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County holds off on paying EOTEC

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is going to have to wait to get another chunk of taxpayer money from Umatilla County.

EOTEC billed the county \$45,190 to cover operations for fiscal year 2016-17. The county, along with the city of Hermiston, had previously agreed to pay \$25,000 annually to the event center for its first three years of operation. Both local governments later agreed to split the amount of EOTEC's shortfall in each of those years, whatever the amount.

County commissioners took up the matter at their meeting last week in Pendleton, and the three questioned what the \$45,190 bill would cover. Robert Pahl, chief fiscal officer for the county, said the funds would pay for operations and any budget gap to date.

Pahl also said the county would not know the full extent of any shortfall until the end of June or sometime in July.

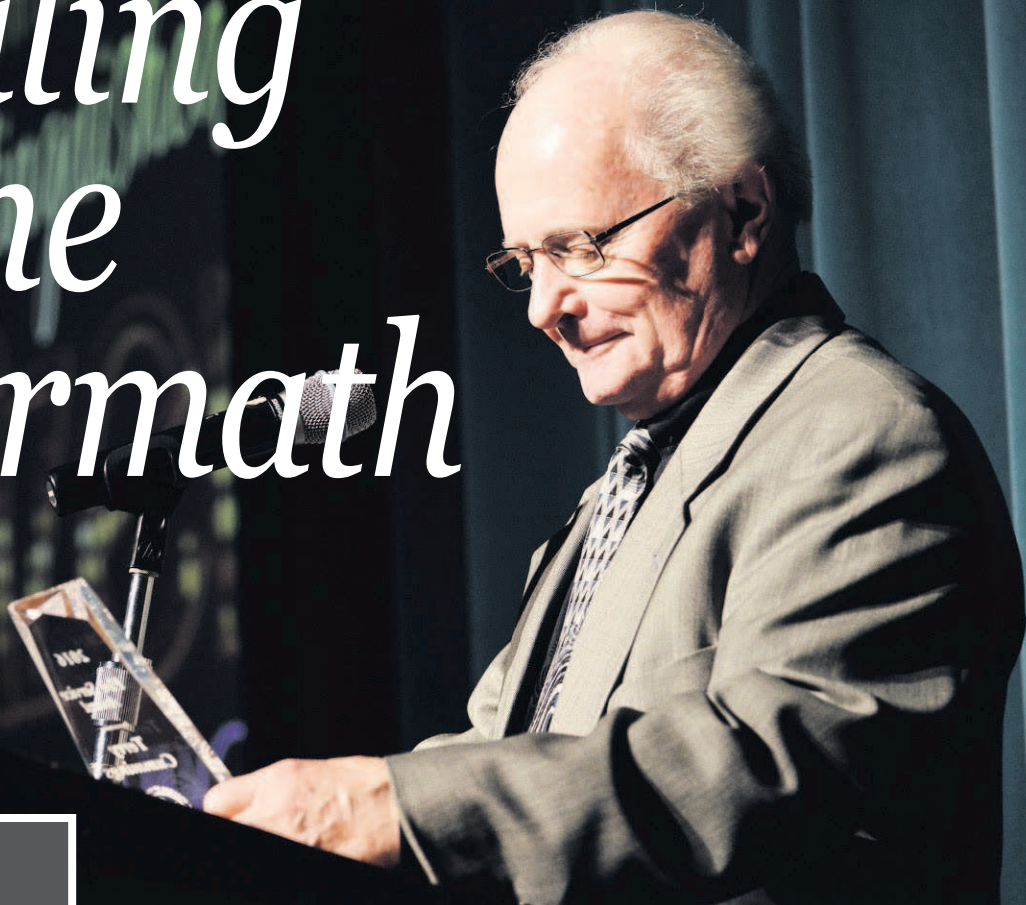
Commissioner Larry Givens, who serves on the event center board, said EOTEC's success remains a question.

Commissioner George Murdock said he would not want to approve the amount if it wasn't what the county agreed to in the budget, or if it wouldn't completely cover the county's portion of EOTEC's deficit.

"We pay this and they put it in their budget and spend it," he said. "And at the end of the year, if there's a \$50,000 shortfall we're out another \$25,000. Right?"

"That's correct," Givens responded.

Healing in the aftermath



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Pastor Terry Cummings looks at the Fire Service Award he won at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Citizens Awards Banquet on Wednesday in Hermiston.

"In a community the size of Hermiston, relationships are like a spider web. People are connected through friends, family, work — you never know who's going to be affected. It takes a huge toll."

Terry Cummings
Fire and police chaplain

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

When the smoke has cleared and the ambulances have left the scene, Terry Cummings goes to work.

As a chaplain for the Hermiston fire and police departments, his job is to help bring peace and closure to first responders and families after tragedy strikes.

For his efforts, Cummings was awarded the Fire Service Award at the Feb. 1 Distinguished Citizens Banquet. He has served in that role in Hermiston since 2011 when the departments started a chaplain program. He had previously spent 43 years as a pastor before retiring.

As a chaplain, his job is to provide non-denominational spiritual, mental and emotional support to first responders in the police and fire departments — and sometimes, just listening to them talk about their experiences.

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HERMISTON'S FINEST

By JADE MCDOWELL
Staff Writer

In an evening of honoring some of Hermiston's most compassionate and dedicated community members, the emotion in the room was most palpable when Charlie Clupny took his turn at the microphone to accept the Award of Merit at the Distinguished Citizens Awards banquet on Feb. 1.

"I was back there crying because I just thought I came here to dinner," Clupny said, wiping his eyes. "I said I wanted to make a difference in the world but I didn't think I'd get recognized along the way. I just thought that's what you're supposed to do in life."

Jesus Rome, a coordinator for Court Appointed Special Advocates, said Clupny was the "poster child" for advocating for foster children in the court system with integrity and passion. He also serves others through the prison ministry at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Meadowbrook Springs camp for children with learning disabilities, the Lions Club, Relay for Life, the Catholic church and as a Parkinson's support group co-facilitator.

Clupny, along with many of the other award winners, will be featured in greater detail in coming editions of the Hermiston Herald.

Other winners at Wednesday's banquet were:

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STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Charlie Clupny wipes a tear from his eye while accepting the Award for Merit at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Citizens Banquet on Feb. 1 in Hermiston.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Liz Marvin, woman of the year, listens as presenter Bob Green reads a list of her many accomplishments at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Citizens Banquet on Feb. 1 in Hermiston.

Alternative school, high school merge

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

The Innovative Learning Center, the Hermiston School District's alternative school since 2011, officially dissolved after the spring of 2016 and is now operating under the umbrella of Hermiston High School.

According to administrators, little else has changed.

"We'll still call it the Innovative Learning Center," said Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo. "But those kids are officially Hermiston High School students again."

The primary reason for the change, Spoo said, is that the state has an attendance requirement — approximately 80 percent of students have to be attending classes full-time. Many of the students in the ILC program are there because they can't attend school full-time, or split their

time between Hermiston High School and the alternative program.

"We'll never come close to meeting that (attendance requirement)," Spoo said. "That was the driving force behind closing it."

Administrators said the change will affect Hermiston High School attendance and graduation rates, but they are happy to be able to continue providing the alternative program in some capacity. For the 2015-2016 school year, the graduation rate for the entire district, which includes the ILC, was 65.7 percent. For Hermiston High School the same year, the rate was 87.6 percent.

"It's positive that we're giving kids an opportunity that many other high schools don't give them," said assistant superintendent Bryn Browning.

Assistant Principal Scott Depew said the program has undergone small change-

es since its adoption, but its primary goal is to target students with attendance gaps or other barriers to success in a traditional high school setting. Increasingly, he said, those barriers are related to attendance rather than to behavioral issues.

Depew said most things about the program will not change — it will still offer a blend of online classes and instructor-led courses. The ILC will no longer offer a night school, but staff will remain the same, and it will still be held in the same location, and kids and parents, he said, do not appear to have noticed any changes.

Depew said about 85 percent of the award winners are working toward a GED certificate.

"I'm looking at ways to discourage kids from GEDs — I want more diplomas," he said. "But 34 GEDs means 34 less dropouts."

