

Lead found in water at four schools

Faucets replaced, re-tests scheduled; new board member appointed

By **ALEXA LOUGEE**
Staff Writer

Extensive water testing in Hermiston's schools found 19 faucets with elevated levels of lead, but none that were considered primary drinking sources.

The Hermiston School District tested 853 sources of water throughout the district and found instances of lead in four schools:

- Hermiston High School, the largest school in the district, had 13 sources of elevated lead, all of them sinks in science classrooms that are now used for math instruction.

- Highland Hills Elementary had three sources, including two classroom sinks and a kitchen spray nozzle.

- Sandstone Middle School had two kitchen dish-washing sinks with elevated lead.

- Armand Larive Middle School, one of the newest buildings in the district, had one hand-washing station in the kitchen where elevated lead was found.

All other schools, including the district's oldest building — Rocky Heights Elementary School — came back with no elevated lead samples.

The district has already taken measures to remedy elevated lead sources. According to Mike Kay, the district's executive director of operations, the first step is to replace faucets and spray nozzles, which the district has already done. The sources are also tagged

with large signs that direct people not to use them.

Each elevated source has been retested and results are pending. The results will determine the next steps. If a new fixture still reflects high levels of lead, the district will begin the process of replacing pipes.

The district began testing July 5, after the Oregon Health Authority recommended all public schools and day care centers test their water for lead using accredited drinking water testing labs. The recommendations came after elevated lead was found in drinking water throughout Portland public schools. Most recently, the Medford School District reported high lead levels at three elementary schools.

The recommendation from OHA asked districts to test all water sites that could reasonably be used for drinking water. Hermiston School District facilities crew took that instruction a step further, including testing janitor closet mop faucets because coaches have been known to fill water coolers from there. They also tested outside hose faucets and bathroom sinks. Kay said they tested these secondary sites because "it was the right thing to do."

The district sent samples to Analytical Laboratory Group and Anatek Laboratory Group, both accredited water testings companies.

Kay estimates the district will have spent at least \$13,000 on lead testing, but is optimistic the district will receive reimbursement from the state.

Hermiston School District gets its water from the city of Hermiston's municipal water system, which, according to public records, receives regular testing and



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY THE HERMISTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

A sink that tested positive for elevated lead levels has been shut off and tagged.

continually meets state and federal lead thresholds.

Kay gave a presentation on the water results to the Hermiston Board of Education Monday night. Board

chair Karen Sherman responded favorably to the district's efforts.

"Thank you, Mike, to you and your staff, for going the extra mile in making sure

that our kids are safe and our staff," she said. "I appreciate all the hard work, I think the thick document shows a lot of time and energy that went into it. That's the right way to do it, and we appreciate all your efforts."

The thick document she referred to was a three ring binder holding all the testing documentation for the district.

On Friday, Kay received notice that the Oregon Health Authority would be requiring all school districts to test all water sources for lead.

"I'm very pleased with our staff and being proactive to get ahead of this," Kay said.

OHA also will require that after the initial testing this year, districts must test a small portion of sites at every

building each year. If one of those small samples comes back elevated, all sites at that building will have to undergo testing.

The school district's water was last believed to have been tested in 2002.

Also at Monday night's board meeting, members voted unanimously to appoint Bonnie Luisi to fill the board seat vacated by Maria Duron, who left for a paid position with the district office. Luisi worked as a classified employee for Hermiston School District for 22 years before retiring and has served on various committees throughout the district. Her term will end June 30, 2017, at which point she may run for election to the board.

Good Shepherd starts \$11 million expansion

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Good Shepherd Health Care System broke ground Tuesday in Hermiston on an \$11 million expansion project that will bring an estimated 35 new jobs to the community when it is finished.

The expansion of the north wing of the campus will extend the Women's Center from about 4,500 square feet to 11,000 square feet. It will also add a slate of new exam rooms, provider offices and room to grow.

In addition to the new building space, the plaza will also see a redesign of its main boulevard through the campus, additional parking and move the hospital's community gardens to a space that is three times as large as the one at the Hermiston Butte.

"This project is going to add a lot of flexibility and room for future growth," Good Shepherd President and CEO Dennis Burke told the audience at the groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday.

Burke said construction costs were expected to be more than \$9.5 million, with the purchase of new medical equipment bringing the total cost up to about \$11 million. He said it was exciting to see another expansion project go forward as Good Shepherd Health Care System continues to grow with the community.

"It just doesn't seem that many years ago that this was all sagebrush," he said.

The construction project is expected to last 14

months, with an opening in the fall of 2017. It will include 180 tons of steel, 1,300 cubic yards of concrete, 72,000 bricks, 4,100 tons of asphalt and 35,000 worker hours to complete.

Thane Eddington of PKA Architects said his company worked with Dr. Gary Trupp to design rooms that were patient-friendly.

"There is more room for family members to be present and more room for providers," he said.

Nick Gonzales, senior project manager for Bouten Construction out of Spokane, said his company was honored to work on a project that would have such a positive impact on the community through improved patient care.

"This is what gets us out of bed: projects that matter," he said.

After the groundbreaking ceremony, GSHCS spokesman Nick Bejarano said the redesigned boulevard through the campus should help improve pedestrian safety. The project is expected to wrap up about the same time as a separate Oregon Department of Transportation project to add traffic signals and more turn lanes to the nearby intersection of 11th Street and Elm Avenue, which should further improve traffic flow in and out of the medical plaza.

The project will also include a new parking lot with diagonal spaces and electric car charging stations to alleviate crowding in the current lots.



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