

Couple crowned prom king and queen

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

Donald and JoAnn Clayton didn't go to their high school prom because of a lack of communication.

"His story is, he asked me and I didn't ever give him an answer," said JoAnn with a laugh. "And my story is, he just presumed I'd go. So we didn't go!"

Fortunately, the Claytons got a second chance at the high school tradition, going to the Hermiston High School prom nearly 64 years after the one they missed.

Earlier this school year, the couple was visiting Hermiston from Port Angeles, Washington, where they've lived for more than 40 years. At that time, Donald stopped in at the high school to have a chat with Principal Tom Spoo. He asked if he and his wife could stop by the Hermiston prom, and Spoo happily agreed.

But what the couple didn't know was that the school had some ideas of their own. District librarian Delia Wallis, leadership advisor Dave Rohrman and students from the Hermiston Leadership class began planning ways to make the evening special for the couple.

"We had just intended to show up," JoAnn said.

Instead, the school treated the Claytons to an evening they won't forget. They were chauffeured around by Fred Clark of the Hermiston Classic Car Club, in a 1951 Mercury. They were served dinner by Ford Bonney of Hale's Restaurant, and stayed at Oxford Suites.

At the prom, Donald was dressed in his Marines Corps uniform, and JoAnn donned a blue dress. The couple was seated at a special table, where students



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Donald and JoAnn Clayton were selected as the Hermiston prom king and queen Saturday. The couple graduated from Hermiston High School in 1952 and 1953, but weren't able to attend prom at that time.

came up and chatted with them.

Wallis said students were very interested in the Claytons' story.

"Several students hugged the pair, and others made a special point of thanking Donald for his military service," Wallis said.

The biggest surprise of the night, though, came a bit later in the evening.

"They crowned us king and queen of the prom," said JoAnn. "It was beautiful. The kids were gracious, and the faculty were just wonderful."

Students formed a circle around the couple as they danced to "You Belong to Me" by Jo Stafford.

Students also took the opportunity that evening to hear about the Claytons' life in Hermiston, long before any of them were born.

JoAnn, who was JoAnn Walker at the time, graduated in 1952, the last class to graduate from the "old high school." Hermiston Union High School, which

later became the junior high. Donald was in the first class to graduate from the "new" school, in 1953. Donald joined the Marine Corps shortly after graduation in 1953, and used his "Senior Sneak Day" to enlist, instead of skipping school. After he had left for boot camp, JoAnn said she got a call from Donald. "He called me and said, 'When I get back, we're getting married.'"

Students attending the 2017 prom also got a little bit of advice from the couple, who got married Oct. 5, 1953 at the Methodist Church in Hermiston.

"Be sure to pick the right person and then hold on," JoAnn said.

After Donald got out of the service, he enrolled at Washington State University in 1957. After he graduated, the couple lived in Eastern Oregon and Washington for several years, before moving over to the west side of Washington. They adopted three children, and now have nine grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

The evening of the prom, the couple also got to enjoy some time with family members who came down for the occasion.

"My sister-in-law lives in Hermiston," JoAnn said. "And my husband's sister is from Spokane. My niece came down. Some of our family met us at Hale's for dinner."

JoAnn said while the couple has lived in western Washington for a long time, they try to make it back to the place where it all began a few times a year.

"We love Hermiston," she said. "They've always been very good to us."

"I still can't believe it all happened," JoAnn said. "My husband and I still look at each other and shake our heads."

Union Pacific replacing 10,000 railroad ties

Part of statewide infrastructure investment

Hermiston Herald

Union Pacific has been working for more than two weeks to replace roughly 10,000 railroad ties in Hermiston.

The work is part of a \$77.1 million investment in rail infrastructure across Oregon.

Spokesman Justin Jacobs said the project began April 24 and should finish by mid-May. The goal,

Jacobs said, is to give the tracks in Hermiston a face lift and improve safety.

UP has set aside \$44.7 million to maintain railroad tracks and \$3.2 million to maintain bridges statewide. The railroad has already invested more than \$300 million in Oregon rail infrastructure between 2012 and 2016, according to company figures.

"Union Pacific's targeted investments fund projects that strengthen our railroad tracks, increase safety and minimize delays as trains travel through communities across Oregon," said Wes

Lujan, vice president of public affairs for the railroad's Western Region in a previous statement. "Maintaining a healthy railroad is the foundation of our ability to serve customers and communities across the state."

UP plans to spend \$3.1 billion across its entire rail network in 2017. Since 2000, the railroad has spent \$51 billion and decreased derailments by 40 percent, though last year's high-profile oil train derailment near Mosier has spurred concerns about rail safety across the Northwest.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

A Union Pacific construction vehicle uses a mechanical arm to place new railroad ties along side of the railroad spur May 3 off of Umatilla River Road north of Hermiston.

Hermiston business flag pole to be replaced with shorter version

One of Hermiston's landmark flags will be replaced with something smaller after wind blew over the 138-foot flag pole at N.W. Metal Fabricators.

The business on North Highway 395 has had the tall pole for 11 years, but owner Kerry Karlson said after looking over

the situation they have decided to replace it with a 70-foot pole for safety reasons.

Luckily no one was injured and no property was damaged when the pole came down in late April, Karlson said.

"It just went right to the north and laid out on that

field," he said. "We were very fortunate."

He said it looked like the old pole fell victim to the harsh winter after water got inside the base and repeatedly froze and thawed.

"Then the winds just took it from there," he said.

EO Media Group names new COO

EO Media Group

Heidi Wright has been named chief operating officer of EO Media Group, which owns the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian.

Wright succeeds John S. Perry, who is retiring after 44 years in the newspaper industry, including the last 12 with EO Media Group.

Wright comes to EO Media Group from Western Communications, owner of the Bend Bulletin and other newspapers in Oregon and California. Westcom also formerly owned the Hermiston Herald. She is Wescom's chief financial officer and human resources director. She will join EO Media Group in June.

Steve Forrester, the president and CEO of EO Media Group, announced Wright's hiring: "Our executive committee — composed of Kathryn Brown, Susan Forrester Rana and me — is pleased to

find a successor to Perry with the leadership capabilities to help our company prosper in the digital age. Her prior experience with family-owned companies in our region is especially relevant."

Prior to joining Wescom, Wright was publisher of the Klamath Falls Herald and News, owned by Pioneer News Group. She also worked as a publisher in Montana for Lee Enterprises. She has an undergraduate degree and a master's in business administration from the University of Montana.

"Heidi has a lifetime of experience in the West," noted Brown, publisher of East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald. "Her experience at newspapers in Butte, Klamath Falls and Bend make her well-suited to understand the communities that EO Media Group serves in rural Oregon and Washington — as well as the extraordinary reach of the

Capital Press, our agricultural weekly."

As chief operating officer, Wright will direct the business operations of EO Media Group and supervise publishers and corporate staff. The company's headquarters are in Salem.

"It's an honor and privilege to be joining EO Media Group," said Wright. "While I will miss my friends and colleagues at Western Communications, I am excited to become a part of the EO Media Group family. My husband, Richard Schuurman, and I are looking forward to calling Salem home in the near future."

EO Media Group publications include: The Blue Mountain Eagle of John Day, Cannon Beach Gazette, Capital Press, Chinook Observer, Coast River Business Journal, The Daily Astorian, East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Oregon Coast Today, Seaside Signal and Willowa County Chieftain.



Wright

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