

CHEER:

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designed by Tina Cullers of Hermiston. The next year, Cullers surprised the couple by creating a magnificent new red velvet quilted Santa outfit for Scarlett.

"The first costume I had was ratty tatty," he said. "Now my costume actually has gold thread in the jacket. I put it on and I'm, like, 'Wow!'"

While the couple enjoys holiday events that focus on kids — serving as Santa and Mrs Claus in recent years during the Hermiston Festival of Trees Family Day — they have a special place in their heart for older adults in assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

"The reason we love seniors is that generation was the greatest generation. They went through the Depression and World War II," Hunt said. "We have better lives because of what they went through."

The couple hopes others are inspired to visit local facilities. And, they even provide opportunities for people to do so. After Donna Meade — the couple's longtime elf — died several years ago, they coaxed Helen McAfee to join them as Santa and Mrs. Claus' helper.

Receiving a basic outfit from the couple, McAfee has added her own personal touches with a blinking light necklace, Christmas bulb earrings and curly-toed shoes. Although this is just her second season as an elf, the 73-year-old has excelled



Members of the Hermiston High School choir sing Christmas songs Tuesday morning during a visit by Richard Scarlett and Wanda Hunt (as Santa and Mrs. Claus) to Brookdale Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY TAMMY MALGESINI

in the role — she's been asked to wear the costume during a pair of upcoming performances with the Hermiston Christian Center.

"I'm normal most of the time," McAfee said with a laugh. "I just love to see the people smile. It brings out the kid in everyone."

For the past 10 years, The Has Been Wanna Bees, a group of singing octogenarians, joined Scarlett and Hunt when they visited facilities in Hermiston. However, as the members continued to age and some passed away, they recently bowed out of the performances.

Always wanting to get more people involved, Hunt called Hermiston High School to see if some choir students could come and sing. Music teacher Jordan Bemrose-Rust was thrilled

by the invitation. Tuesday morning, two busloads of band and choir students crowded into the lobby of Brookdale Hermiston.

Ruby Halvorson wore a bright smile throughout the hour-long performance. The 91-year-old sang along during the final set of Christmas carols.

"I love it," she said. "This is so great. I love all the equipment — the piano, the horns and the drums. And, the singing was wonderful."

After her husband of 47 years died, Van De Brake started volunteering for the Good Shepherd Medical Center Hospital Auxiliary. It was there that she came up with the idea to refurbish and distribute stuffed animals to children.

"It's been a lifesaver for me and it's also been helpful

to the community as well," Van De Brake said while surrounded by dozens of stuffed animals of all shapes and sizes. "It helped me when my husband died — it kept my hands and heart and mind busy."

Van De Brake noticed that children visiting with family in the hospital would appear bored when she entered a patient's room. The children, she said, would ask the adults when they were going to leave. Van De Brake thought offering a child a stuffed animal might help settle them down or keep them entertained.

Over the past 15 years, the 82-year-old estimates she has refurbished and donated 20,000 stuffed animals — even having to replace her washing machine to handle the loads. Some of the ani-



Richard Scarlett, aka Santa Claus, and Ruby Halvorson share a laugh Tuesday morning at Brookdale Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY TAMMY MALGESINI

mals were in pretty sad shape — she swears by Tide laundry detergent and Oil Eaters, a heavy-duty cleaner.

"I was able to bring these stuffed animals back to their original condition," she said.

Gathering the animals has come through a variety of resources — from organizations such as The Salvation Army, Agape House, Hermiston Elks, The Hermiston Police Department, as well as yard sales and personal friends. However, it's been a one-woman operation as far as washing, fluffing, hanging to dry and re-stuffing the animals.

Except for one year, Van De Brake has donated 500 stuffed animals each December to Christmas Express.

Instead of giving to local kids in 2005, she sent 600 to Louisiana and the surrounding areas to be distributed to children impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

"The adults were being taken care of by the government," she said. "But I thought the kids needed something."

Like Santa's elves, who happily do their part in spreading holiday cheer, Scarlett, Hunt, McAfee and Van De Brake enjoy seeing the fruits of their labor. McAfee summed up the central theme shared by many who give of their time and talents during the holiday season.

"It's making people smile," she said. "It's all about spreading joy."

VOTE:

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which are currently \$4.09 per \$1,000 for education.

Board members acknowledged the financial impact on Hermiston residents, but also spoke of students spending their days in portable classrooms and in schools with floor plans where children have to cross an unsecured outdoor campus to get from room to room.

"The bottom line is always the kids," board chair Karen Sherman said. "Rocky Heights and Highland Hills are not safe schools. We owe it to our students to have safe schools."

Right now the district is using 34 modular classrooms to handle overflow and superintendent Fred Maiocco said that number could be as high as 50 in two years. The district was using 20 portable classrooms when voters approved a \$69.9 million

bond in 2008 to replace and expand multiple schools. Since then the district has grown by an additional 600 students, beating Portland State University's most aggressive projections for yearly growth.

The district's last survey indicated that 46 percent of likely voters supported the bond and 48 percent did not, leaving about 6 percent undecided.

Maiocco said waiting until May 2019 could give the district more opportunities to educate those undecided voters, but could also make the district lose the momentum it has built after a three year process putting together an in-depth facilities master plan.

From a financial standpoint, waiting two more years would mean more of the district's previous bonds would be paid off. On the other hand, Maiocco said, construction costs are rising at about 1 percent a month with no end in sight, so delaying construction by two years would raise the

cost of building the schools.

Another consideration is the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program, which has provided \$4 million matching grants to several other Eastern Oregon schools that recently passed bonds. The May election would be the last time the money would be available, although Maiocco said even that is not a sure thing anymore after Gov. Kate Brown's recent budget proposal recommended that program be ended early. If legislators listen to schools and keep it for one last election cycle, however, Hermiston would be eligible for \$5.76 million under the current matrix.

If Hermiston does not get those matching funds, Maiocco said the district would still be able to build the schools but would not have the \$5 million it has built into the bond to purchase new property that would be kept in reserve for the next time the district needs to build a new school.

Board member Dave Smith said that there is "no doubt" the district has done its homework, and that the need is there. Waiting two years to go for the bond, he said, would only make it more expensive.

Board member Josh Goller agreed, and added that it would also mean two more years of less-than-ideal classrooms for students.

"Our students get one shot at those grade levels," he said.

Sherman also pointed to the maintenance problems of the older schools, and the recent analysis showing \$846,075 in cost savings over five years thanks to the energy efficiency of the district's new schools.

On Monday the board discussed one example of a maintenance problem in the part of the high school built in 1992, which would be replaced during the proposed expansion. Freezing temperatures caused a water line in the school's fire suppression system to burst on Thursday, flooding the

math and science classrooms, hallways, kitchen and commons area.

The school was evacuated for 14 minutes due to safety concerns about the mixture of water and electrical fixtures, then the gym was cleared for use by students waiting for a bus to take them home.

Maiocco had high praise for the response of the district's custodial staff, which rushed to answer the "all hands on deck" call, and O So Kleen, which responded within 20 minutes to begin cleanup. All classrooms were back in use by Monday morning.

"Within two and a half hours all the water was picked up ... It was just absolutely amazing how fast that whole team came together and got things done," Maiocco said.

He said insurance adjusters had examined the damage, and there was still extensive cosmetic work that would need to be done over the winter break.

The board approved the emergency funding request, with an abstention from Smith, who owns O So Kleen.

Contact Jade McDowell at 541-564-4536.

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STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Piper Jamieson -CONDON HIGH SCHOOL

Piper, a senior at CHS, is the daughter of Andrew and Leslie Jamieson. She is an active student leader, currently serving as senior class president. Her academic prowess has allowed her to achieve an accumulative GPA of 3.95, and she has been recognized as a national winner in the Washington Calligraphers Guild "Gracious Envelope Contest". In June, 2016 she participated in the Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. as a representative of Columbia Basin Electric Co-op.

Piper has achieved much during her years at CHS, both in and out of the classroom. In addition to these accomplishments, she has served her school and community as a volunteer, whether it be keeping the scorebook for basketball games, gathering food donations for the Condon Food Pantry, or working at activities of the annual July 4th community celebration. Piper is an outstanding student, young adult, and citizen, and also a positive role model for the younger students in Condon. She is very deserving of the honor and recognition of Student of the Week!

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