

# City developing plan to increase public art

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

As the city of Hermiston sets its sights on increasing the amount of public art in the community, there is plenty of room to grow.

Here and there a piece of art pops up — a small water feature in front of City Hall, a sculpture in front of the library — but the city is mostly devoid of the statues and historic murals that grace many Eastern Oregon downtowns.

Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, said he didn't know why more public art had not sprung up around Hermiston as it grew, but the public art plan and policies currently in the works should help encourage more projects in the future.

"This is really to facilitate placement of art," he said. "Without any plan in place, it's really easy for the city to err on the side of caution and say, 'We don't want to do that,' when opportunities do

come up."

The city does have some pieces of art. In 2007 the Centennial Plaza was installed at McKenzie Park. It included a 26-foot-tall clock tower, a bell and a stone globe that was once a water feature but now sits dry.

A pair of abstract statues by Michael G. Booth of Pendleton stand in front of the Hermiston Public Library and Hermiston Conference Center. Debbie Pedro, director of the Chamber of Commerce, said she wasn't sure the history of "Companions" in front of the conference center, and library director Marie Baldo said library staff couldn't remember exactly when the city had placed "Marriage" in front of the library.

"I know it was here in early 2000s since I remember the mayor thinking it had been stolen when it was taken off for repair," she wrote in an email.

Other public art includes water features in front of City



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

"Companions" by Michael G. Booth sits outside the Hermiston Conference Center.

Hall and the Stafford Hansell Government Center, the marble peace pole in front of the police station and an antique wagon placed near one end of the Oxbow Trail.

Last year, at the request of Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter, Hermiston artist Chris Huffman sculpted a set

of cattails and installed them in a metal saucer located on the sidewalk along Highway 395 near Main Street. Huffman said he is working on a second set of cattails that will be placed around the small stone fountain in front of City Hall.

Huffman, who has completed numerous works of

public art for Stanfield, Umatilla, Echo and the Tri-Cities, said he was pleased to see Hermiston working on an official art plan.

"I think their direction is right," he said.

Huffman said he believes the best kind of public art is something that "makes people think or brings back an emotion." The cattails, for example, could make people nostalgic for their childhood fishing spot or make them think about the role that rivers have played in Hermiston's growth.

He said public art helps people slow down and notice their surroundings more — including businesses where they might like to shop — and helps people relax and feel more positive.

"Everyone wants to go someplace that looks nice," he said.

Morgan expressed similar sentiments, noting that in today's information-based economy people tend to have

more flexibility in where they can live, instead of having to move where the jobs are. As a result, it is more important for cities to increase their livability to attract new residents.

"If we're not cognizant of making sure people want to live here, they won't," Morgan said.

Rebecca Couch, a consultant from Moscow, Idaho, is working to gather input for a public art plan and a set of policies for the city council to adopt. That includes discussion about how art is acquired and whose responsibility it is to maintain. She was at the Saturday Market in McKenzie Park on Saturday, May 21, to get feedback and ideas from residents. After the plan and policies are completed they will go to the city's Community Enhancement Committee for review and the city council for adoption. Future acquisition of art will happen as opportunities arise through grants and donations.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY LEAH SMITH

Hermiston High School FFA's ag communications team is Emily Vandehey, Dylan Westfall, Claire Wilson and Shasta Jundt.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY LEAH SMITH

Hermiston High School FFA's food sciences team is Wyatt Paschal, Sydnee Miller, Jessica Smelser and Lainey Anderson.

## FFA teams take first at state

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

Two Hermiston High School FFA teams are headed to national competition this fall, after taking first place at the state level.

The agricultural communications team and food sciences team won their categories at the state competition at Oregon State University May 2-3. They will compete against other state champions in Indianapolis this fall.

The agricultural communications team includes sophomore Dylan Westfall, junior Shasta Jundt, senior Emily Vandehey and senior Claire Wilson. The food

sciences team is made up of senior Lainey Anderson, junior Wyatt Paschal, senior Sydnee Miller and senior Jessica Smelser.

The communications team competed individually through a multiple choice test, an editing quiz, practicums (such as writing a press release or creating a video) and then completed a group presentation. The Hermiston team chose to do their presentation on Boardman's SAGE Center.

Westfall said he enjoyed the chance to learn communications skills that were coming in handy in his classes.

Wilson said that coming back to win this year

was especially meaningful, because last year her team was named first place on stage but was later notified that there had been a scoring error and they had actually come in second.

"When we won I cried onstage," she said. "It was a good moment."

The food sciences team went through five individual competitions, including taste tests, tests to identify flavors by smell, and tests about food handling practices. They also had a team competition where they were given a challenge to invent a product using a list of ingredients they were given, then create plans for

marketing, packaging and production.

The team prepared for competition under the coaching of Melissa Ney, Umatilla County Public Health environmental health supervisor. She took the team on a couple of restaurant inspections so that they could see how the process works.

"It gave us new knowledge and consideration of what goes into the food industry," Smelser said.

Anderson said the team was excited to compete against an even higher caliber of students at the national competition in the fall.

## Transportation committee coming to Hermiston

The state legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization will be able to see some of Eastern Oregon's transportation needs firsthand when it holds one of its meetings in Hermiston this summer.

The committee is tasked with developing a comprehensive package of bills for the 2017 legislative session that will address transportation infrastructure needs — including highways, railways, bridges and ports — across Oregon.

The committee has announced nine meetings for the summer, including one at Hermiston High School on June 29 at 2 p.m. Citizens are welcome to attend and share their priorities for state investment in transportation. The committee's visit also will include a tour of the Port of Morrow.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, is on the 14-person committee and worked to bring the committee to District 57 for one of its meetings. In a statement he thanked House leadership

for allowing the committee to travel to Eastern Oregon to hear directly from local communities and ports.

"Our region relies on the transportation system to connect communities and export our commodities," he said. "I believe having the committee travel outside of Salem is the right decision. This will help develop a more robust and comprehensive package that will benefit all of Oregon."

Other meetings will be held in Salem (May 25), Portland (June 13), Ontario (June

28), Eugene (July 20), Bend (August 18), Newport (Sept. 15) and Hillsboro (Sept. 19).

"We want to hear from Oregonians about their transportation priorities," Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, said in a news release. "This tour will give us the chance to discuss shipping routes with business owners, traffic flow with community leaders; and congestion with commuters. It will provide the information we need to create the right statewide transportation for all of Oregon."

### BRIEF CASE

#### Seminars highlight email use

A pair of upcoming workshops will provide participants with information and tools to improve use of email with their business.

Look Great in the Inbox is Tuesday, June 7 from 3-5 p.m. and Get Open, Get Read, Get Results is Wednesday, June 8 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Both seminars are free and are at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395.

To register or for more

information, contact Carol Infranca and Associates at 503-623-0112, carol@carolinfranca.com or visit www.carolinfranca.com and click on "Upcoming classes."

#### Shari's pies receive gold medals

Shari's Cafe & Pies, formerly known as Shari's Restaurant, received a record 14 gold medals during the 2016 National Pie Championships held April 29-30 in Orlando, Florida.

The West Coast restaurant chain, which first opened in Hermiston in 1978, has competed in the contest six times.

In 2015, seven of Shari's pies placed first.

For more information, visit www.piecouncil.org.

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