

EOTEC passes \$2.2 million budget

By **JADE McDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board adopted a 2017-2018 budget on June 21.

The \$2.2 million budget is a decrease of \$6.9 million from 2016-2017, reflecting a shift from construction to operation. Construction is expected to wrap up just in time for the Umatilla County Fair that begins on Aug. 8.

Umatilla County and the city of Hermiston have both agreed to raise their yearly contributions to the general fund from \$45,000 to \$75,000 to help cover staffing expenses for a general manager, administrative assistant and maintenance manager. The EOTEC board is currently advertising for the general manager position at a salary between \$70,000 and \$80,000.

Marketing expenditures for 2017-2018 are budgeted at \$194,285, up from \$64,610 in anticipation of having a fully-completed project to market to conventions, trade shows and other events the EOTEC board hopes to draw in. The facility's marketing dollars

come from the tourism promotion assessment of one dollar per room per night that hoteliers and RV park owners agreed to.

Events other than the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo are estimated to bring in \$132,000 in additional revenue over the fiscal year.

The rest of Wednesday's meeting included a construction update from Knerr Construction and Hendon Construction. Carl Hendon of Hendon Construction reported that the concrete work for the rodeo arena is finished, the announcer's stand has been framed and the contractors are currently working on phase two of the bleachers.

On the rest of the site, work continues on the barns, restrooms, landscaping, security building, fencing and other elements. Work parties of volunteers to prepare the fairgrounds and rodeo arena for the fair and rodeo are scheduled for multiple Saturdays in July.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

Two families displaced by fire

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Two families are trying to get back on their feet after a fire Monday destroyed the duplex where they were living.

No one was injured in the blaze, which started in a field near the Oxbow Trail, but a young couple with a child and a baby on the way, as well as an older couple, were displaced from their duplex at Northwest 13th Street and West Ridgeway Avenue on Monday afternoon.

Firefighters from the Umatilla County Fire District 1 as well as Pendleton, Boardman, Umatilla and Echo fire departments spent several hours battling the flames and thick smoke, which billowed over the entire neighborhood. Police had 35 residents evacuate their homes as a precaution. The fire started a little after 1 p.m. and spread across more than seven acres before reaching the duplex.

There are collections in progress for both families. The Hermiston Church of the Nazarene is collecting and storing items for Miguel and Rebecca Godoy.

People can also make monetary donations at https://pushpay.com/pay/hermistonnazarene/8B_k4dhxQdg-GRBkbbmFOPQ.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Firefighters put out a fire that destroyed a duplex at NW 13th Street and Hartley Avenue in Hermiston on Monday.

A Go Fund Me page has been started for Ashlynn Beenblossom and her fiancée, Diego Lopez, at <https://www.gofundme.com/fire-loss-fund-for-ashlynn-diego>.

The couple, who are expecting a baby this summer, are being put up in a hotel until mid-July by Red Cross. There are also Facebook campaigns started to help both families.

Lopez, who lived in one of the units with his girlfriend, said he was inside and his girlfriend was asleep on the couch when the fire started.

"I was still up, thank goodness," he said. "I looked out and thought the sky was turning orange. I saw the fire, and rushed to get her out."

The two left in separate cars, and couldn't find each other until a while later when Lopez used a phone at a nearby gas station to call her.

His girlfriend is several months pregnant and went to her mother's house. Both she and Lopez were unharmed by the fire.

"She's worried about her guinea pig," Lopez said with a laugh. "It's unfortunate, but our families and other families got out safely. That's the main thing."

Fireworks are suspected as the cause of the fire. Fire marshal Tom Bohm said the department is still investigating who could be responsible. But he said the person could be held liable for the damage. If it's a minor, he said, their parents could be held liable for the damages, as well as for the department's response.

On their Facebook page, UCFD 1 said they were able to save five homes and 12 apartments from damage. They said 40 to 50 firefight-

ers were involved in fighting the flames in already high temperatures, and there were no injuries reported. Early indications are that the cause of the blaze was fireworks.

Chris Wrathall, a firefighter and paramedic with UCFD 1, said a common theme with fires this year is the tall grass, which has grown rapidly due to the wet winter, and is now causing more fires.

"We were seeing four to eight-foot flames," he said. "Then the wind picked up and blew it into the duplex. It turned into a bigger incident than we initially thought."

Heleo Sanchez, the landlord of the duplex, said he thought part of the issue might have been that the grass in the field was too high. The property around the Oxbow Trail is managed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Sanchez said the building was a total loss.

Several other agencies, including Hermiston Police, a hazmat team and Morrow County Health District were on hand, as well.

Wrathall urged people to be careful when using fireworks.

"With the Fourth of July coming up, we'd hate to see anybody else lose their home as a result of fireworks," he said. "We want people to use extreme caution."

One dies, several injured in string of crashes June 21

HERMISTON HERALD

One man died and others were injured in multiple, unrelated crashes June 21 in the Hermiston area.

The driver of a semi truck died after colliding with a train across the river in Plymouth, Washington.

The Benton County Sheriff's Office reported the driver, a male in his 60s, was making a delivery and had turned off Christy Road into a driveway. Around 2:28 p.m., the driver was headed northbound and was slowly crossing railroad tracks when a train, headed westbound, came toward it. The driver failed to clear the tracks before the train hit.

"It's a private track, so there were some stop signs but no bars," said Sgt. Jason Erickson of Benton County Sheriff's Office.

He said the train conductor and engineer seemed to be uninjured, and the BNSF train did not appear to have any significant damage.

A small fire that started in nearby brush was put out by firefighters. Authorities are investigating.

Spilled lumber

A little before 5 p.m. Wednesday, a lumber truck overturned near the inter-

section of Interstate 84 and Interstate 82, spilling lumber planks across the side of the road. The cab of the truck landed on its side, and the trailer was flipped upside down. The driver sustained minor injuries to his ankle and initially declined attention, but later requested medical transport. Umatilla County Fire District 1 and Oregon State Police were on the scene a few minutes after the accident.

The driver, a Utah man named Mike who declined to give his last name, said the load on his truck was stacked a little high, which probably caused the accident.

"The load shifted as I was coming around the bend and once it shifted, I tried to account for it, but there's not much you can do once the truck decides to go one way," he said.

Mike said it was a tough way to end his 12-year career as a truck driver, after previously having decided to retire. He said he was in his last two weeks on the job.

He attributed his ability to walk away from the wreck to wearing a seatbelt.

"I would have really been damaged otherwise," he said. He said he was relieved that his accident didn't affect any-

one else.

Minivan vs. Semi

In Umatilla, a semi collided with a minivan at 4:08

p.m., sending one person to the hospital for evaluation.

Sgt. Bill Wright of Umatilla Police Department said they were still unclear on how the

accident happened because of conflicting reports. Wright said the driver, a woman in her early 50s, was sent to the hospital

as a safety precaution, but had no evident injuries. The driver of the semi truck appeared to be unhurt.

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Gary L. West | Editor • gwest@hermistonherald.com • 541-564-4532
 Tammy Malgesini | Community Editor • tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4539
 Jayati Ramakrishnan | Reporter • jramakrishnan@hermistonherald.com • 541-564-4534
 Jade McDowell | Reporter • jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4536
 Jeanne Jewett | Multi-Media consultant • jjewett@hermistonherald.com • 541-564-4531
 Shannon Paxton | Office coordinator • spaxton@hermistonherald.com • 541-564-4530
 Audra Workman | Multi-Media consultant • aworkman@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4538
 Dawn Hendricks | Circulation District Manager • dhendricks@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4540

To contact the Hermiston Herald for news, advertising or subscription information:
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