



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lydia and Hobs Hurty relax on the couch during a past holiday season in their family's Stanfield home.

CHRISTMAS

Continued from Page A1

being celebrated. As a Christian, she said it's about God sending his son, Jesus — which is worthy of celebration. That celebration, she said, can include decorating, parties, practicing traditions and singing.

"But don't lose sight of what we're actually celebrating," she said.

"In a culture and lifestyle that's busy and complicated, it's easy to go through the Christmas season forgetting to stop and think and ponder and pause about the true meaning," added Rev. John Hurty, pastor of the Stanfield Baptist Church and Maria's husband.

Countdown to Christmas

Although the Hurty family didn't grow up formally cel-

brating the advent season in a traditional way, they have incorporated practices both at church and in their family home.

John said as the kids have grown up — Nathan, 19; Lydia, 17; Sisay, 16; Norah, 13 and Hobs, 13 — they developed a family tradition of gathering everyone together to read. With an undergraduate degree in history, John sometimes chooses books about historical figures or they read a chapter from the Bible.

"We try to read various things together and pray together," John said. "Christmas is a variation of that."

The advent tradition, John said, is a tool that a family can use to try to focus on the meaning of Christmas. In Latin, advent simply means "coming." The traditional celebration of advent begins with the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

"It's kind of like a count-

down to Christmas," Maria explained.

After using various devotional guides over the past few years, the Hurty family found many of them technical and full of verbiage from professional theologians. With a goal of writing advent devotionals that would hold their children's interest, Maria published "Christmas Crazy to Jesus Joy!"

Each of the 24 days leading up to Christmas has a Bible verse and commentary written by Maria. The book, available on Amazon.com, touches on such topics as the pressure to impress others, the "buy, buy, buy" mentality and highlighting the birth of Jesus and a personal relationship with Christ.

"Christmas Crazy to Jesus Joy!" was a big hit with the Hurty family. Son Nathan said the photos and family memories makes it fun. And, it's easy to follow.

"It's definitely written in a way that stuff isn't going

to fly over your head," he said. "It's more designed for the normal person's theological understanding."

Indicating that people don't have to go deep into debt in order to give to others, Maria suggests filling stockings with blessings. She shares about the touching sentiments of a handwritten note from her then 10-year-old son, Hobs.

"I love you more than TV," melted the mom's heart more than any store-bought gift ever could.

While her holiday habits aren't "perfect," Maria said she's learning to celebrate better. In addition, she recognizes there's no right or wrong way.

"My value and worth is what God does for me, not how I perform," she said. "Look at your motivations for what you do. Are you doing it to wow the neighbors or is it enhancing your celebration of the birth of Jesus?"

Retired pastor paints God's creation

By TAMMY MALGESINI
COMMUNITY EDITOR

Nearly two dozen new oil paintings are featured in an exhibit by Hermiston artist Jim Simpson.

A retired minister, Simpson finds inspiration in God's creation. Featuring landscape art, his newest works are inspired by the shores and wilderness areas along the Columbia River. Familiar scenes include six depicting the McNary Wildlife Area. Other notable locations captured by the stroke of Simpson's brush are the Blue Mountains, Warehouse Beach, the John Day Basin and Helix.

The public is invited to "A Brush with Life" Saturday from 4-8 p.m. at the home of Jim and Sue Simpson, 370 W. Moore Ave.,



Simpson

Hermiston. The framed works, ranging from 8-by-10 to 38-by-30, are also for sale during the exhibit and reception.

Simpson's new work is based on many years of painting outdoors, and the plein air style is obvious in his studio work.

"It's taken almost 50

years of painting outdoors to enable me to paint in a swift and free-flowing style," Simpson said. "(It) takes time to learn value, color and composition — the 'big three' of successful art."

Simpson began painting in the mid-1970s. He picked up his brush wherever his career as a pastor took him, from Texas, New Mexico, Montana, California and finally Oregon. When he began pastoring the Hermiston First Christian Church in 1997, Simpson found himself too busy to paint.

He laid aside his brush and palette several times over the decades while shepherding churches. Shortly after retiring in 2002, Simpson renewed his interest in painting.

His works have been

featured locally at Pendleton Center for the Arts, the Walla Walla Art Center and an annual artist competition in Joseph. Simpson's also has been an exhibitor in the Lawrence Gallery in Sheridan, the Gabriel Gallery in Laguna Beach, California, and the Outlaw Gallery in Kalispell, Montana. His paintings have also hung in local banks, storefronts and art shows in Hermiston.

In addition to private instruction, Simpson taught landscape painting at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston. Also an accomplished musician, Simpson plays banjo and harmonica with the Buttercreek Boys.

For more information, contact Simpson at jmspaint@eotnet.net or 541-656-8453.

Examining Oregon education against other states

By JAYATI
RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Oregonians have heard before that their graduation rates are some of the lowest in the country. The Oregon Department of Education has released its statewide report card, and some data compiled by the state's Legislative Policy and Research Office sheds additional light on how Oregon students don't always face a level playing field when compared with other states.

The state report card included data on graduation and dropout rates, school funding, attendance, test results and progress for students in specific demographics.

Numbers for the two reports did not always match up, and the data com-

paring various states was pulled from several different years. For some data points, the year was not specified.

The data from the Legislative Policy and Research Office was compiled after a request from State Representative Greg Smith's office, made in hopes of better understanding why Oregon's graduation rates are suffering. They asked for a side-by-side comparison of Oregon and 10 other states: five high-performing states, and five comparable Western states.

Against high-performing states Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Vermont and Minnesota, and western states Colorado, Utah, Washington, Nevada and Arizona, the data showed how Oregon stacked up in eleven

categories.

Among the findings:

- Oregon displayed lower scores than the other states in most categories. Oregon's graduation rate was 72 percent, lower than all the states listed except for Nevada, at 70 percent. New Jersey's graduation rate was highest, at 89 percent.

- Oregon also had one of the shortest school years, with students in school 161 days. Only Colorado's was shorter, at 160 days. Most other states listed attended school for 180 days.

- Oregon had 22.18 pupils per teacher, one of the highest. Utah and Arizona had comparable ratios, while Vermont's was the lowest, at 10.59 and new Jersey's was 11.96.

- Oregon and Washington had the highest percentages of chronic absen-

teeism, at 22.7 and 24.8 percent, respectively.

- Oregon also requires 24 credits to graduate, tied with New Jersey for the highest number among the states surveyed. Massachusetts and Colorado have no statewide credit requirement, and Connecticut, Vermont and Washington require 20 credits.

On the Oregon statewide report card, the ODE reported that its teacher-to-student ratio is decreasing, and was at 20.26 for 2016-2017 (average of all three school levels). It said 95 percent of its funding goes to school buildings and student services, and that it spent \$11,241 per student in 2015-2016.

Data for the state report card is available at the state's education website.

BY THE WAY

BTW

Continued from Page A1

iston Foods was knocked down quickly on Tuesday, but not before it sent a column of smoke into the sky south of Hermiston.

Daryl Fuchs, harvest supervisor, said the cause was still unknown. He said the excavator was working on the scrap metal pile when it caught fire.

•••

Hermiston resident **Sandra Vandever** recently became a 12-gallon donor during the Nov. 20 **American Red Cross** blood drive held at **Good Shepherd Medical Center**.

Volunteer **Patti Perkins** said a total of 34 units were collected from 46 donors. The canteen was provided by **Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church**.

The next drive is Monday, Dec. 18 from 12:30-6 p.m., also at Good Shepherd, 610 N.W. 11th St. Perkins said walk-ins are welcome, but it's helpful if donors schedule an appointment by calling 800-448-3543. For more information, contact Perkins at pzperchek@charter.net or 541-571-5372.

•••

A handful of sure-shot basketball players will advance to the **North-east District Hoop Shoot** (Jan. 7 at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston) after taking top honors in their age groups during the Dec. 2 **Hermiston Elks Hoop Shoot Competition**, which drew about 50 area youths ages 8-13. Moving on are **Alexia Sanguino** of West Park Elementary School, **Adrian Gonzales** of Sunset Elementary

School, **Layla Chavez** of McNary Heights Elementary School, **Julian Gomez** of Irrigon Elementary School, **Leslie Rivera** of Clara Brownell Middle School and **Ronaldo Torres** of Armand Larive Middle School.

Other second and first place finishers in their division during the local competition included Girls 8-9: **Rocio Garay** of Windy River, **Dulce Valencia** of West Park. Boys 8-9: **Jose Perez** of McNary Heights, **Carson Cyganik** of McKay Creek. Girls 10-11: **Ashlynn Cutburth** of Sunset, **Lorelai Keefauver** of Highland Hills. Boys 10-11: **Michael Montez** of McNary Heights, **Blaze Hoffman** of Desert View. Girls 12-13: **Laura Molina** of Irrigon Jr/Sr High, **Chloe Gomez** of Riverside Jr/Sr High. Boys 12-13: **Alexis Armenta** of Clara Brownell, **Jesus Montes Martinez** of Riverside Jr/Sr High.

Winners of the district competition will advance to the Oregon State Hoop Shoot Feb. 10 at Alder Creek Middle School in Milwaukie. The Elks Hoop Shoot culminates with the National Hoop Shoot Finals, which are April 21 in Chicago. For more information, contact local Hoop Shoot director **Ernie Kern** of Hermiston Elks Lodge No. 1845 at eandkern@yahoo.com.

You can submit items for our weekly *By The Way* column by emailing your tips to editor@hermistonherald.com or share them on social media using the hashtag #HHBTW.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Plastics, unclean tin food cans and other items sit in an aluminum recycling container at a recycling center off of Harper Road on Thursday in Pendleton.

RECYCLING

Continued from Page A1

and Styrofoam to more hazardous waste like used syringes.

Many Chinese recyclers have already stopped taking shipments, leaving U.S. waste collectors scrambling. The Department of Environmental Quality has issued "disposal concurrences" to 12 transfer stations so far allowing them to send recycling to the landfill because they have no more room to store it.

Sanitary Disposal is in a better position. Most of the recyclable materials it takes in — including newspaper, glass, wood, cardboard, electronics, tin and aluminum — are sent to domestic buyers, and the company has enough room to store bales of plastic for the foreseeable future. But Sanitary Disposal President Mike Jewett said other transfer stations that were previously sending materials to China are now trying to find a domestic home for them, causing a glut in the market that Jewett hopes to ride out for a while.

"We're stockpiling more," he said. Recyclables are the sixth largest export from the United States to China, according to the Oregon Refuse and Recycling Association. As the market fluctuates, careless or intentional dumping of non-recyclable materials into drop-off sites like the one Sanitary Disposal has on Harper Road in Hermiston can cause a thin profit margin to turn into a loss.

"Recycling is expensive enough as it is to collect, and then if we have to toss it, that's really expensive,

and that reflects on everyone's (garbage collection) rates," Jewett said.

Not following the rules on recycling can have a larger impact than most people realize. Signs at the collection depots state that window glass and light bulbs should not be dumped into the containers for clear glass, for example, but people do it anyway. If the window breaks before a Sanitary Disposal employee spots it and pulls it out, the entire load of glass has to be dumped in a landfill rather than risk the lead-tainted window glass being recycled into a food or beverage container.

"Suddenly you've got 30 tons of glass that are useless," Kik said.

They also get a lot of clear plastic mixed in with the glass, and people tend to not be able to tell the difference between tin and aluminum (hint: if it sticks to a magnet, it's tin; if not, it's aluminum) or don't bother to rinse the food out of the containers or pull the paper labels off.

Kik said another one he sees frequently is people throwing Styrofoam pieces and packing peanuts into the cardboard dumpster.

"The Styrofoam just kills the load," he said. "A lot of places will just bale it up with all of that in there. We pull it out, but a lot of people don't and I guess that's what caused the problem with China."

Staff time spent removing packing peanuts from a load of cardboard or hauling lead-contaminated glass to a landfill instead of selling it adds up. Jewett and Kik said the more people can follow the rules posted on signs at the depots, the better.