



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Marchers recite the Pledge of Allegiance on the steps of city hall Monday at the end of a Martin Luther King Day march in Hermiston.

Marchers carry on King's legacy

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The mood at Hermiston's Martin Luther King Jr. Day march Monday was positive, but carried a clear message that the fight for social justice is far from over.

"When you come to a small town like Hermiston and still have people watching and marching, it's just amazing," said Don Rome.

Rome was the keynote speaker at the annual celebration of social justice and civil rights, which has taken place in Hermiston for 18 years. More than 100 people from Hermiston and other cities gathered in front of First United Methodist Church to walk, listen to speeches, and discuss what King's message continues to mean today.

After a walk around Hermiston's downtown blocks and a speech on city hall steps from City Councilor Doug Primmer, Rome took the stage, talking about his own experiences growing up black in Hermiston.

Though some of his stories were lighthearted and had the audience laughing, he described how prejudice can occur, even if it's not obviously hostile.

"The pro was that I always got picked for sports," he said with a grin. "The con was — I sucked!"

He told a story of how his coach asked him to race the 100 meters, and several of his competitors were nervous to race him, simply because they thought a black athlete would be better than them.

He also told of when he was a small child, a teacher had refused to call him by his name, instead calling him a derogatory term.

"I asked her why she called me that, and she said, 'Because that's all you're ever going to be,'" Rome recalled.

He also acknowledged his own insecurities. He remembered a trip to the grocery store last year, where an elderly couple was walking toward him. He smiled, but they didn't reciprocate.

"He looked me up and down in disgust, and walked off," Rome said. Hurt and thinking they were glaring at him because of his race, he said, he went home and recounted the incident to his wife — who revealed to him that his zipper had been open.

"The point of the story is, 'know what you're talking about,'" he said.

Rome discussed the challenges King and other people in the civil rights movement faced.

"You had people putting their life on the line daily," he said. "I have a dream

is so powerful. Those who have a dream can change history."

John Carbage, president of the Hermiston Cultural Awareness Club, invited anyone in the audience to say a few words.

Rev. Robert Eadie recalled hearing a speech by King when he was a young man, and how it continues to impact him today.

"He said, 'I might not get there with you,'" Eadie said. He pointed out the importance of teaching young people about the movement.

"We are not here permanently," Eadie said. "But we must always put that into our young children's minds and hearts — we all have to overcome something."

A Hermiston resident named Patrick, who declined to give his last name, said it was important to realize that civil rights are not just in a history book. A teacher at a local elementary school, he said he has a spot in his room called "Martin's Corner," where he features a different quote from King each week.

"We need to brave those big conversations," he said. "Pressing 'like' or shooting back with a comment doesn't replace what's happening here today. Martin Luther King Jr. is not folded within the pages of a history book."

Camp Umatilla training center to get \$25 million upgrade

HERMISTON HERALD

With about 7,500 acres of former Umatilla Chemical Depot land now in the hands of the Oregon National Guard, the Oregon Military Department is planning to invest \$25 million to improve the facilities.

According to a report Thursday from the public affairs office of the Oregon National Guard, the new training center west of Hermiston will be used for weekend and annual training requirements for the Guard and other military branches. It will also house the 249th Regional Training Institute, which trains infantry leaders.

The \$25 million will be spent over several years, according to the release, and pay for sewer line repairs, a water distribution system, roads, fencing, improvements to offices, lodging and the dining facility and new classrooms. An additional \$2 million has already been spent on the project.

The depot was constructed in 1941 in preparation for World War II, and Lt. Col. Noel Hoback told the *East Oregonian* in September it seems that many of the buildings being used by

the National Guard were part of the original construction.

The Oregon National Guard has been training at the site since the 1980s and has built arms ranges and kept vehicles.

"A lot of the facilities and infrastructure out there haven't been updated in decades if at all," said Eric Manus, the senior manager for the Camp Umatilla construction

projects. "We have already been out there working projects to modernize the infrastructure so that we have a solid foundation for building renovations over the next several years."

The Oregon Adjutant General and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers signed a license on Nov. 27 that dedicated the land as a training center.

Questions asked of EOTEC over failure to meet conditions

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center has been directed to report to the Hermiston Planning Commission each month leading up to the next Umatilla County Fair after failing to meet multiple conditions of a parking variance granted by the city.

Commissioners said during a meeting Jan. 10 that they supported the fair and the Farm-City Pro Rodeo and wanted those events to succeed, but they couldn't turn a blind eye to the infractions committed during the 2017 Umatilla County Fair.

"We can't make EOTEC above everyone else in the city we have a responsibility for," Phil Hamm said.

The EOTEC board had obtained a variance from the planning commission in 2017 allowing some parking and traffic requirements to be waived during large events with more than 2,000 people in exchange for meeting certain conditions. But most of the six conditions were not met during the 2017 fair and rodeo, including requirements to notify neighbors and to submit an event permit application, a lighting plan, an overflow parking plan and shuttle ridership count. The events also flouted a 2012 rule that an ingress on Ott Road is to be used for emergency access only.

Nate Rivera, who came to EOTEC as interim manager the week after the 2017 Umatilla County Fair and is now helping transition to management by VenuWorks, said county commissioner and EOTEC board member Larry Givens made the decision to start using the Ott Road entrance in addition to

Airport Road. He said the decision was made in consultation with Sheriff Terry Rowan after extensive traffic jams on the first day caused serious concerns about safety.

City Planning Director Clint Spencer said it "rankled" to read in the newspaper that a condition for approval of EOTEC's zoning was being violated after the first day of EOTEC's first large event. Rivera said EOTEC was "fully aware" that it had failed in its responsibility to make sure conditions set by the planning commission were met but things would be different now that VenuWorks had taken over management of the center and could craft parking and traffic plans.

"We had that in place and it didn't seem to matter," Kathy Erz replied, noting the time the planning commission spent discussing concerns that the two-lane, unpaved Ott Road would not handle heavy traffic. "After the first day the whole plan was thrown to the wind."

Rivera said plans for the first year were all based in theory, but moving forward it would be easier to craft a plan with knowledge from last year's event.

"There won't be as much data as the planning commission hoped, however. Ridership for the free shuttles — which commissioners said they had expected would run all week but instead only ran Friday and Saturday — was not tracked. Equipment failures caused by high temperatures in the afternoons kept the fair from getting an accurate attendance count for 2017, and Rivera said data from traffic counts conducted by the county were "not able to be recovered" either.

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