

CLEANUP:

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a staff pastor for Hermiston Assembly of God, said about 300 people so far have signed up to participate in the April 8 community cleanup, including many who are not members of the partner churches but wanted to participate anyway.

“It’s pretty neat,” he said.

In total, they expect somewhere between 400 and 500 volunteers, who will perform free car washes, clean up downtown Hermiston, pick up garbage along the railroad tracks, help run the city’s annual spring recycling day and go door to door with offers to help clean up yards.

“It will be a spring cleaning for the city,” Haight said.

Hermiston Assembly of God began the effort last fall in response to tragedies that had struck the community. Their first event, which included free car washes and handing out snacks and water at Butte Park, drew attention with red T-shirts proclaiming “I Love My City.” In December, the group handed out free candy canes and performed free gift wrapping outside Wal-Mart shortly before Christmas.

Haight said there were a few people who were suspicious of being offered something for free and declined to participate after the volunteers refused to take a donation. But for the most part, people said they appreciated the positive message that the group was portraying.

“We’re not marketing anything except we love our city,” Haight said. “We’re

Slam Dunk the Junk returns

Umatilla will be having its own community cleanup Saturday, sponsored by the city.

The annual Slam Dunk the Junk returns April 1, with dumpsters placed throughout the community for residents to dump yard waste, debris and general junk for free. The city is looking for volunteers to help with coordinating, translating and other duties for Saturday’s cleanup event.

Volunteers can sign up by calling the public works department at 541-922-3226. If anyone has items to dispose of that are too large for them to handle by themselves, they can also call the public works department to arrange assistance.

If residents miss out on Slam Dunk the Junk, they can also take advantage of Sanitary Disposal’s free and discounted dump days over the following week.

just loving people, because that’s what Jesus did.”

They plan to do some sort of I Love My City event every 90 days. Haight said they hope to do a free community barbecue over the summer, or possibly rent out the aquatic center.

The April 8 event coincides with Hermiston’s annual spring recycling event. Residents can bring everything from old tires to unused paint to paper in need of shredding down to the Umatilla Electric Cooperative parking lot (at 750 W. Elm Ave.) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. that day to get them recycled for free.

“What many of those stations require is a supervisor to make sure that the right stuff goes in the right bin,” parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said.

If individuals and families aren’t interested in volunteering there, they can sign up to pick up trash around town, or to wash cars for free

at various locations around town. Haight said organizers have some back-up projects in mind if they get too many volunteers to accommodate at currently planned locations.

Chris Hankel, pastor of worship ministries for New Hope, said church members were excited to join the other churches for the event. The first Sunday it was announced, 80 families signed up to participate.

Hankel said the church wants to be a positive part of the community beyond just their own congregation. It also wants to facilitate service opportunities for families who attend New Hope.

“Part of church is learning to serve people for no other reason than just to serve, without any expectation of reciprocation,” he said.

Anyone interested in volunteering on April 8, whether a member of a church or not, can sign up online at www.ilovehermiston.com.



STAFF PHOTO BY DANIEL WATTENBURGER

Gabriel Villasenor paints the final of four murals Saturday on the side of Carniceria Julissa on Hermiston Avenue.

COLOR:

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The store will provide some services to a part of town that doesn’t currently have a grocery store. Many parts of Hermiston are considered “food deserts” — which is a USDA definition based on the ratio of grocery stores to residents.

While the Valles and Orozco put up shelves, cleaned and prepared the inside of the store, Gabriel Villasenor was busy on the outside of the building,

painting a colorful mural. The murals span four walls, and depict farm animals, the cast of Spanish cartoon “El Chavo Animado,” pigs dressed in mariachi outfits, and a watermelon — with the word “Hermiston” painted above it.

“With the weather, it takes me about a month,” Villasenor said, “because I have to wait when it rains sometimes.”

On a Monday afternoon, Villasenor had about half an hour’s work left on the painting. He stood on a ladder in the sun with a

small brush and carefully painted shadows on the letters of the word “Hermiston.” Below, his wife used a roller with bright green paint to touch up the grass behind the watermelon painting.

Villasenor owns Three Brothers Signs, and has painted murals for several businesses in the Tri-Cities and Yakima.

The Valles have been in Tri-Cities for about 7 years, having previously lived in Yakima and other towns around Washington. They moved to the United States from Mexico in 1998.

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