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BY THE WAY

Santa stranded, still jolly after tree ceremony

If you were driving around Hermiston on Thursday night, you may have noticed Santa Claus traveling without his reindeer.

The man in red, played by city councilor Doug Primmer, arrived at the city's tree lighting festival to great fanfare while riding on a fire truck. But Primmer noted that no one had remembered to arrange for Santa's ride back to the fire station after two hours of picture-taking with his young fans. So he hoofed it the quarter of a mile back.

Other than that, city councilors and city staff agreed during Monday's city council meeting that the festival was a success that kept people around watching the entertainment and getting pictures with Santa far longer than in previous years. (For more on the story, see Page A3)

Parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said the tree and surrounding lights will be lit each evening until Christmas, with a flashing light show for about 10 minutes at the top of every hour from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Desert Rose is expanding its downtown offerings yet again.

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COME VISIT HERMISTON?



A discarded idea for a county tourism tax highlighted the different approaches to tourism taken by Pendleton and Hermiston

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

A proposed Umatilla County tourism tax was rejected last week, but not before the discussion surrounding it highlighted different approaches to tourism in Hermiston and Pendleton.

The proposed 2 percent tax, added to hotel customers' room bill, would have been earmarked to promote tourism in Umatilla County via grants, product development and marketing. But after county commissioner Bill Elfering listened to concerns from hoteliers and others during a meeting in Hermiston on Thursday, he announced at a second listening session on Friday that the idea had

been shelved.

One of the main reasons was a feeling in Pendleton that Hermiston wasn't interested in tourism promotion. Travel Pendleton, a tourism arm of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, maintains a comprehensive online guide to Pendleton tourism and puts money toward promoting events such as the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest and attractions such as Pendleton Underground Tours.

There is no Travel Hermiston equivalent. Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce board chair Josh Burns said the chamber approached the city about starting one but was told the city wasn't interested.

"We'd love to help Hermiston," Tracy Bosen of the Pendleton House bed and breakfast responded. "We know if Hermiston picks up on things, we're going to benefit. But Hermiston needs to be in the driver's seat first."

Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said Hermiston is working to get there. But the city needs some time to build up its tourism assets before it jumps to marketing.

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EO FILE PHOTO (TOP)

The Hermiston Family Aquatic Center is one of the city's few recreational facilities, and is at the base of the city's most recognizable landmark, the Hermiston Butte.

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

After a months-long search for a new home, the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce will be moving into the Cornerstone Plaza in early 2018.

The chamber offices will be closed the week of Christmas, re-opening in the new location at 1055 S Highway 395 Suite 111 on Jan. 2.

Board chair Josh Burns said the plaza will not be the chamber's permanent home, but will allow them to continue providing services for chamber members and the community as they look for the best fit.

"We're excited to continue to do what we're doing for mem-



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce is moving its offices to the Cornerstone Plaza, two doors down from Kobe Hibachi Sushi.

bers," he said.

The chamber's offices have been located at the Hermiston

Conference Center as the organization managed the building under a contract with the city of Herm-

iston. In April, however, the city council voted to end the contract with the chamber on Dec. 31 and transfer management of the conference center to the city's parks and recreation department.

According to reasoning given by the city at the time, the change was spurred by a 35 percent decrease in revenues for the conference center, likely due to competition from the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. By taking over management of the conference center the city hopes to better leverage both resources, directing smaller community events and recreation classes to the conference center and larger events meant to bring in tourism to EO TEC. Moving the parks and recreation offices

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