

EOTEC discusses management

By **JADE McDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in Hermiston was not built for the birds.

Yet interim manager Nate Rivera told the EOTEC board Friday that birds are pulling apart the insulation on the ceilings of the barns and nesting in it. A bid for netting to protect the insulation came in at \$196,000 and John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction said that even lower cost options would be “well into the \$160,000 range.”

Board vice chair Dan Dorran questioned whether the insulation’s benefits are worth the maintenance expense to save it.

“We don’t have \$10, let alone \$200,000,” he said.

Eckhardt said the insulation serves to eliminate condensation dripping down, reduce the sound of the wind rattling the roof and keep a cooler temperature inside the barns during the summer. Rivera said it is easy to defer maintenance projects due to initial cost, but that often means more expensive fixes down the road.

The board wanted to see what other options were out there for deterring the birds.

Phil Hamm and Tim Weinke of the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center discussed dust and weed control with the board, offering up the center’s expertise on what types of vegetation could be used on the unpaved, un-irrigated parking areas to hold down the sandy soil but not become a significant fire hazard for vehicles to park on during the fair and rodeo. They said if EOTEC could come up with seed, the center could lend some free labor and equipment. The board authorized Dorran to work out the details with HAREC and also voted to have a Department of Corrections work crew pull puncture



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Contestants wait to compete with their livestock in the beef barn during the Umatilla County Fair in August 2017 in Hermiston.

vine by hand.

Logistics for EOTEC’s biggest event since the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo were discussed at length Friday as the Hermiston Horse Sale Extravaganza looms Oct. 14-15. Rivera said in EOTEC’s current situation — with just a part-time, interim manager as EOTEC’s only staff — the facility isn’t really ready to handle that type of event in 2017. But Rivera said he made an exception for the horse sale because it is an event with a good track record in Hermiston that the community doesn’t want to lose. The sale is expected to bring in 2,000 to 2,500 people and generate about 500 hotel stays.

“This is exactly what this facility was designed for,” Rivera said.

The facility’s conditional use permit has different requirements for different sizes of events, and the board discussed whether those attendance thresholds applied to over-all attendance during the entire weekend or merely the number of people on the grounds at any given time, which is expected to be 500 or less. They also discussed the need to have people directing parking and enforcing the restric-

tions that are in place for access off Ott Road, and someone from EOTEC to be on site managing those people and taking responsibility for issues that arise.

Rivera will be tied up with his other job as superintendent of Hermiston Energy Services over the next couple of weeks, but Dorran said he would work out logistical problems with horse sale manager Randy Hull and make sure someone from EOTEC was on site during the event.

The board also approved a \$2,500 grant from EOTEC’s tourism promotion assessment funds to market the horse sale. Board members said the grant amount was coincidental to the fact that Hull was paying \$2,500 to rent the rodeo arena, barns and pens. That fee was based on the price Hull had paid at the old fairgrounds, and board members noted it would likely change for future events after a permanent manager is brought in and a fee structure is created for the barns and arena.

A middle school leadership convention had requested free use of the event center in exchange for doing all set-up and tear-down, but Rivera suggested a \$400 fee due to the fact that the facility is

operating at a loss when comparing expenses such as contract labor for janitorial to rental revenue.

“It costs us over \$1,000 per day just to open our doors,” he said, calculating the cost since July 1.

The board also approved some suggestions by Rivera for policy changes to address problems caused by evening events involving alcohol. He suggested an earlier last call for alcohol in order to make sure events wrapped up on time. He said the center should stop offering a discount for doing their own tear-down, since “drinking and exhaustion” was causing additional wear and tear on chairs and tables, and that renters should be charged a \$250 fee for leaving their decorations in the building to be picked up later. He also said that someone needed to be supervising security staff hired for events, since “without supervision we’ve identified that very little work is actually being done,” including one incident in which security showed up two hours late to a wedding.

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

Health survey comes to Umatilla County

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The four long, white trailers on the former Umatilla County Fairgrounds might look out of place amid the rubble, but nurses and doctors are hard at work inside. A team from the National Health and Nutrition Survey is in Umatilla County for the next month, conducting interviews and examinations on selected participants from around the county.

The survey team travels to 15 different counties around the United States each year and collects health data. The data are then used to create statistics that the Centers for Disease Control publish about the health of people in the U.S.

In each county the survey team visits, they identify about 450 people to be surveyed. Of those, they hope about 350 will participate.

“With the 15 counties, we’re trying to match the U.S. population,” said study manager Janis Eklund. That means the people they select are picked based on age, race, gender and socioeconomic status — with the hopes that they can find a collection of participants that mirrors the population of the country. However, Eklund said, they select random home addresses and visit those homes, to see if the person living there fits a demographic they need.

Eklund said last week they had identified about 300 people, and they will start examinations Thursday. They will be in Umatilla County until Oct. 31.

The examinations this year include dental, dietary, hearing and body mass scans. They also draw blood, and test participants’ blood pressures using both an old and a new machine.

The data they collect is used to study a variety of health trends across the U.S., including anemia, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and sexually transmitted diseases.

All the information participants give is confidential, Eklund said.

Eklund said every few



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Cristal Alatorre Perez, a dietary interviewer, talks with Chris Woltman during the NHANES survey.

years, some of the tests will change based on medical research.

The staff that work for the survey spend much of the year on the road, conducting examinations in different counties.

Rita Washko, a doctor with the survey team, has been traveling with NHANES for about 12 years.

She said it’s been interesting seeing how different the various parts of the United States are, health-wise.

“The biggest difference I’ve seen is the difference in blood pressure control throughout the country,” she said. “There are some regions where it’s much higher.”

Washko would not say specifically where, but she said she has also noticed that in rural areas she tends to see older people that are more physically robust.

Washko said one of the challenges with the survey job is the lack of follow-up.

“Say you have an abnormal CBC (complete blood count). I speak to the person so they understand, and send them off, but I never find out what happens. That’s a big disconnect, and I had to get used to that.”

But she noted that the primary goal of those working for NHANES is to collect data.

“We’re collecting data that affects the entire population.”

Those who participate in the study are compensated \$125, plus a transportation fee.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@hermistonherald.com.

Buses switched to new route on Monday

By **JADE McDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston’s free public bus system changed its route this week.

The system, known as HART, will now make six circuits through town each day instead of four, and the route has been rearranged with the goal of riders spending less time on the bus during a round trip.

During a Public Transit

Advisory Committee meeting Sept. 25, assistant city manager Mark Morgan said ridership has not increased as was expected, and Kayak Public Transit and the city have received feedback that the system isn’t well suited for round-trip travel. The new route designed by Kayak reduces the number of stops the bus makes and creates a system that rotates directions each trip instead of making a contin-

uous loop in one direction around town. It also runs from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. instead of 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Starting Monday, the number of stops went from 30 to 20, eliminating several stops with low ridership, including Riverfront Park, the Aspens, Sunland Avenue and Moore Avenue. The trade-off is that the bus will now run six loops through town during the day, and loops will be under an hour

instead of the previous hour and 15 minutes. Fewer riders will have their ride interrupted by the bus driver stopping for their regularly scheduled breaks as well.

The bus will also change directions during the day, providing longer and shorter options for riders to choose from.

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

Third student-built home sold

The Hermiston School District has sold its newest student-built home.

Taylor and Brittany Smith will receive the key to their new home on Oct. 4 at 4 p.m., in a ceremonial event at the home in the Fieldstone Crossing neighborhood on Southwest Angus Court.

The house was listed at \$379,000 and is 2,466 square feet, with several special amenities. The home has a full outdoor kitchen, a gas fireplace, a three-car garage and a central vacuum system. The house is also equipped

with energy-efficient heating, cooling and ventilation systems, and lights and appliances.

The new owners are both graduates of the Hermiston School District. Brittany Smith is a teacher at Sunset Elementary School, and Taylor Smith is the son of school board member Dave Smith.

The home is the third in a series of 11 homes that will be built by students from Hermiston, Umatilla and Stanfield high schools as part of the Columbia Basin Student Homebuilding Program. Students

work on most aspects of the home, from putting up rock to laying down floors. Several students have gone on to pursue careers in construction.

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