeo.

The bill specifically names the nonprofit instead of leaving it open to any nonprofit in the state to enter into an agreement with the state lottery, which made it "somewhat of a long shot," Dorran said.

"It's a very unique approach and if it does get implemented there will be a lot of eyes on it," he said.

The EOTEC board will hold a special meeting Friday, Feb. 5, at 7 a.m. at the Stafford Hansell Government Center in Hermiston to discuss approval of bid packages, including lighting and paving, and discuss ongoing design work for the barns and rodeo arena.

Two injured in ATV crash

Two local men are in the hospital after crashing an all-terrain vehicle into a car Saturday near Hermiston.

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office in a statement Monday morning reported the crash is under investigation and did not release the names of the people involved, but family members confirmed the younger victim was Kelly Nobles, 18, from Umatilla.

The crash happened a few minutes before 6 p.m. at Kik and West Punkin Center roads, according to the sheriff's office daily bulletin. The written statement from the department reported a 53-year-old Hermiston man was driving the four-wheeler and an 18-year old Umatilla man was a passenger. They were going south on Kik Road and drove into the side of a vehicle that was traveling westbound on West Punkin Center Road.

"Both men were thrown from the four wheeler onto the roadway; neither was wearing helmets," the statement said.

An ambulance took the driver to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, and then an air ambulance flew him to Kadlec Regional Medical Center, Richland, Washington.

"At last report, he was unconscious and in critical condition," according to the sheriff's office.

An ambulance also took Nobles to Good Shepherd, which transferred him to Legacy Emmanuel Hospital, Portland. Nobles' father Kelly Nobles Sr. said Monday afternoon that his son had a fractured skull and bleeding on his brain, but the bleeding was from the skull fracture and not the brain itself. He is awake and talking and expected to be released from Legacy Emmanuel in a few days.

Two arrested for killing, butchering cow

Two Umatilla County men were arrested Friday for killing and butchering a cow, according to Oregon State Police.

Anthony Haigh, 21, of Stanfield, and TJ Kestler, 20, of Hermiston, were both charged with theft, criminal mischief, criminal trespass with a firearm, animal abuse and interfering with agricultural operations. In addition, Haigh, who was already in the Umatilla County Jail on unrelated charges, was charged as a felon in possession of a firearm.

A third adult male, not yet named, was not taken into custody but may be charged with theft and criminal trespassing, depending on the district attorney's office.

The crime took place sometime during the night

POLICE ARREST UMATILLA MAN IN MEACHAM MURDER

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
Staff Writer

Joseph Aaron McIver of Umatilla was charged Thursday with murder in the shooting death of Thadd Nelson of Meacham.

Two other men also are in Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, in connection to the crime.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said he could not provide details of the crime while the police investigation continues. Nelson's family said they are reeling from the loss.

Primus arraigned the trio Thursday afternoon in separate cases. They appeared in circuit court in Pendleton via video from the jail.

The state charged McIver, 22, of 81765 Harbor Lights Lane, Umatilla, with the lone count of murder with a firearm. The judge set McIver's bail at \$10 million.

Edward Duarte Ayala, 46, and Armando Vargas, 39, appeared before Circuit Judge Lynn Hampton. They said they live with others at 1065 W. Juanita Ave., Hermiston. The state charged Ayala with felon in possession of a firearm, unauthorized use of a vehicle and attempt to flee police. Vargas faces charges of felon in possession of a firearm and unlawful use of a weapon.

Police used a spike strip to stop Ayala, Primus told the court, and caught him with at least five guns in his possession. Primus also said both men had substantial criminal histories in Fresno, California, including for domestic violence and weapons crimes. He said Vargas moved to Hermiston in the last week.

Hampton set bail at \$30,000 each and also set preliminary hearings for Wednesday, when they can enter pleas.

Local and state police responded at about 3:30 a.m. Wednesday to a 9-1-1 call about a shooting near milepost 233 on the Oregon Old Trail Highway in the Meacham area on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Nelson lived at 67457 on that highway.

Marnie Elder is Nelson's sister. She said in an email she learned her brother returned home Wednesday morning and found someone attempting to steal one of his vehicles. It was unclear what happened at that point, she said, "except that he was shot and killed."

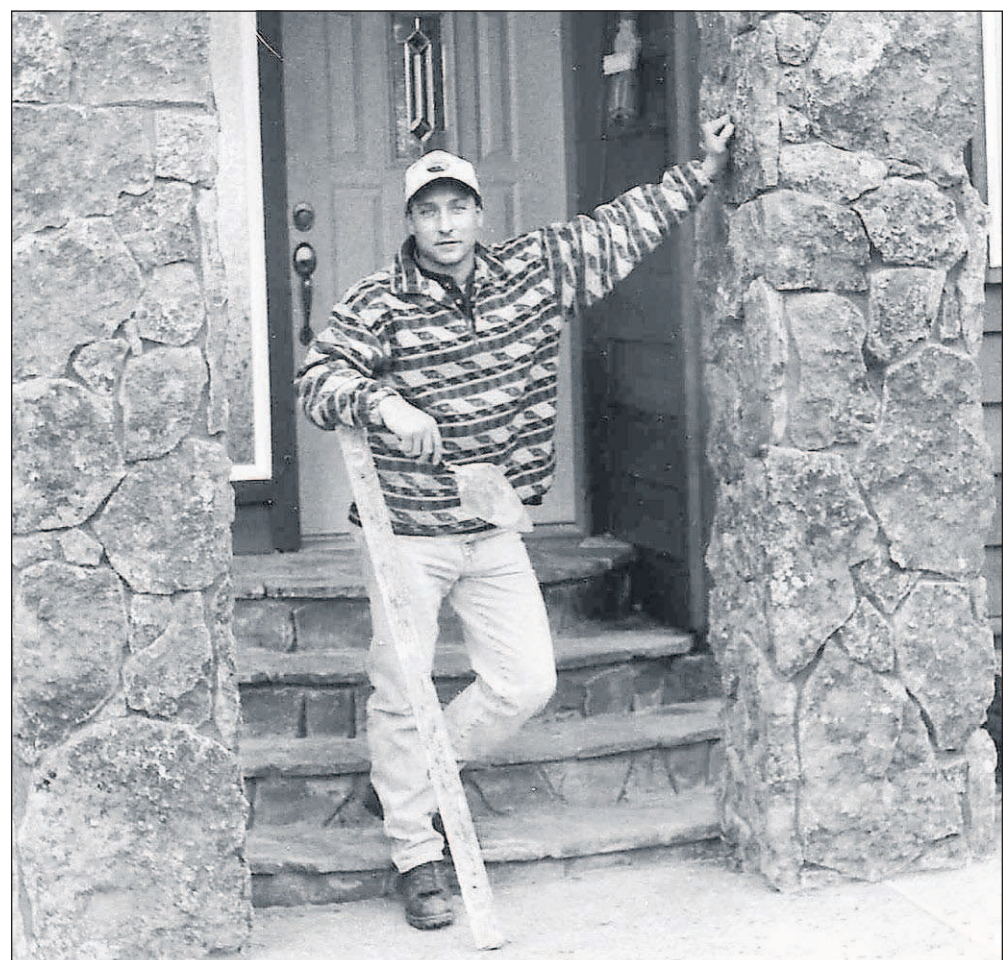
Nelson's daughter, Ashlyn Nelson, said she heard about her father's death through social media and called her grandparents, Susan and Steve Nelson, who live in California.

"I had to be the one to say he got shot and didn't make it," Ashlyn said.

Elder said her brother was outgoing and charismatic and never met a stranger.

"He had the ability to engage an entire room telling a tall tale of fishing or hunting," she said, "and was funny enough to be a professional comedian."

Thadd Nelson became a general contractor after moving to Pendleton in 1995 and developed a large clientele in Umatilla County and Washington, according to Elder. He also worked for wineries in Sonoma and Mendocino counties in California. Elder said her brother was a skilled stone mason, and the



Thadd Nelson stands next to his masonry work in the late 1990s. He was a skilled stone mason, according to his sister, Marnie Elder. Nelson was killed Wednesday in Meacham.

TV show "This Old House" featured one of her brother's jobs.

Ashlyn Nelson said her father's construction company folded during the recession, so he traveled for work, including to California and more recently in Hermiston. Ashlyn was born in Boise and moved back there in 2010, but for a time attended Pendleton High School and lived with her father. She said she cherished those years.

"It was just the two of us," she said. "He was a hard-working man, a good man."

He is survived by his parents, his daughters Ashlyn and Alexa Nelson, his sister Marnie Elder, and his niece Savannah Elder.

Anyone with details about

the crime can contact the Umatilla Tribal Police Department at 541-278-0550 or the Umatilla County dispatch center at 541-966-3651, -3652 and or -3653.



Joseph McIver



Edward Ayala



Armando Vargas

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY MARNIE ELDER

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