

FIRE CONSOLIDATION PASSES

Hermiston, Stanfield district folded to form new district.

By **JENNIFER COLTON**
Staff Writer

Umatilla County Fire District 1 is a go.

The consolidated district will encompass the area — and staff — of both the Hermiston Fire District and the Stanfield Fire District.

To pass, voters had to approve three separate measures: 30-108 formed the new district and established funding, 30-109 dissolved the current Hermiston Fire District and 30-110 dissolved the current Stanfield Fire District.

Voters in Hermiston and Stanfield cast votes in favor of forming the new district. “Obviously, we’re very happy with the results,” said Scott Stanton, chief for both the Hermiston and Stanfield fire districts. “The support of our citizens is awesome to help us take the fire district to the next level and provide the service we need,” he said. “We’re grateful for the support. We’re going to do good things. We’re going to do great things.”

The new district takes affect July 1.

“The trucks will have a different name on the door, but it’s going to be the same stations, the same people, but we’ll be able to keep up with the growth now and provide a great service,” Stanton said.

When it opens with the new name on July 1, the new Umatilla County Fire District 1 will have a combined tax rate of \$1.75 per \$1,000 of assessed property value for residents within the Hermiston and Stanfield area. This value will not impact residents — such as those within the city limits of Hermiston — who are already under compression.

The reformation is expected to generate \$900,000, which would go toward adding staff, replacing old vehicles and providing 24/7 staffing at Fire Station 2 on Diagonal Road.

This is the second time the fire districts have asked voters for the reformation. The consolidation pre-



HERALD FILE PHOTO

Beginning July 1, this shirt will become a collectors item and the Hermiston Fire and Emergency Services District will be replaced by the new Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, encompassing both the Hermiston and Stanfield Fire districts after voters approved the consolidation May 17.

New fire district means less tax revenue for city

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Voters’ decision to approve a merger between Hermiston and Stanfield fire districts will mean increased fire and ambulance service in the new district, but it will also mean sacrifices for the city of Hermiston.

The new Umatilla County Fire District 1 will raise revenue from a property tax rate of \$1.75 per \$1,000 of assessed value, an increase from the \$1.20 per \$1,000 that has been funding Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services.

As promised, voters in Hermiston will not see an increase in their taxes. That’s because in 1990 Oregon voters passed Measure 5, which limited the amount of property taxes a resident can pay to \$5 per \$1,000 of assessed value for education and \$10 per \$1,000 for other government services.

Once a city reaches the \$10 ceiling, as Hermiston has, any new tax passed by voters adds a new slice to an already-full pie, shrinking all of the other slices of pie to make room. The process is known as compression.

In Hermiston, the city itself has by far the biggest slice of pie, at a tax rate of more than \$6 per \$1,000 of assessed value. That money pays for city departments ranging from Hermiston Police Department to parks and recreation.

Mark Morgan, the assistant city manager, said in an email that the new tax rate for Umatilla County Fire District will di-

vert approximately \$130,000 per year that would have otherwise gone to the city’s general fund. So while residents won’t be paying for the new fire district directly out of their own pockets, the city will have to figure out somewhere to make cuts.

“In short, there’s no such thing as a free lunch,” Morgan said.

That doesn’t mean that the city was against the merger, however. Recognizing the importance of fire and ambulance service to the community’s safety and livability, the city council made an official statement in support of a consolidated district in 2015. That attempt to merge the districts failed, but voters approved a second go-round May 17.

The other taxing districts within Hermiston affected by compression are Umatilla County, the Port of Umatilla, the county radio district, the mosquito control district and the cemetery district.

Stanfield, which is not under Measure 5 compression limits, will see a 31 cent decrease in property taxes with the new district compared to the previous Stanfield Fire District rate. Residents outside of Hermiston and Stanfield will see up to a 55 cent increase.

The increased taxing rate and new fire district will mean increased fire and ambulance coverage for the Hermiston/Stanfield area, which has been experiencing delays in service multiple times per month when people have called for an ambulance but one has not been immediately available.

viously failed in the November 2014 election. In that election, the measure to create the new district failed 56 percent to 44 percent among voters in Hermiston and Stanfield areas.

“I’ve been cautiously optimistic this whole time. I looked at the numbers 18 months ago and the differ-

ence in the campaign and what we did differently,” Stanton said. “People this time were a lot more vocal saying they were voting for us and they hoped we got it. We hoped for the best.”

The chief said the community support continued as the election results came out and his phone kept ringing into the evening.

“We want to give all our thanks to all the folks who supported us. We just feel so grateful for the support we have, and we would have been grateful, no matter what happened today,” he said. “These are two great communities and we’re going to continue to serve and continue that on the best we can.”

Echo voters approve school bond

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

It was good news for supporters of Echo School District’s \$4 million bond (with \$4 million match), which voters approved May 17.

Echo is one of 10 school districts statewide chosen to receive \$4 million grant money from the state if they could get voters to approve a bond. The grant will come from the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program, created by Senate Bill 447 to provide incentive for voters to pass a general obligation bond to help fund deferred maintenance.

At Echo School, the \$8 million will pay for an expansion that includes three classrooms, a school library, an air-conditioned second gym, and dedicated space for wood shop, metal shop, art, agriculture and a science lab. It will also pay

for increased school security, including security cameras and a key card system to replace the locks that currently require 41 different keys to lock everything in the building.

Superintendent Raymon Smith was celebrating with a group of district supporters after the initial results came out and said everyone in the room was “really excited.”

“It’s a lot of relief, honestly,” he said.

He said he was grateful to the community for recognizing the opportunity with the matching funds from the state and being willing to support the school. He said he believed the state’s match was what clinched it for them.

“We would have never had a shot, otherwise,” he said.

The district hopes to start construction within a year.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Echo High School ag students study in a small classroom that was built between the school shop and a bus barn in Echo. The small classroom is used for agriculture, business, wood and metal shop and art classes.

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ELECTION RESULTS

Final unofficial election results on candidates and measures in the greater Hermiston area from election night returns in Umatilla and Morrow counties and/or the Oregon Secretary of State’s office.
Winners are marked with a checkmark.

Ballot title 30-108: Would form a new Umatilla County Fire District No.1
Passed ✓

Ballot title 30-109: Would dissolve Hermiston Fire & Emergency Service District, if the formation of the new district is approved
Passed ✓

Ballot title 30-110: Would dissolve the Stanfield Fire District, if the formation of the new district is approved
Passed ✓

Ballot title 30-112: Echo School District general obligation bond
Passed ✓

Umatilla County Commissioner, Position 3
Tom Bailor ✓
Bill Elfering ✓

Circuit Court, 6th District, Position 2
John L. Ballard ✓
Jon S Lieuallen ✓

Circuit Court, 6th District, Position 3
Daniel J Hill ✓

Morrow County Judge
Greg Sweek ✓
Melissa J Lindsay ✓

Morrow County Commissioner, Position 1
Leann Rea ✓
Jim Doherty ✓

District Attorney, Umatilla County
Daniel R Primus ✓

Municipal Judge, City of Hermiston
Thoma J Creasing Jr. ✓

Mayor, City of Hermiston
David A Drotzmann ✓

State Senator, 29th District
Republican Bill Hansell ✓
Independent Barbara E Dickerson ✓

State Representative, 57th District
Republican Greg Smith ✓

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