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completion date for the rodeo arena from June 1 to June 15.

John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction reported that the bid for concrete for the barns had been awarded and other subcontractor bids are not far behind. He said

prolonged freezing temperatures and snow — which his company is considering a once-every-75-years event — has caused some “real issues” staying on schedule because the ground is too hard to do much excavation work.

“We’re a little nervous, but we’re going to get through that and find some solutions,” he said.

During Friday’s meeting the board shifted its focus from construction to operations to discuss a request from the project’s two managing partners — the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County — to come up with a written operations and marketing plan and present it for review at a joint city council and county commission work session.

Board member Dan Dorran said he agreed that the time was right to build on the discussions about operations that took place during a November work session, and requested that the marketing subcommittee come back to the full EOTEC board for a “full-throated discussion” before sending it on to the city and county.

Byron Smith, board chair

and Hermiston city manager, noted that the board has been “hesitant to spend more than we have and trying not to be a burden on the city and county” but said it sounded like the two entities were willing to consider kicking more than their \$45,000 per year each if that’s what’s needed to help fill the center with events.

The event center has

had 43 events so far since it opened last May. During a budget discussion Friday, city finance director Amy Palmer broke down revenue and costs by event so the board could see how the fee structure was working out. She reported that so far in the 2016-2017 fiscal year EOTEC’s operations costs had been about \$100,000 for a net loss of \$4,645.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

JaNessa Prewitt, left, Kira Krumbah-Kuhar and Karolyn Jones are announced as the 2017 Umatilla County Fair Court.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

The staff of Shelco Electric were awarded the 2016 Business Partner of the Year during the 2016 Umatilla County Fair appreciation dinner.

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The theme of the night — and the 2017 fair — was a nod to preparations for moving the fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo to their new digs at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, where the dinner took place.

“This is a whole new ballgame up here,” Umatilla County Fair board member Gay Newman told the audience.

After Newman and other board members thanked a long list of supporters throughout the night they recognized Lyons, owner of Elmer’s Irrigation, as a strong supporter of youth activities at the fair and its companion event, the Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

Lyons came to Hermiston to work with Elmer Georgeson at Elmer’s Irrigation in 1989, and quickly became involved in the company’s tradition of involvement in the fair and rodeo. He said they always did “little things with the fair” but their biggest involvement has always been with 4H and FFA — something that Lyons continued when he took over the business.

That involvement includes giving about 400 tickets to 4H and FFA youth to the Thursday night rodeo and sponsoring the calf dressing event, where high schoolers from the various chapters compete to see who can get a T-shirt on a calf the fastest. The winning chapter gets a \$1,000 check from Elmer’s Irrigation, hats and their name

on the calf-dressing trophy. “They get out there and chase those calves and it’s a great time to watch,” Lyons said.

He said Elmer’s Irrigation also buys three or four animals from the youth auction each year and gives the meat to their employees. They do the same for the Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo, and also support other youth events such as sports booster fundraisers.

“There’s different avenues to support youth in the community, that allows them a really positive path,” Lyons said.

He said the real thanks goes to customers in the community who support Elmer’s Irrigation, enabling him to sponsor these events. Lyons said he’s not big on being in the spotlight but was honored to be asked to be the grand marshal.

Two other people in the spotlight Saturday were the 2016 volunteers of the year.

Male volunteer of the year went to Warren Smith, who has done “odds and ends” for the fair since the 1970s, including work on the sound system, the rodeo, and building stronger gates for the pigs. Smith he has made good friends through the fair and enjoyed helping out.

“I think this is an exciting move this year up here,” he said.

Female volunteer of the year was Alice Newman, who has worked through the years on everything from coordinating exhibitors to serving as a chaperone for the Umatilla County Fair Court.

“All I can say is I love this fair and love supporting it, so

thank you,” Newman said after receiving her award.

The business partner of the year went to Shelco Electric, after Dan Dorran gave a demonstration with potatoes of how they somehow manage to fit “15 pounds of potatoes in a five pound bag” when it comes to supplying electricity to all of the fair’s needs.

“I’d like to recognize Shelco Electric for carrying the Umatilla County Fair for as long as I’ve been on board — and it hasn’t burnt down!” Dorran said.

The county’s youth sale committee was also recognized by the Oregon State University Extension Center for their work in making each year’s youth livestock auction such a success.

The board introduced the 2017 Umatilla County Fair Court on Saturday. The court said goodbye to 2016 princess Raylee Lenhart, but 2016 princesses JaNessa Prewitt and Kira Krumbah-Kuhar were joined on the 2017 court by newcomer Karolyn Jones.

Prewitt is a Hermiston High School senior, Krumbah-Kuhar is a McLoughlin High School sophomore in Milton-Freewater and Jones attends Pendleton High School.

Also announced Saturday was the entertainment line-up for the fair: country pop duo LoCash on Tuesday, Southern rock/country band Marshall Tucker Band on Wednesday, country music artist Tracy Lawrence on Thursday, Latino Night on Friday (band to be announced) and rock band Great White on Saturday.

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Browning said, those students will no longer be counted as separate from Hermiston High School.

“The point of (the center) was that it was a place for students unlikely to meet graduation requirements in a standard instructional day,” Browning said. “We found out from the Oregon Department of Education that we can have the same students as part of Hermiston High School.”

Browning said rates were low at the center because graduation was not the goal for all students there.

“The focus for all Innovative Learning Center students was not always a high school diploma,” Browning said. “It could be a modified diploma or an extended diploma or a GED.”

In addition to the overall rates for each school and district, the ODE report breaks down graduation data into various subcategories such as gender, race or ethnicity, and economic status.

Browning said the district is always keeping an eye on certain subgroups, such as economically disadvantaged students and underserved races and ethnicities.

The district’s elementary schools, she said, all receive Title I funding, which is aimed at schools with high populations of poverty.

“We concentrate those resources on the elementary schools,” she said. “Research shows early learning is the best place to catch those kids.”

She added that all students receive academic intervention if they’re not at the level they need to be.

Browning said while the district doesn’t set a specific goal for graduation rates each year, they expect the percentage of students graduating to increase every year.

“We hold the school district’s goal that all of our students will continue to improve,” she said.

• Umatilla superintendent

Heidi Sipe said her district is starting to see payoff for its career technical education efforts.

Sipe said the district’s renewed focus on CTE has allowed teachers and administrators to keep students who are interested in vocational programs engaged in school and on the path to graduation. The school district’s graduation rate leapt from 64.7 percent to 72.2 percent in 2015-16.

“We didn’t want to value that any less than a traditional four-year college experience,” she said. “They’re working toward a productive future and we support that.”

Sipe said some students now take the ACT WorkKeys exam instead of the Smarter Balanced assessment, where they can apply the lessons they learned in their vocational classes.

Sipe said Umatilla High School students are also completing more college credit hours than they have in the past.

She said staff plan to continue dedicating resources toward their current efforts and expect the class of 2017’s graduation rate will rise even further.

• Stanfield’s graduation rate for the past school year

was 85.3 percent, an improvement from its previous year’s 82.2 percent. Superintendent Shelley Liscom said while the staff does a good job working individually with students, they want to meet the needs of all their kids. In a graduating class that’s fairly small, Liscom said she hopes to work on catching up those few that don’t graduate.

“Fifteen percent of our class — we’re still not meeting the needs of (several) kids,” she said. “We really are striving for every student to graduate, and finish high school with a plan for after high school that they implement.”

• Echo School District’s graduation rate was 84.6 percent, a slight drop from 87.5. Like Stanfield, Echo’s superintendent Raymon Smith said numbers are easily skewed with such small classes.

“Those just look at four-year graduation rates,” Smith said. “If you look at fifth-year completions or summer graduations, it’s closer to 100 percent.”

Smith said he’s happy that the school’s small size allows teachers to maintain an individual relationship with students, which he feels helps with a higher graduation rate.

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