

# Marie Baldo prepares to retire — for the second time

## Second career after Army fulfills a delayed dream

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

Librarians often get stereotyped as quiet individuals who do most of their living in the pages of books. But before Marie Baldo was handling returns, she was handling nuclear weapons in Germany.

Baldo, Hermiston Public Library's director since 2004, is retiring at the end of the month. It's her second retirement, after first retiring from the U.S. Army.

"When I was a teen there were two things I wanted to do," she said. "I wanted to be a librarian — big time, I wanted to be a librarian — and I wanted to join WAC (the Women's Army Corp)."

When she left high school she decided to pursue the librarian path, but she graduated from college into a recession and after six months of not finding work as a librarian she went

on to plan B and joined the Army.

The WAC was being phased out, but her college degree allowed her to enter as a second lieutenant and participate for a year before she was transitioned to ordnance work. She spent much of her Army career handling nuclear weapons in Germany, but jokes she was "issued" her husband Fred Allen at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. She eventually transitioned from nuclear weapons to chemical ones and ended up as commander of the Umatilla Chemical Depot in the late 1990s.

The next step would have been the Pentagon, but Baldo didn't want to move to Washington, D.C. Her husband had already retired from the Army to follow her to Hermiston, so she made the decision to retire too.

She saw an opening for a librarian in Umatilla and decided to dust off her library sciences degree. The job may not have been as exciting, she said, but it also didn't keep her up at night worrying that a mistake under her watch would



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

**Hermiston Public Library director Marie Baldo stands next to a display case full of pigs she has received over the years working at the library.**

cause mass casualties.

"Special weapons, nuclear and chemical, it's a real tightrope, a zero-mistake environment," she said. "Going from that to putting on antlers and doing a story time was a relief."

She had to get used to the way libraries had changed since she left school — the absence of a physical card catalog was a shock after spending so many hours in school learning how to properly type up cards. But she said many functions of her job, such as managing employees and writing up reports, are not

much different than what she did in the Army.

Libraries are becoming wall-less, she said. People used to be limited to the books on the shelves of their libraries. Now they can jump online and request an inter-library loan from across the state, download an e-book, listen to an audiobook or use a subscription-based database.

"I can't tell you what it's going to look like in the future," she said.

One of Baldo's favorite parts of the job, however, is still buying books.

### Baldo's retirement

The public is invited to Baldo's retirement gathering Thursday from 4-6 p.m. at the library, 235 E. Gladys Ave. For more information call 541-567-2882.

"I love zombie books," she said. "We probably have a higher percentage of zombie books than at other libraries."

Another favorite experience has been working with the teen advisory council. Baldo said when she came to the library the young adult section was small and mostly held classics like Tom Sawyer. She put together a group of teenagers, won a grant and took them to Barnes and Noble in Kennewick to pick out \$1,000 worth of young adult books for the library and then discuss them over lunch. The "mall crawl" has since become a beloved annual tradition.

"They found 'The Hunger Games,'" she said. "They've found good books, and our circulation jumped tremendously."

She said she already had a large amount of respect for

the staff when she arrived, because she had served on the Hermiston City Council and knew how hard they worked. She has enjoyed working with them and collaborating with other librarians.

"I know librarians from Ontario to Hood River, and they have become my friends," she said.

One thing she hasn't enjoyed as much is dealing with the facilities side, including several major repairs and remodeling the library to get rid of a former decorating scheme she described as "violently pink."

Now she is leaving it all behind for retirement on June 30. Baldo said her pre-retirement present for herself was going through the qualifying process for the TSA pre-check program. She and her husband already have two trips planned (to the beach and an Alaskan cruise) and hope to take many more. Her third dream as a teenager, after the Army and library, was to travel.

"Talk about a lucky life, she said.

The city has not yet selected Baldo's successor and is still reviewing candidates.

# Family loses home to fire within hours of son's graduation

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

Community members are collecting donations for a Hermiston family working to rebuild their lives after losing their home to a fire on June 4.

Ayden Prewitt, a Hermiston High School senior, had walked with his class earlier in the day and was going home to get ready for the school-wide graduation party when he was greeted by a wall of thick black smoke at his front door.

He called 9-1-1, then his parents, Cyndi and Jeremie Prewitt, who were at another graduation party a half-mile away.

His parents drove home, arriving before the fire department got there. They ran into the house to try and grab what they could and search for the family's two dogs, but the smoke and flames pushed them back out again before they could save the Pomeranians.

"There was just nothing

we could do," Cyndi said.

The insurance adjuster has ruled the house a total loss, although the family is still working to salvage a few items the fire skipped over or they pulled out when they first arrived.

"We lost a lot of photos, but there are still some left," Jeremie said.

Their daughter JaNessa, who will be a senior in the fall, also lost items, including some of the clothing she wears to events as a Umatilla County Fair princess. The Prewitts' third daughter Skylar is not living at home but had some things stored there.

Cyndi and Jeremie said the help they have received since has been extremely humbling, starting with three of Ayden's friends who refused to leave their side the night of the fire.

"They missed out on their graduation party to stay with us," Cyndi said, wiping away tears.

Employers have offered

paid time off to deal with the aftermath of the fire, Jeremie's mother Donna Anderson has let them stay with her, and friends and strangers alike have donated clothing, gift certificates and other items. Mailing Made Easy, where Cyndi works, is acting as a drop-off point for donations, and other people have reached out through Facebook asking how they can help while the Prewitts rebuild their home.

"There has been a tremendous outpouring of people wanting to help," Jeremie said. "It's been very comforting."

Cyndi's coworker Car-

# Council OKs hike to electricity customers this fall

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston City Council approved an electric rate increase of 2.59 percent Monday.

The change was smaller than the 4.4 percent increase Hermiston Energy Services superintendent Nate Rivera originally recommended during a May 23 work session.

"We were able to tighten our belts and find some cost savings," he said.

The rate adjustments vary by account type. The charge per kilowatt hour will remain the same for residential customers but their base charge will increase from \$10.50 per month to \$14. Small commercial customers will see a .71 percent increase, large commercial cus-

tomers a .4 percent increase, industrial no increase and irrigation customers a 6.43 percent increase.

The changes will take effect on bills calculated after Sept. 1.

The rate increase follows an 11 percent increase adopted a year ago, but prior to that Hermiston Energy Services had not raised rates for 12 years. The utility had instead built up a sizable reserve fund when the cost of wholesale power from Bonneville Power Administration was low and has been pulling money from its reserves for the past few years to make up for significant increases in the cost of power from BPA.

Rivera said at the May 23 workshop that model was not sustainable. He also said that Hermiston Energy Services needed extra funds to make capital improvements, including a new \$1 million substation called Hermiston East that should help reduce power outages in the city and get customers back online faster if they do occur. Rivera also wants to institute "smart meters" that would tell HES as soon as the power goes out and allow the utility to automatically collect detailed reports of customers' energy usage without sending a meter reader door to door.

# EOTEC approves \$9.1 million budget

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center approved a \$9.1 million budget on June 10.

The 2016-2017 budget includes \$8.5 million earmarked for construction.

Operating costs have been a question mark for the EOTEC board, as the event center building recently became operational while most of the project remains under construction. For the 2016-2017 fiscal year the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County are budgeted to contribute \$45,190 each to be added to a beginning cash fund of \$55,300 and an estimated event revenue of \$46,200 for the year. An additional \$297,665 from the tourism promotion assessment on hotels will provide funds to be used for marketing.

In addition to business manager Heather Cannell's salary, personnel costs will include a full-time administrative assistant, two part-time janitorial staff and a part-time finance position split with the city.

On the construction side, bills will be paid out of a beginning cash balance of \$4.6 million, as well as a \$1.4 million state grant administered by the Port of Umatilla, \$1

million raised through an increase in the tourism promotion assessment and donations from the community. The money will go toward constructing barns, a rodeo arena, food stalls, restrooms and finishing touches such as fences and lighting.

**"WE WISH YOU A GREAT SUMMER!"**

**Hibbert Dental**

1100 Southgate, Suite 3 Pendleton, OR 97801

www.hibbertdental.com • 541-612-3707

When they say "Summer in the city!" and you say "The weather is pretty?"

**SOUND ADVANTAGE HEARING CENTER**

541-567-4063  
405 N. 1st St., Suite #107, Hermiston

541-215-1888  
246 SW Dorion, Pendleton

Ric Jones, BC-HIS    Verna Taylor, HAS    Forrest Cahill, HAS

**See Us for Hearing Tests Every Monday and Tuesday.**

**Ruud's HEARING AID SERVICE**

29 SW Dorion, Pendleton, OR  
Call 541-276-3155 for appointment

**PRIORITIES**

A hundred years from now it will not matter what My bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the Life of a Child.

**ARE YOU LOOKING TO**

- Build your Confidence?
- Grow as a Leader?
- Improve your communication & public speaking skills?

**TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL**

**JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL EVENT AT TUMBLEWEED TOASTMASTERS OPEN HOUSE**

**THURSDAY June 16, 6:45am**

**Blue Mountain Community College**

**Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center**

**Rm 134, 975 SE Columbia Dr, Hermiston OR**

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - DON - 541-379-5763

**VINEYARD VOICES TOASTMASTERS CLUB**

**Tuesdays, 6-7pm**

**109 NE 5th Ave, Milton-Freewater, OR**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - JENNIFER ZERBA - 307-258-5062

Or check out these other fine Toastmaster Clubs

Pendleton Toastmasters, Articulate Ambassadors

Cay-Uma-Wa, Walla Walla Toastmasters,

Blue Mountain Toastmasters

For Additional Information On Toastmasters

www.toastmasters.org/Find-a-Club • ed.newman.tm@gmail.com

**NATIONAL FLAG WEEK**

Exchange your old flag for a new American Flag!

**Honoring Veterans**

**McKay Creek Estates**

In honor of National Flag Week, we will be handing out free American flags.

You're a grand old flag, you're a high flying flag, and forever in peace may you wave.

~George M. Cohan

Flags may be exchanged Sunday, June 12 thru Saturday, June 18 between 9:00am and 5:00pm. Limited supply, reserve yours today!

There will be a ceremonial disposal of the retired flags that are collected.

**McKay Creek Estates**

1601 Southgate Pl  
Pendleton, OR 97801  
(541) 276-1987

www.PrestigeCare.com

Prestige Senior Living, L.L.C.