

Rocky Heights team reads its way to state

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

Students throughout the Hermiston School District sparred for the top prize in a literary contest that's become increasingly popular throughout the state: the Battle of the Books.

Hermiston had a strong showing at all three grade levels, with the Rocky Heights Elementary School team besting all comers in the region to go to the state competition, while Hermiston High School's team took second at regionals.

The statewide event assigns students at each grade level a selection of fiction books, which students gather into teams of four to read and discuss. The teams are then quizzed on those books in head-to-head competitions.

After making it to the top of their respective schools, teams went to a regional competition at Blue Mountain Community College. Rocky Heights beat a pool of 21 teams, including Highland Hills in the finals, to become the regional champions.

The team, which includes Cate Doherty, Eleanor Larsen, Caden Lloyd and Glyn Lystrup, will compete at the state competition April 8 in Salem.

"We have an amazing team," said Melissa Doherty, a Rocky Heights third grade teacher and coach of the winning team. "They gave up every recess to stay in the classroom and study, they made up their own battle questions — I've been so impressed."

Doherty said the competition has challenged students to read books they wouldn't ordinarily pick up.

At the state level, the students



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY DELIA WALLIS
Ethan Atkinson, Chance Frederickson, Quincy Nordyke and Jessica Ferguson were on the Hermiston High School Battle of the Books team that competed at regionals.

will be quizzed on the same 16 books they read for the previous competitions, but the questions will be much more difficult and specific.

At Rocky Heights, the winning team will also face off against a team of teachers on April 7.

At the high school level, students usually read about 12 titles per team — often splitting the workload. Most are contemporary titles, but usually one or two classics are included. Seven teams competed within the high schools. A team of sophomores who called themselves The Book Tumors won the school-wide competition. That team, comprised of Ethan Atkinson, Jessica Ferguson, Chance Frederickson and Quincy Nordyke, went to the regional tournament and competed against several other high schools: Adrian, Baker City, Imbler Charter, Ione Community and Jordan Valley.

Frederickson said his team went over some of the questions together, focusing on books they were quizzed on most during the first few rounds, but said the main preparation was just reading the

books. He said most of the questions tested the students' knowledge of facts and chronology of events in each book.

Frederickson said the books he read for the competition were "The Martian," "The Girl With All the Gifts," and "Raven Boys."

At Sandstone Middle School, a team of sixth graders took the top prize. The Eragonic Readers, featuring Karter Arrit, Elizabeth Doherty, Gavin Doherty and Everett Wicks, had to compete for their victory in two matches in front of the entire school.

Armand Larive's champions bested a field of thirty-plus teams to win. The Seventh Grade Wonders of the World, featuring Hunter McDonald, Alyssa Miller, Bridget Sanders and Emma Williamson, were the school's winners.

Delia Wallis, the librarian for Hermiston secondary schools, said she and the students were both surprised and excited they did so well, and she looks forward to having many students participate again.

EOTEC looking for a manager

By JADE MCDOWELL
Staff Writer

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center's partners agree the project needs a manager, but they are still working out the details on who that will be and how much they will be paid.

"It's got to be boots on the ground on a day-to-day basis," Umatilla County commissioner Larry Givens said. "It can't be someone who just knows marketing or just knows construction or just knows fair and rodeo."

During a joint work session March 20 the Hermiston City Council and the Umatilla County commissioners discussed the operations plan proposed by the EOTEC board.

The plan calls for a general manager to oversee an administrative assistant and contracted janitorial/maintenance services, while also managing the budget, overseeing day-to-day operations, booking events and creating and implementing a marketing plan. The manager would report to the EOTEC board, which would adopt the budget and general policies, while the city council and county commissioners would appoint board members and approve funds.

City councilors said they agreed with the overall structure but wanted to see some dol-

lar figures attached. City manager Byron Smith, who also chairs the EOTEC board, said after some early calculations he believes that budget can support a \$60,000 to \$75,000 salary for the general manager.

The position will only oversee one or two employees, but mayor David Drotzmann and councilor John Kirwan questioned whether the salary was competitive enough to draw someone with the experience needed to successfully market the event center.

"In that kind of price range you're going to get college kids," Kirwan said, proposing the number be "possibly double."

Smith said that would be difficult without additional contributions from the city and county.

Marketing and booking are currently handled by business manager Heather Cannell, and Smith said some EOTEC board members had expressed interest in promoting Cannell to general manager when the time comes.

The council also approved \$10,000 leases with the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo, with the caveat that no rodeo or competing event can be booked at the venue 60 days before the event or 30 days after without the respective board's approval.

Hermiston approves loan for festival street design

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

The Hermiston City Council had a busy meeting Monday, making changes to the supplemental budget, approving a loan to fund the festival street project and discussing the progress at EOTEC.

The council issued a proclamation declaring April as Distracted Driving Awareness Month, reviewing some photos presented by Police

Chief Jason Edmiston. His niece, Alexxyss Therwanger, died last year in a crash believed to have been affected by texting distractions. Alexxyss' car will be featured in a display about distracted driving, which will be at the Hermiston High School parking lot April 3 and 4.

The Hermiston City Council entered an inter-governmental agreement to loan the Urban Renewal Agency \$100,000 for the festival street design.

Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan presented some photos of construction going on at the EOTEC grounds, including stadium seats and a small animal barn for which roofing will start later this week.

The council unanimously approved the changes requested by city finance director Amy Palmer for the supplemental budget. The resolution for the hearing authorizes additional expenditures in nine

funds, transfers between budget categories in two funds, a reduction of expenditures in one fund and inter-fund transfers between four funds. The non-departmental category will be increased by \$35,000 for a sewer expansion feasibility study. The reserve fund will be supplemented by \$27,200 for repairs at the aquatic center, and person-

nel services are being increased by \$8,000.

The total supplement to the city budget is \$6,947,967. For reserves for future expenditures, \$70,473 was requested.

Morgan discussed the ridership for the Hermiston public bus system this month, and said the city will eventually look at changing services to reach

more people. The bus currently makes four complete trips through town, each lasting about an hour and 15 minutes. Morgan said the city will also look at ways to make the service available to more people, potentially changing hours to serve those that work an 8 to 5 job. Currently, the free service runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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