

Former Umatilla chamber director under indictment

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

The former executive director of the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce has been indicted on charges she stole thousands of dollars from the organization.

Karen Hutchinson-Talaski, 60, of Hermiston, did not immediately return calls Wednesday. She left the chamber post sometime in 2016. According to public records, this is the second embezzlement case involving Hutchinson-Talaski.

Umatilla County Circuit Court documents show a grand jury handed up the indictment Dec. 6, 2016, charging Hutchinson-Talaski with one count of third-degree theft, one count of second-degree theft, both misdemeanors, and four felony charges of first-degree theft. The thefts span early July 2014 to late November 2015 and include taking \$1,000 or more on two occasions from bank cash machine withdrawals as well as making unauthorized purchases on a chamber account.

According to Oregon law, third-degree theft applies to values of less than \$100, second-degree theft is for \$100-\$999, and first-degree theft covers values of at least \$1,000.

Hutchinson-Talaski pleaded not guilty at an arraignment Monday in Hermiston circuit court.

The chamber is a charitable nonprofit, and its tax returns are available from Guidestar.org, which specializes in gathering and providing data on nonprofits. The chamber's tax forms shows it lost \$25,221 in 2012, lost \$27,677 in 2013 and lost \$40,139 in 2014.

Hutchinson-Talaski was a reporter in 2008 for the Hermiston Herald.

And from August 1992 until October 1998 she taught for the Morrow County School District. Records from the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission show she lost the job after embezzling approximately \$9,000 from the district.

Hutchinson-Talaski signed an order from the commission in May 1999 in which she agreed to surrender her Oregon teaching license and admit to the theft. The order also states a Morrow County grand jury indicted her on Dec. 14, 1998, on multiple counts of theft, and she pleaded guilty to first-degree theft. She avoided jail, had to pay back the \$9,000 and served two years of probation.



Hutchinson-Talaski

Parks director plans summer projects as winter lingers on

Disc golf course, Sunset Park addition in planning phase

By JADE MCDOWELL
Staff Writer

Snowy weather has put a damper on park use this winter, but Hermiston parks and recreation director Larry Fetter is still excited about projects coming up when the weather thaws.

One of those projects is a disc golf course. Fetter said he is discussing agreements right now with Good Shepherd Health Care System and Hermiston Irrigation District that would allow the city to place a course across from the hospital near the corner of Northwest 11th Street and Elm Avenue.

"We've already started seeking funding," he said.

Fetter said the parks and recreation committee has also looked into what will be needed to get the course officially ranked by professional disc golf associations for tournament play. The 18-hole course would likely be utilized by a mix of serious disc golfers and people who just wanted to "go out



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

Discarded Christmas trees at Butte Park that the city hasn't fed through a wood chipper yet are one thing the parks department has delayed due to snow.

and have a good time," Fetter said.

As for parks projects already underway, Fetter said the snow and the prolonged freezing weather did halt some concrete work at Sunset Park, which the city has been working to expand and renovate.

"We would have made some winter progress on Sunset Park, but that's really ground down to zero," he said.

However, when the weather gets better the department will continue to

work on concrete borders, landscaping, basketball hoops and a new set of playground equipment that will arrive in the spring.

Fetter said the backstop screen at Newport Park will also be installed "as soon as the weather breaks."

Newport Park's softball field was lowered by a couple of feet to help catch water that was flooding neighboring homes during rainstorms, but Fetter said when a portion of the snow melted last week it did so slowly enough that it didn't

turn the park into a lake.

In the spring or summer the parks department will also begin work on a planned overhaul of Greenwood Park, the half-acre neighborhood park tucked away on Beech Street.

Fetter noted that the department has had to delay its annual wood-chipping of all the Christmas trees people drop off at Butte Park each January. The chips are used as mulch at parks around Hermiston, but Fetter said the snow keeps delaying use of the wood chipper.

He said the extra snow this year shouldn't cause too many extra maintenance problems in the spring, unless a rapid thaw causes the Umatilla River to overflow its banks at Riverfront Park.

"If it's like it was four years ago (when the park flooded), we would have to go in and do some restoration work," he said.

On the recreation side of things, Hermiston is currently missing its recreation director after Dan Earp left for a job at a larger parks department in Carson City, Nevada. Fetter said he received 32 qualified applications, however, and has narrowed them down to five applicants that he plans to interview Monday.

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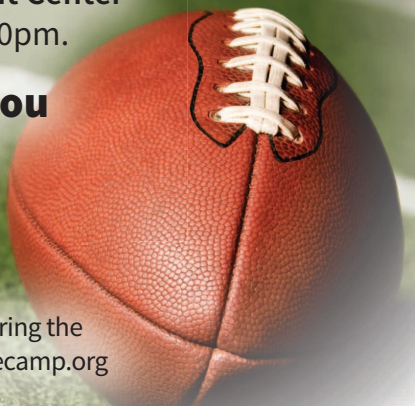


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