



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

The 2017 Hermiston High School graduating class listens to a speaker during Saturday's commencement ceremony.

Hermiston looks at new venues for graduation

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston High School this year boasted a record number of graduates — but with that came unprecedented crowds filling the gym, auditorium and commons to watch those students walk across the stage.

In the coming months, the Hermiston School District will look at options to better accommodate those crowds, which will likely keep growing. The district is examining three new venues in which graduation could be held: the school's Bulldog Stadium at Kennison Field, the rodeo grounds at the new Eastern Oregon Trade and Events Center, and the Toyota Center in Kennewick.

Hermiston superintendent Dr. Fred Maiocco said the district would bring the issue before the school

board this fall.

"The challenge is that our crowds are growing, and we can only accommodate the same number of people. This year we allowed each student to have five tickets for family members, and last year it was six. I anticipate it would go down to four next year, and that's just too few."

Maiocco said this year about 300 people watched the graduation on a screen in the auditorium, and more overflowed into the school commons. There were 1,800 in the gym, not including the students and staff on the floor. This year's graduating class of 332 students came from a school population of about 1,600.

Of the three options the district is exploring, Maiocco said there are some challenges with each.

"We're taking another look at the Bulldog stadium, Kennison Field," he said. But he noted several disadvantages to using that facility, including the lack of air conditioning, and the distance between the crowd and graduates.

"And it only provides a couple hundred more seats," he said.

The EOTEC rodeo grounds are another option, Maiocco said, that would not address the problem of outdoor heat.

"Unfortunately the EOTEC building is not big enough," he said.

With nothing in the region on the Oregon side large enough to hold such large crowds, the district has also begun looking across the river. Holding graduation at the Toyota Center would be a major change, but mitigates some of the issues the dis-

trict is looking to address. Maiocco said this year, the district sent a team up to review a graduation at the Toyota Center, and felt it may be a good option for Hermiston.

"The basic rental would be less than \$10,000 to rent a facility," Maiocco said. "But that's not the only cost. We'd look at transportation, all logistics."

But he added that Hermiston already spends about \$10,000 on graduation, even at its own facility.

Maiocco said the district is currently analyzing its options.

"We'll certainly take public input, and provide all kinds of opportunities for that," he said. "But ultimately, it's a school board decision."

Maiocco said the district aims to find a solution to its graduation issues for the upcoming school year.

Good Shepherd plans to acquire Gifford Medical

HERMISTON HERALD

One of Hermiston's largest employers will get even larger as Good Shepherd Medical Center will assume ownership of Gifford Medical on July 1.

Gifford Medical, which is located across from Good Shepherd on West Elm Avenue, will retain its name and current services. Dr. Joseph Gifford will continue to see patients, but on a part-time basis. The other three doctors at the facility will also continue to work there.

Gifford has been a doctor since 1974 and has been practicing in Hermiston since 1990. When he started the practice, he

was the only doctor there. Lisa Gifford, Dr. Gifford's wife and the company's spokesperson, said the hospital plans to retain all the company's employees.

"It happened pretty fast," said Gifford. "We decided to sell because we're wanting to retire."

Gifford said she hopes the change will be good for the practice and for patients.

"We hope it will eventually grow it and allow it to expand hours," she said.

A representative for Good Shepherd could not be reached by press time. Gifford Medical currently provides urgent care as well as private practice.

HSD hires new operations director

HERMISTON HERALD

The Hermiston School District has hired Brad Wayland as its new director of operations.

Wayland will start the job July 15, pending approval from the school board, replacing outgoing director Mike Kay. Kay is retiring from the district June 30.

Wayland has a background in operations management. He is currently the president of his own company, Sentry Security Consultants in Hawthorne, Nevada. Among other jobs, he has served

as the director of facilities and operations for Central Valley School District outside Spokane, Washington.

Wayland is also a retired Air Force lieutenant and has a Masters of Science in Management Science from Ohio University, and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the U.S. Air Force Academy.

"Mr. Wayland will be a great addition to the administrative team," said Tricia Mooney, assistant superintendent of human resources. "He brings a wealth of knowledge in many areas."

Hermiston signal project delayed

HERMISTON HERALD

One of Hermiston's main infrastructure projects has been delayed after it received no bids from contractors.

The project, which planned to put a traffic signal at Highway 207 and West Elm Avenue and another at West 11th Street and Orchard Avenue, will likely be delayed at least six months according to Mark Morgan,

assistant city manager.

"We don't have a plan nailed down," Morgan said. "But we will probably re-bid in the fall once construction season is over."

Morgan said the city had hoped to start construction this fall, but now will likely not get to bid again until that time.

"It's not a minor project," he said. "Really, the environment we're in now is that

construction folks are just so busy."

The projects at those two intersections included a left-turn lane on Highway 207 into Good Shepherd Medical Center.

The cost for the traffic signals is about \$1.6 million, with funds provided by an Oregon Department of Transportation grant, Good Shepherd Healthcare system and the city of Hermiston.

Committee looking at franchise fee increase

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

As the Oregon legislature looks to raise revenue for transportation projects, the city of Hermiston is working on a plan of its own.

The city's public infrastructure committee has been working to put together a comprehensive capital improvement plan, and recently moved on to the street department portion of the project.

That could include a plan to raise franchise fees on providers of electricity, natural gas, cable and telecommunications.

"Before we start to develop what that plan looks

like, we really need to have an idea of what the resources are going to be," assistant city manager Mark Morgan said.

In a 12-page memo to the committee, Morgan recently laid out the city's main options for raising money for street projects: increasing franchise fees to 7 percent, adding a \$5 surcharge to utility bills or adopting a 5 cent gas tax.

Outside of the city's control, but also a possible revenue stream, is the major transportation package the legislature is hoping to pass before the end of their 2017 session. If the bill passes as currently written the city would

receive additional street maintenance revenue from the state's plan to raise the gas tax by 14 cents per gallon, in addition to funding a multi-million dollar overhaul of First Place that would include traffic signals at its intersections with Highland Avenue and Orchard Avenue.

Other street projects the city's public infrastructure committee is looking at listing in the capital improvement plan include paving roads like East Theater Lane, overlays on various worn-out streets and extending Gettman Road to Highway 395 so that it can be used as another major east-west corridor through town.

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