

# First EOTEC building open for business

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

It was a party at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center on Friday as curious community members mingled with civic leaders who helped establish EOTEC to celebrate the opening of the center's first building.

"Today is a day to celebrate and say thank you," Mayor David Drotzmann said as he welcomed the group.

Although Drotzmann is involved in EOTEC today as a fundraising committee member and mayor, he said it was important to acknowledge the long line of people who worked to make EOTEC a reality long before he took office — people like Tom Harper, who as Hermiston city manager 30 years ago helped the city purchase the land where EOTEC now sits.

"These gentlemen had the vision," he said.

EOTEC has had its challenges, Drotzmann said, and its detractors. But any community should be thrilled to have a \$16 million investment with no debt to pay off.

Larry Givens, Umatilla County commissioner, said he was nervous when the county signed away the current fair and rodeo grounds to Hermiston School District in 2012, but Hermiston is a "can-do community" that has made it work.

State Sen. Bill Hansell was a Umatilla County commissioner when the county first decided it wanted to move the fair from the center of Hermiston. He said the \$8 million that eventually came from the state was helped along by the fact that Hermiston was a "visionary community" and the Umatilla County Fair is one of the best county fairs in the state.

As community members cheered the opening of the event center, city manager and EOTEC chair Byron Smith said he hoped the open house was the first in a series of celebrations as the EOTEC project continues to move toward hosting the 2017 Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

The building that opened Friday is just one component of the overall EOTEC project. When complete, EOTEC will also feature three large barns, a rodeo arena, food stalls, RV parking and extensive green space — all yet to be built.

According to Rob Drier of Frew Development Group, the EOTEC board should have bids in hand for construction of the barns by mid-June. He told the EOTEC board during their Friday morning business meeting there have already been contractors who expressed an interest in the project.

A swine barn and "fur and feathers" barn will run about 15,500 square feet each and a third barn almost three times that size will host horses and cattle.

The rodeo arena is still under design, and Drier said it will probably be another three weeks before bid documents are complete. He said the bid package will include various add-on options that the board can price out for before deciding whether there is money in the budget.

The original design work was done by local designer Jim Michaels. But in March, Drier asked the board to hire a second architectural firm to help finish the drawings to the standard needed. Since October, the board had been told that the drawings would be finished in February.

George Anderson, a Hermiston attorney who has provided pro bono legal services to EOTEC, expressed frustration with the continued delays, say-

ing during Friday's meeting that as a private citizen he was "mystified" that it had taken so many months to complete designs for the barns and the rodeo arena.

"You've got contractors here, you need to light a fire under them," he said.

Smith said he understood the frustration, but there were a lot of factors at play.

"We're trying to make this happen, but this is not a straightforward one-group project," he said. "It's a community project that requires a lot of input from different groups, and that has impacted the timeline tremendously."

Anderson said he understood that, but he felt the board shouldn't be afraid to apply pressure on contractors and Frew Development Group to work faster.

Various smaller bid packages will also need to be completed in time for the 2017 Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo. Food stalls, restrooms, fencing, site lighting, a public address system, signs and landscaping are still in the works.

Some items have not been put out to bid yet, and others are being done in pieces. A request for proposals for signs for the site, for example, did not receive any bids and so the board is buying different types of signs from various vendors instead.

The fencing bid was issued but then canceled after contractors complained it was too hard to give a price per foot when they didn't know how much fencing or what types of fencing was needed. The board now plans to issue a request for proposals for the 1.25 miles of chain link fence needed to finish enclosing the entire EOTEC grounds, then add decorative and interior fencing later.

Water continues to be a challenge for EOTEC. A single shallow well is currently providing the site's water, but it won't be enough for irrigation once all of the planned green space is seeded.

Smith said that a second well would be dug soon. He said a nearby company has expressed an interest in selling deep water rights to EOTEC, but he is still working with them to overcome legal hurdles. If those hurdles prove too much, Smith said a sec-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County Fair Princess JaNessa Prewitt, right, greets visitors to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center during an open house Friday in Hermiston.



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EOTEC board member Dan Dorrn, right, gives a tour of the front office of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center during an open house Friday in Hermiston.



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Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann speaks during an open house for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center on Friday in Hermiston.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Visitors to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center both coming and going during an open house Friday in Hermiston.

ond option would involve switching the property from the Stanfield Irrigation District to the Hermiston Irrigation District and using some of their water.

"We haven't closed the door on that," he said.

Until the full EOTEC

project is up and running, pulling in revenue from

facility rentals while also adding up costs, questions about EOTEC's operations budget continue to be mostly answered with: "We don't know yet."

Umatilla County and the city of Hermiston plan to split evenly any subsidy needed for operating costs. They contributed \$25,000 each during the current fiscal year but expect to need a bigger contribution as the project opens for business.

The operating budget includes a salary for business manager Heather Cannell, who is running day-to-day operations

such as booking events. On Friday the board agreed that since the event center building is open, they will need to have some sort of receptionist to greet visitors and answer phones when Cannell is not on site.

Even though work still needs to be completed on the rest of EOTEC, the event center will start hosting events immediately. Cannell said bookings so far include seven private events and a variety of meetings, including a League of Oregon Cities gathering scheduled for today.

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