



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Hermiston residents can download an app on their smartphones to monitor their water usage via the new "smart meters" installed by the city.

New tech gives utility customers more knowledge

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

New meters installed by the city of Hermiston will help residents be smarter consumers of water and power.

While the city is just beginning to install new electrical meters around town, installation of new water meters is finished and customers can now track their water usage by the day, by the hour or even in 15 minute increments.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said while some customers might not care about monitoring their water usage more carefully, others may find it helpful to look at where their water is going. For example, when he did a test run of the app a few months ago, he was able to experiment with the timing of how he watered his lawn and reduce his bill.

"For those customers who are really sensitive to rate increases, this gives them the ability to track what they can do to decrease their own bills," he said.

Customers will be able to create a variety of charts and graphs after logging into their account, such as a line graph showing daily water usage compared with the temperature for those days.

Morgan said the app can also help people spot potential leaks — if they notice all of the sudden they're using three gallons of water per hour even when they're asleep or not home, for example. Customers can set up their account to alert them to possible leaks or a pipe bursting, and city staff will also keep an eye out for irregularities and can potentially contact customers if it looks like something is wrong.

"It can't hurt to have more data," he said.

Morgan said some people might feel like their bill has gone up since their

new meter was installed, but that is because the new meters chart usage 12 months out of the year. Under the old system, where meters had to be read by hand instead of the meter sending data remotely, the city just estimated water usage for winter months and then once the meter was read in the spring added any extra usage on to the next bill. Anyone who feels like their December bill was higher than last December's will likely have a smaller March or April bill than usual, he said.

To view their detailed water usage information, customers can create a login on eyeonwater.com after inputting the account number found on their bill.

Hermiston Energy Services customers will be able to keep closer track of their electricity usage soon, too. Allegiant Energy Services, on behalf of HES, is installing new "smart" meters between now and the end of March. Once a customer receives a new meter their SmartHub payment portal they now use to pay bills and check their monthly usage will feature new data including usage by the day and by the hour.

HES general manager Nate Rivera said people will be able to spot patterns about what times of day their home uses the most electricity, although temperature outside does tend to have a large impact by determining how much the heating system or air conditioning runs.

Information has been sent out to HES customers about installation, and Rivera said when meters are installed in a neighborhood someone will go door to door to explain the installation to residents, and that there will be a few minutes without power during the switch.

Customers with questions about the new electrical meters can call 541-289-2000.

HART gives 2,723 free rides in first year

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

Ridership on Hermiston's new bus system did not grow as quickly as anticipated during its first year of service, but it still fulfilled its purpose of providing free transportation to residents.

"Overall I'm really happy with it," said Susan Johnson, manager of Kayak Public Transit.

The HART began in January 2017 as a free public bus system run by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation under a contract with the city of Hermiston. Ridership numbers for its first year of operation show an average of 11.1 riders per day for the first nine months of 2017, which jumped to 11.8 riders per day after the city adjusted the route on Oct. 1 to make it more user-friendly. In all, it gave 2,723 rides in 2017.

The system's best month was November, when 283 rides were given over 19 service days. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan had told the *East Oregonian* in March 2017 he expected ridership to grow to 600 people per month that year.

Morgan said last week



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The HART shuttle leaves the bus stop at Walmart on Wednesday in Hermiston.

that routing was "a challenge" during the first nine months of the year but he expects to see the ridership curve hit its stride now that the faster route is in place.

"We hope more people will realize it is a good, usable system that they can utilize," he said.

When the HART first began in January 2017, it made four loops per day through town, stopping about 30 times each loop. In October a new schedule was adopted that pruned the number of stops to 20 with six passes per day. Following feedback from riders who complained having to wait too long for the bus to pick them up, the route was

also changed from a continuous loop in one direction to one that reversed direction after every stop at Hermiston Plaza. Johnson said before there was about an hour and fifteen minute wait between each time the bus stopped at a location. Now there are some waits that are as short as 20 minutes and others that stretch almost two hours, allowing people to plan short or long errands and appointments.

"We try and have a little bit of time in the schedule for everybody," she said.

The city started an online advertising campaign in October, and has given printed advertising and bus schedules to the Umatilla

County fair supporters 'stirrup some fun'

By ANTONIO SIERRA
STAFF WRITER

The Umatilla County Fair appreciation dinner celebrated the fair's first year in its new home, but speakers reminisced about history that went back much farther.

Introducing Rep. Greg Smith and wife Sherri Smith as the fair's 2018 grand marshals, retiring fair board member Dan Dorran remembered meeting with the Heppner Republican in 2001, when both were still fresh to their respective governing bodies.

It was a tough year for county fairs across the state as the legislature eliminated funding for fairground maintenance in the state budget, but Smith helped pass a bill that permanently allocated money from the state lottery fund to county fairs.

Smith would spend his ensuing years in the state House of Representatives lobbying on behalf of the fair, whether it was fighting further cuts to fair funding or helping secure a \$6.4 million lottery grant to build the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, where Saturday's dinner was held.

Smith wasn't the only one remembered for his contribution to the fair. The fair board said goodbye to Dorran, who spent many years on the board.

One by one, fair board members praised Dorran for his work ethic, his indefatigable spirit and his commitment to the fair, even as they razzed him for overusing words like "incredible" and "awesome."

"Dan is the guy you go to when you want to get things done," board Vice-Chairman Mel Keely said.

When it was his turn to speak, Dorran shared some



STAFF PHOTO BY ANTONIO SIERRA

From left to right, Laiklyn Fields, Bobbie Sharp, Rebekah Miller and Olivia Warner introduce themselves as the 2018 Umatilla County Fair Court at an appreciation dinner Saturday.

2018 fair concerts to include big names

Fair supporters got a glimpse of the line-up for the 2018 Umatilla County Fair's entertainment at Saturday's fair appreciation dinner.

Board member Lucas Wagner was responsible for the big reveal. Bouncing along as the act's music played over EOTEC's loudspeakers, Wagner said country music band Sawyer Brown will open up the fair on Tuesday.

Wednesday will see country band Brewer's Grade of The Dalles open up for another country act, Ned LeDoux. LeDoux will sing some of his own music along with hits by his late father, country singer Chris LeDoux, and some of his father's previously unreleased music.

Wagner said he wasn't able to announce the acts for Thursday and Friday nights because the fair is still working to confirm them, although he did tease the audience about the identity of the Thursday act.

"It should be a crowd pleaser if you're into late '80s, early '90s hair metal bands," he said.

Friday's bands will fit in with the Latino Night theme.

Saturday will be capped off with 90s rock band Blues Traveler, which Wagner introduced with a clip from their hit song "Run-Around."

of the things he took pride in, like the growth in the number of food vendors and the

successful launch of Latino Night after a few false starts. One of his most vivid

County Housing Authority, which has agreed to disseminate the information to residents of their properties. The hospital's Healthy Communities Coalition has also been helping spread the word. Johnson said bus dispatcher Katherine Palmer participated in the Third Annual Special Education Linkage Fair.

HART's most popular stops have been at Hermiston Plaza, Walmart, and Southeast Columbia Drive located near the Stafford Hansell Government Center, Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center and Department of Human Services.

Near the end of 2017 the city purchased some Plexiglas bus shelters and last week installed one at the Third and Orchard stop, which is also where Kayak Public Transit's Hermiston Hopper picks up riders to transport them to Stanfield and Pendleton. Morgan said other possible locations for shelters include Victory Square Park and Columbia Drive.

A schedule for the HART can be found online at ctuir.org/hermiston-hart and a dispatcher is available from 4 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at 541-429-7519 to answer questions.

Photo feature

For more photos from the event, See A17

memories was watching Future Farmers of America students tear up as they washed their livestock one last time before the animals were auctioned off.

The theme of the 2018 fair is "Let's stirrup some fun," and the night's honorees tried to stick to that theme by mixing levity with sincerity.

As he accepted his marshal badge, Smith said he recently visited Hermiston High School, where he was mistaken twice by a staff member, first for former U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith and then for U.S. Rep. Greg Walden.

"I told that story because we feel like a mistake has been made," Smith said after the audience laughter died down. "Each of you are more deserving than we are."

Smith and Dorran weren't the only people honored Saturday night.

Alice Dyer was honored as the female volunteer of the year for her work helping out in the small animal area. Steve Kelsoe, a "jack-of-all-trades" who handles everything from hauling hay for livestock to welding, was honored as the male volunteer of the year.

A-1 Industrial Hose & Supply won the business partner of the year award.

A new fair court was announced, with Bobbie Sharp, 17, of Echo, Olivia Warner, 17, of Pilot Rock, Laiklyn Fields, 15, of Hermiston, and Rebekah Miller, 15 of Hermiston taking the stage after the 2017 court was honored.

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