

## COMING DOWN AND GOING UP



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

The city of Hermiston's Christmas tree arrives at city hall after its cross-town trek from Victory Square Park.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Tree, Inc. employees prepare to unload the city's Christmas tree.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

The city of Hermiston's biggest Christmas tree yet is lowered into place on Monday morning.

## Giant Christmas tree provides downtown draw

## Tree-lighting ceremony is Thursday evening

By JADE MCDOWELL  
STAFF WRITER

It may look a little strange in its current form, but the towering cedar sticking out of the middle of a street in Hermiston is expected draw hundreds of people downtown on Thursday for its official unveiling.

In what has become an annual tradition, the city — with the help of Umatilla Electric Cooperative and their subcontractor Trees, Inc. — dug a six foot deep hole in the middle of Northeast Second Street near city hall on Monday morning and placed a roughly 40 foot tall Christmas tree inside.

The tree will be lit every evening during the holiday season, starting with a tree-lighting festival Thursday. Food vendors and live entertainment will start at 5:30 p.m., with the official lighting and

a visit from Santa at 6 p.m. Downtown businesses will also be offering deals for December's First Thursday event from 4:30-7 p.m.

This year's tree comes from Victory Square Park, where parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said it was crowding a number of smaller trees and needed to be removed.

"It's a cedar," he said. "It's a really nice shape, and it's got a great color to it."

Vehicle traffic on Second Street between Gladys Avenue and Main

Street will be blocked during the month of December while the tree is in place. In the spring the city plans to begin turning that block into a festival street featuring decorative brickwork, landscaping, lighting and other features.

"I'm hoping construction on the festival plaza is done for next year," Fetter said. "Looking at the schedule, it looks like it will be, otherwise I'll have to find a temporary spot for this."

On Monday morning the tree traveled across town in horizon-

tal position on the back of a UEC truck before arriving in front of city hall, where about six feet of trunk was lowered into the hole in the street and packed in with dirt.

Fetter said the city will add extra lighting to the tree and the area surrounding it, after people commented it could use more. This is the third year the city has placed a giant tree on Second Street.

For more information about the tree or Thursday's event, contact Hermiston city hall at 541-567-5521.



FILE PHOTO

A snowboarding snowman lights up a North Dupont Street home during a past holiday season in Echo.

## Echo to ring in holiday season

By TAMMY MALGESINI  
COMMUNITY EDITOR

People are invited to head to Echo as the small town offers big fun during the holiday season.

"It's kind of a quaint and historic little community," said Diane Berry, city administrator.

Typically, more than half of the homes are decorated with at least a few strands of lights, Berry said. In addition, the city has added several light poles and free-standing displays from money through the Echo Benefit Plan.

"You can come over the hill and you can look down on Dupont Street and see all the lights," Berry said about driving into town.

Also, Echo Ridge Cellars and Sno Road Winery are rolling out festive fun with Holiday Barrel Tasting. The event is Friday from 4-8 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. at both wineries (551 N. Thielsen St. and 111 W. Main St.).

Each venue will offer holiday wine deals and samples of future releases straight out of the barrel. Also, a gift basket workshop is available Saturday at Echo Ridge. People can create their own basket, filling it with wine and goodies from Alexander's Chocolates and Smith's Tiny Farms cheeses.

Additional holiday shopping is available during the Echo Parent-Teacher Organization's annual holiday bazaar. A fundraiser to benefit students in the Echo School District, it includes handmade goods from local crafters, homemade desserts and a raffle. It is Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the school commons, 600 E. Gerone St.

To celebrate the season in song, head to Sno Road on Friday, Dec. 15 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. for Christmas with John Wambeke & Students. The festive musical performance features the Hermiston man along with a number of his protégés. There is no charge for the all-ages event.

Another highlight of the holiday season are the annual concerts presented by the Inland Northwest Musicians orchestra and chorale. "The Spirit of the Season" is Friday, Dec. 15 at 7 p.m. and Saturday,



FILE PHOTO

Decorations fill a yard during a past holiday season in Echo. People are invited to vote on their favorite displays.

Dec. 16 at 4 p.m. in the Echo Community Center, 20 Bonanza St. The performances are free but reservations are required. To RSVP, contact 541-289-4696 or inwm@machmedia.net.

"We're doing a mix of seasonal music," said RaNiel Dunn, program manager. "The chorale is performing some lovely pieces."

In addition, the orchestra is offering a variety of songs, said Salli Ketchersid, publicity coordinator. Among the most familiar, she said, is "The March" (aka "March of the Toy Soldiers") from Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker Suite."

Before renovations were complete at the venue, Berry asked for input regarding acoustics from R. Lee Friese, the group's director. After playing at the May 2000 dedication, they arranged a holiday concert — and have returned each year.

In addition to the building's great sound, Ketchersid and Dunn said Berry and her staff go all out in decorating.

"It's different than just doing a concert in a school auditorium or gym," Dunn said. "It makes it more intimate and festive."

"From the big room to the hallways — it's just Christmas everywhere," Ketchersid added.

The holiday concerts, Berry said, are a way to give back to the community.

Whatever brings people to town, Berry invites everyone to pick up a ballot and vote for the best holiday displays.

## IN BRIEF

## Santa's serving pancakes, holiday fun on Dec. 16

He's making a list and checking it twice — trying to find out who has tickets to Pancakes with Santa.

People who want to attend this fun holiday breakfast need to make sure to purchase tickets in advance. Pancakes with Santa is Saturday, Dec. 16 from 9:30-11 a.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. In addition to a pancake and sausage breakfast, staff from the library will share a holiday story and kids can have a picture taken with Santa Claus. The cost is \$8 for ages 2-15, \$10 for ages 16-and-older or \$30 per family.

Tickets must be purchased by Tuesday, Dec. 12. They are available at Hermiston City Hall, 180 N.E. Second St. For more information, contact 541-776-5018 or parksandrec@hermiston.or.us.

## Minion to visit SAGE Center before movie

For more minion madness and a chance to meet a minion, head to the SAGE Center for screenings of "Despicable Me 3."

The showings are Friday at 7:15 p.m. and Saturday at 2:15 p.m. at 101 Olson Road, Boardman. The meet-and-greets are 45 minutes prior to each show and are free with movie admission. In addition, non-perishable food donations will be accepted.

Admission is \$3 per person and includes a bag of popcorn. Other concessions are available for cash purchases.

For more information, call 541-481-7243 or visit [www.visitsage.com](http://www.visitsage.com).

## Giving trees spread holiday cheer

With the holiday season in full swing, people are invited to help in spreading Christmas joy to area children and youths in need. Several giving trees are available for people to take tags and shop for gifts. Local opportunities include:

•HERMISTON: An Angel Tree organized by



STAFF PHOTO BY TAMMY MALGESINI

McKenna Seaton shows an ornament she made while her friends Athena Huffman-Martin and Harmony Blake work on craft projects during the 2016 Pancakes with Santa. Tickets must be purchased in advance for this year's Dec. 16 event at the Hermiston Conference Center.

The Salvation Army is on display at Shari's Cafe & Pies, 800 S. Highway 395, Hermiston. People can remove tags and shop for items for needy children and families who live in west Umatilla County.

The gifts must be returned by Saturday, Dec. 9. For more information, call 541-276-3369.

•IRRIGON: The annual Giving Tree in Irrigon provides a chance for people in the community to give to children and youths in need. It's in the Irrigon Library/City Hall lobby, 500 N.E. Main St. People can drop by during regular business hours to pick up a card or two and shop for gifts on the recipient's wish list.

The gifts need to be wrapped and returned to city hall by Monday, Dec. 18. For more information, contact City Manager Aaron Palmquist at 541-922-3047.

## Irrigon hosts decorating contest

It's time for Irrigon residents to tap into their inner Clark Griswold for the annual home decorating contest.

Sponsored by the Irrigon Watermelon Festival, cash prizes will be awarded to the top three properties. To be eligible for judging, people must reside within the 97844 zip code. Also, last year's winners may enter, but they aren't eligible for the cash awards.

The judging will take place the evening of Monday, Dec. 18. For more information, contact [irrigonchamber@irrigonchamber.com](mailto:irrigonchamber@irrigonchamber.com) or search Facebook.

## Bake sale benefits hospital auxiliary

A pre-Christmas baked food and craft sale will benefit the Good Shepherd Hospital Auxiliary.

The event is Wednesday, Dec. 13 from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Conference Room 6 at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St., Hermiston. Money raised from the event helps in purchasing needed medical equipment and providing scholarships for local individuals pursuing a career in the healthcare field.

For more information, contact [juner1942@gmail.com](mailto:juner1942@gmail.com).

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