

DANCE:

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Though he said his first reaction to being asked to dance was “total panic,” Elfering enjoyed his performance, engaging the crowd and impressing the judges — who praised his showmanship and camaraderie, both with the audience and with his partner.

Elfering raised money for Pregnancy Care Services, which offers support to young families and single women who need help during pregnancy.

Beas-Fitzgerald wowed the crowd with her strong dance skills and stage presence, dancing the high-energy Polka with her partner Joey Williams.

Her charity, the Umatilla-Morrow Hispanic Scholarship Foundation, which encourages local students to stay in school and pursue college.

Judges were floored by Beas-Fitzgerald’s dance ability and her enthusiasm.

“We all felt like we were part of your dance from your interactions with the audience,”

Hansell said.

The crowd loved the dances, cheering mid-song and clapping along to songs they knew.

Audience members also enjoyed a performance by several local children, as well as one by the professionals of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company, which paid homage to a variety of dance styles and iconic films — including “Singing in the Rain” and “Moulin Rouge.”

“I was shocked to win,” Smith said after the announcement. “I just came out to have a good time. Everyone who danced was phenomenal.”

Smith said he felt raising money for the warming station was important now more than ever, with the unusually cold winter, and thanked all who contributed to the event.

Smith had spent several hours this week driving back and forth between Salem and Hermiston for rehearsals — but said it was worth it.

“It was a blast,” he said.

The event is organized by the Desert Arts Council, and was sponsored by the Hermiston Breakfast Kiwanis Club.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Rep. Greg Smith dances and his partner, Trina Morago, react to being named winners of Dancing with the Hermiston Stars on Saturday at Hermiston High School.

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can escalate quickly. “It’s not meant to be tactical training, but educational — to get officers aware of what can be in play, to be on guard for issues in the immediate area.”

But Edmiston said it can be a challenge to deal with those kinds of issues — both for officers and others.

“We try to address those things and do a good job,” he said. “But at the end of the day, it’s not illegal to suffer from mental illness. That’s a tough pill for people to swallow.”

Eynon said officers prepare to encounter any type of crisis.

“I don’t know that we see one more than others, except maybe drug or alcohol-related things,” he said. “We don’t always know if it’s drug-induced psychosis, the result of long-term drug

use or mental issues first and then self-medicating with drugs or alcohol.”

Eynon added that before the department started doing crisis intervention training they dealt with mental health cases a little differently — with more frequent bookings so patients would be safe from physical harm. The training helps officers handle the situation before it gets to that point, and avoid using force.

“Are we seeing reciprocal results? I’d say yes. I think our officers are able to de-escalate or defuse a situation, and show people they’re trying to help,” Edmiston said.

Hermiston police have dealt with their share of mental health-related issues. On Dec. 31, 2012, the department had its first officer-involved shooting where a suspect died. A man robbed a bank, and then went across the street to a crowded liquor store. He demanded

a bottle of liquor, and then drew a black pistol BB-gun, which officers thought was a semi-automatic weapon. Officers fired, and the man went down. He died later that day.

“It’s our belief based on the investigation and statements that the individual suffered from mental illness or a short-term crisis,” Edmiston said.

He recalled how his officers reacted to the incident, and some of the dangers with the training.

“If there’s a concern with this training, it’s that (officers) take their guard down to talk with the person, and you have to be able to do both — talk with the person, but keep your guard up — you never know what could happen.”

Kevin Campbell, chief executive officer of Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., agreed that police involvement should not be the long-term solution to mental

health crises.

“People call the police because they’re afraid an individual may kill themselves or others,” he said. “There’s a lot of fear associated with people having a psychotic condition. But we need to think of mental health crises as medical conditions rather than law enforcement conditions.”

Carol Eck of Lifeways, a mental health services provider in Umatilla County, said mental health counselors from the organization are always available to deal for such situations.

“I have Masters-level clinicians on-call 24 hours a day,” she said. “We go out on scene with the officer if they request it.”

She praised officers’ handling of mental health cases, citing the effects of crisis intervention training.

“They’re very adept,” she said. “Very good at working with individuals with men-

tal issues, patient and able to decide the best place for that person to go.”

Eck said one of the drawbacks to the system is that if a person needs to be hospitalized for a psychiatric service, they have to go to the emergency room — and Oregon has a lack of emergency beds, which means those people are often kept waiting.

Kimberly Lindsey of the Morrow County-based Community Counseling Solutions said her organization has worked closely with local law enforcement for several years to provide mental health services to the surrounding areas.

“If it’s brought to law enforcement’s attention that there’s something that looks like a mental health issue, we get called to go to the scene,” Lindsey said, adding that her staff never go to a scene without law enforcement officials.

“They keep the perim-

eter and us safe, if a person is dangerous or violent,” she said.

“I can’t say it’s cut down on crises — it’s not really a preventative measure,” Lindsey said of the collaboration with officers. “But I think it reduces the trauma for both individuals and officers.”

Edmiston said he’d like to see more short-term care options for people going through crises.

“The answer is not to expect more from the police, yet tie the hands of police to do their job,” he said. “In eastern Oregon, where resources are limited, it’s going to require significant investment on the part of the state.”

He said he hopes funding for mental health care is something state lawmakers will consider seriously in their next session.

“There’s got to be a right formula out there that hopefully legislators can figure out,” he said.



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