



Mark Krawczyk, left, and his wife Tammy at Hermiston City Hall.

# Hermiston finance director finds hospitality up north

By JADE MCDOWELL  
HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston’s brand new finance director is still getting settled in, but he and his wife can’t stop marveling about how friendly everyone is.

“It’s a very welcoming community,” Mark Krawczyk said. “Other places I’ve been to, you have to be there six months to a year to get people to talk to you. Here I’ve never met a stranger.”

His wife Tammy Krawczyk had the same first impression when she arrived in Hermiston for the first time.

“He had some training to do, so I just roamed around, and I never met a rude person,” she said.

Mark grew up in Oklahoma and Tammy grew up in Florida and they had been living in Texas. This is their first time living in the Pacific Northwest. They moved away from three children in Texas but will be closer to their other two in Washington and Idaho.

“We kind of left one half of the family to be closer to the other half,” Mark said.

Mark — previously assistant finance director for the city of Fort Worth, Texas — started his job as Hermiston’s finance director on Dec. 11. Tammy left behind a job as an educator and administrator at a small

community college and said she hopes to be able to continue to work in higher education here.

They’re a little apprehensive about what a northern winter might be like, but they are also looking forward to the new opportunities for hiking, biking, hunting, boating and other outdoor recreation now within a short drive.

“I want to learn how to snowboard,” Mark said.

For now, however, he is still settling in to the new job, and the couple is looking for a home in Hermiston’s tight housing market.

Mark’s previous experience includes banking, municipal finance, finance for a utility company, and time handling personal finances for millionaires in the oil industry in Texas. They had sold a company for \$2.3 billion and were looking to build “generational wealth.”

He said each type of financial challenge taught him new lessons, from dealing with government regulations to handling problems that arose when people didn’t heed his fiduciary advice. Mark likened jobs he has held to his time going on camping trips as an Eagle Scout and trying to follow the principle of leaving the campsite better than when he found it.

“I have tried to do that with every job I’ve had and

I hope to do that here,” he said.

He said he is also on the faculty for the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University, which offers a two-week course each spring, and loves the “light-bulb moments” when he helps small-town bank owners understand ways they can successfully compete with the country’s largest banks for local customers.

Tammy said she is looking forward to finding a new job in the area. She said the couple has always been in the habit of involving themselves in the communities where they have lived. She is enjoying Hermiston so far, and said everything from the investment in schools to the cleanliness of the roads shows that residents take pride in their community. She also appreciates the town’s offerings of restaurants and businesses.

“I like the mom and pop shops, the drug store on Main,” she said.

The Krawczyk name (pronounced “Crossick”) is a little hard to spell, but Mark said it’s as common as “Smith” in Polish. His father emigrated from Poland to America as a baby, but Mark said he doesn’t remember much from the informal Polish lessons his father used to give him as a child.

# Taco Bell employee known for jokes, hard work

## Horizon Project links developmentally disabled people with jobs

By JADE MCDOWELL  
STAFF WRITER

Regulars at the Hermiston Taco Bell on weekday afternoons expect to be greeted with a smile by Mark Leach, one of the store’s most enthusiastic workers.

“I love my job,” he said.

Leach, 52, has been working at Taco Bell for a year and a half through an employment program at Horizon Project that helps individuals with developmental disabilities hold jobs. LaTonya Avila, a Horizon Project employee who accompanies Leach to his job, said he is well-known by many customers, some of whom even leave him tips.

“There’s people who always recognize him, who really notice how hard he works,” she said.

Hermiston’s own Mark Leach can be found restocking the napkins, wiping down tables and emptying garbage in Taco Bell’s lobby on most days. He calls himself the lobby supervisor.

“I help the customers that need it with their pops, like the little kids that need help to put their lids on,” he said.

Kelly Shockman of Horizon Project said keeping the front of house organized and stocked with cups, napkins, hot sauce packets and other items is his “pride and joy.”

He also has the important job of emptying used grease from the fryers into a special dumpster, and sweeping up garbage from the parking lot. Avila said seeing all of the cigarette butts on the ground out front always makes him frustrated that people don’t clean up after themselves.

He keeps a good attitude, though.

“He’s a huge jokester,” she said.

“Your shoe’s untied,” he responded, looking at Shockman. She laughed, but refused to fall for the trick.

“I tease these guys all the time,” Leach said.

When he’s not working at Taco Bell, Leach builds model cars, erector sets and other hands-on projects.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS  
Mark Leach cleans a table in the dining area at Taco Bell on Tuesday in Hermiston.

One of his favorite things to do is shop at Hobby Lobby in the Tri-Cities for new models and then “tinkering” with them.

Leach grew up in California, then moved to Oregon with family after his brother got a job in Nyssa. After both of his parents

passed away, Leach moved to a group home run by Horizon Project, which he has been involved with for nearly a decade.

Horizon Project started in Milton-Freewater in 1978 and expanded its services to Hermiston in 2002 and Pendleton in 2004, according to their website. The organization aims to give individuals with intellectual disabilities more independence and an opportunity to participate in activities outside their home. The organization offers employment services such as job training, community job placement and direct employment at their recycling operation in Milton-Freewater. They also offer housing services, including group homes and semi-independent living arrangements, and provide daytime activities for individuals who are not able to be employed.

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