

# VOLUNTEERS IN SHORT SUPPLY FOR LOCAL GROUPS

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

When the announcement came that Umatilla's Landing Days were being scaled back significantly this year due to lack of volunteers, it signaled a growing problem.

"We usually have between 30 and 40 volunteers and last year we got about 15," Umatilla Chamber of Commerce director Karen Hutchinson-Talaski said.

After the committee said they would cancel Umatilla's signature summer event if they didn't get more volunteers for 2016, they didn't get much of a response. As a result, the plan is to forgo hosting vendors and most daytime activities, even though the parade and fireworks show with live music will go on.

Landing Days is not the only event that has been scaled back or canceled altogether in recent years because new volunteers haven't stepped up to replace ones that are burning out. Hutchinson-Talaski estimated the ages of the Landing Days Committee to be between 40 and 80 and said they all "wear multiple hats" in the community.

"We aren't spring chickens anymore and this is a lot of work," she said.

She said it's not uncommon in communities to see the same people stepping up to volunteer for everything. The problem is that they often get spread too thin and eventually decide they need to step back from some activities so they can give 100 percent to others. It can be hard finding someone to replace them.

Hermiston went through a similar problem with the Festival of Lights that used to brighten the Umatilla County fairgrounds each December.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

Hermiston Senior Center volunteers Harry Trump, Rose Hamilton and Harry Stevenson serve spaghetti at the center's meal program.

After the county stopped providing manpower for the event in 2010 a group of volunteers came together to keep the lights on, but ran out of steam in 2013 when they couldn't find enough helpers. After another unsuccessful attempt to find enough volunteers for 2014 they canceled the festival again, and in 2015 the county donated the lights to the city of Hermiston.

Other organizations continue on, but still find themselves short of volunteers. The Hermiston Warming Station sometimes closes its doors even when the temperature is below freezing because there are not enough volunteers to keep it open through the night.

Marci McMurphy, director of CAPECO's Area Agency on Aging department, said CAPECO has a difficult time finding volunteers to pack boxes at the food warehouse, help around the office or

offer financial mentoring to clients.

"The generation that's now aging was very much into giving back ... as they're aging now they're becoming the ones who need help," she said.

Young people seem to be experiencing a resurging interest in volunteer work, she said, but their schedules often conflict with when agencies need the most help.

McMurphy said it might help people to know that CAPECO will take volunteers who just want to commit to one hour a month or want to help out with a single project without committing to doing any more once it's over.

"With peoples' busy schedules, the last thing they want to do is be tied down," she said.

At the Hermiston Senior Center, Virginia Beebe said it's not uncommon to have to ask one or two people showing up for a

meal to throw on an apron and help serve everyone else first.

"We're always short on volunteers," she said.

Julie Harris-Rosner said the problem was that the younger seniors tended to be busy helping care for grandchildren or aging parents or continuing to work well past what used to be retirement age.

"Our really, really good volunteers are now in their nineties, and they're dying," she said. "We're left with the eighty-year-olds."

Gary Reiland, 69, was there Thursday to deliver Meals on Wheels, a volunteer position he said he has held for about 30 years. He said he and his wife used to be involved in a long list of organizations but have had to cut back their volunteering to mostly Meals on Wheels and the Red Cross, because their health no longer permitted more.

The good news is some organizations are find-

## HELP WANTED

Here are a few places to start if you're looking to volunteer:

1) City committees. City councils rely on the legwork and recommendations of multiple committees to make decisions, and many of them face a near-constant parade of vacancies. Contact your city hall or check their website to find out about committee vacancies or opportunities to volunteer for activities conducted by those committees.

2) Schools. Local school districts are always looking for volunteers to help out in the classroom, chaperone field trips, read to children or serve on a committee. If you don't have a child or grandchild's classroom to volunteer in, contact a principal or school district office to find out where volunteers are needed most.

3) Nonprofits. It's a rare nonprofit organization that isn't in need of more volunteers. A few that are frequently looking for more help include Meals on Wheels, the Agape House, CAPECO, the Warming Station,

Desert Rose Ministries, Domestic Violence Services, Salvation Army, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts, PAWS, Relay for Life and various local churches.

4) Umatilla-Morrow Head Start. The local Head Start office relies on a network of volunteers to read to children, assist teachers in the classroom, help prepare meals in the kitchen, plant a garden, work as Court Appointed Special Advocates, do maintenance or work in the office. Contact the office to get the proper paperwork and sign up for a background check.

5) Hospitals and nursing homes. Hospitals are often looking for volunteers to help out everywhere from the gift shop to transporting patients who can't make it to the hospital on their own. Nursing homes take volunteers willing to visit residents and do activities with them.

6) Service Clubs. For those looking to take their volunteerism to the next level, Umatilla County offers more than 12 service clubs — many with chapters in several cities — that residents can join.

ing ways to boost participation. A year ago, core members involved with the Hispanic Advisory Committee in Hermiston started pushing hard for people attending the meetings to step up and volunteer more. Chairman Eddie de la Cruz said the message was heard, and today there are a variety of new faces helping take charge of programs like the one that provides Spanish translators at parent-teacher conferences.

"I kept talking to them and saying it can't be Eddie, Eddie, Eddie all the time," he said. "I can't do it all myself."

When people like Hector Ramirez and Claudia Jimenez stepped up, he

said, that helped get the ball rolling. Each new person who came on board brought with them new ideas for recruiting volunteers and a new network of contacts who they could convince to help out.

De la Cruz said he has also talked to people about being responsible volunteers, and encourages them to treat any board or committee they serve on as seriously as they do their job, instead of frequently skipping meetings.

He said it takes work to recruit and train responsible volunteers, but it can pay off like it did for the Hispanic Advisory Committee.

"We have had quite a change," he said.

# City will add new paved trail, waves goodbye to roundabouts

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston city council approved an agreement Monday that will create a new section of trail parallel to Highland Avenue.

The eight-foot-wide paved trail for walking and bicycling will stretch from Riverfront Park to Southwest 11th Street on the south side of Highland, continuing a larger trail project that runs from Good Shepherd Medical Center to the park.

"This is exciting," Mayor David Drotzmann said. "It's going to be a nice addition to the community."

Originally the city was going to pay for the project and seek some reimbursement from the Oregon Department of Transportation through a grant. But city planner Clint Spencer said when ODOT looked at the project, they liked it so much they adopted it into their Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and said they would pay for 77 percent of it. According to the agreement the council approved Monday night, that leaves Hermiston with about a \$150,000 bill for

the remainder.

Spencer said the timeline for the project depends on how long it takes to acquire the needed rights of way, but construction will likely take place in early 2017.

On Monday the council also adopted an amendment to the Transportation System Plan, which calls for a signal at the Hermiston Foods truck entrance north of the Wal-Mart Distribution Center on Highway 395.

The signal will help handle the expected increase in traffic based on a planned Ranch and Home store at that location.

On Feb. 22 the council opened a public hearing on the amendment, which at that point included a recommendation from ODOT that the words "or a roundabout" be included in the plan's proposed traffic signals along south Highway 395. But the council and several citizens who testified that night were unanimously against the idea of roundabouts on the highway.

City staff went back to ODOT with the feedback, and the department withdrew its request for roundabouts.

"The public process worked," Drotzmann said.

The final amendment adopted by the council Monday did add the new signal to the city's longterm transportation plan but did not include any language about roundabouts.

### Small park named for its creator

On Monday residents of the neighborhood behind Pizza Hut watched as the council agreed to name the park at 80 Beech Avenue as Greenwood Park.

The city's smallest park has often been referred to as Northside Park, or sometimes Candy Cane Park, but parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said he couldn't find any record of the space ever receiving an official name.

The parks and recreation committee met with the park's neighbors four times over the past few months to discuss updating the design of the park, which includes a small playground and basketball court, and replacing the old equipment.

Out of those discussions came a consensus that the park should be named Greenwood Park after long-

time neighborhood resident Greenwood Woodrow Luster.

Fetter said that according to a history he pieced together from city records and recollections from Hermiston residents, Luster went to the city in the early 1970s and asked if he could build a park on a derelict lot the city owned near his house. He got the Hermiston Jaycees and

members of his church to clean up the lot and install used playground equipment donated from Dun Rollin Mobile Home Park.

Luster's granddaughter Jackie Linton still lives in the neighborhood today, and has been participating in the meetings between the parks and recreation committee and residents. She said it was a great honor

to see the park named after her grandfather.

"My grandfather loved Hermiston," she said. "... He'd grin ear to ear and say, 'Hermiston sure is growing.'"

Luster worked for Rohrman Ford, Union Pacific and Hermiston Sanitary Disposal in addition to serving as pastor for Church of God. He died in 2010 at the age of 87.