



PAWS Thrift Store manager Sara McCormack helps a customer on Thursday in Pendleton.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Noise concern for EOTEC neighbors

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Now that the city of Hermiston has taken full ownership of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, it will also take on the responsibility of responding to complaints about the facility.

There have been plenty from neighbors, some of whom formed the Hermiston Airport Road Neighborhood Association last year when the county was considering changing the name of the road to make it easier to find EOTEC. They won a partial victory — the county decided to put off the decision until after the road has been improved using transportation package dollars from the state.

Last spring some of the 34 neighbors (representing 17 addresses) also complained during a board of county commissioners meeting about bass-heavy music blasting from the event center until midnight or later during events, about party-goers who drive recklessly or trespass on private property after events break up, and about traffic and dust problems generated by EOTEC.

HARNA president Chris Waine said in the last year response to his complaints has been a mixed bag, with noise still a major concern but dust issues getting better. He said he and neighbor Mariah Murray met with city manager Byron Smith two weeks ago about a request they have made for the city to update its noise ordinance.

Noise has been the main complaint of property owners near the event center. Waine said people on social media have made comments about not being supportive of the fair and rodeo, saying neighbors of the old fairgrounds dealt with similar issues for decades. But he said the neighbors are willing to put up with noise during fair and rodeo week for the sake of supporting those events — it's the weddings and quinceañeras blasting music until midnight on other weekends that concerns them.

"We've been dealing with this for over two years and we've still made no progress today from where we were two years ago," he said.

Waine said the city's noise ordinance measures dBA, which measures decibel levels for mid-range fre-

quencies, instead of dBC, which measures decibel levels for high and low frequencies. As a result, he said, police can come out and take dBA readings during a party and find they don't violate the noise ordinance even though neighbors are being kept awake by pounding bass.

Waine wants the city to adopt an ordinance similar to Pendleton's, which states the operation of sound-producing devices such as radios "between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., so that it is plainly audible at a distance of 50 feet from the building, structure, vehicle, or place in which it is located" is a violation of the nuisance ordinance, as is action to "make, continue, or cause to be made or continued any loud, unnecessary or unusual noise nor any noise, which annoys, disturbs, injures or endangers the comfort, repose, health, peace or safety of others, within or over the limits of the city."

However, he said Smith has so far declined to bring the issue before the city council.

Smith said Tuesday that he hadn't closed the door on that option, but was still having the city's attorney research the legal issues surrounding noise ordinances and enforcement before deciding how to move forward with HARNA's concerns.

One request that has been made in the past is to shut down events at 10 p.m., but Smith said the city believes the earlier deadline would hamper EOTEC's ability to attract events.

In January the event-management company VenuWorks was hired to run EOTEC's day-to-day operations. Al Davis now serves as general manager. Smith said as the city partners with VenuWorks on policies and planning, issues like noise control will be part of the conversation. He said trees planted and growing to maturity should help as well.

"We're going to do the best we can with operating an entertainment facility," he said. "We try to have as little impact on the neighborhood as possible, but it is a big change for that neighborhood."

EOTEC has tried to mitigate other complaints neighbors have, including laying down dust abatement chemicals and winter wheat to help with blowing dust.

Nonprofits protect against donation theft

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Small nonprofits can do an outsized amount of good in their communities. But their part-time, volunteer nature can also make it easy for abuses to go unnoticed.

It happens in Eastern Oregon. Shawn MacGregor, former director of the Pendleton nonprofit shelter Tonya's House, was arraigned earlier this month on charges of theft after being accused of embezzling more than \$10,000 from the organization, which had to close its doors in 2017 for financial reasons. The Umatilla Chamber of Commerce, Spray Rodeo Association and Haystack Cemetery Association have reported thefts by employees in recent years.

Nonprofit thefts in the news was what led Nicole Shelton to recently broach the subject with the board of the Hermiston Warming Station. Shelton, who was a board member until she resigned March 11, said there were signs that donated items were being mishandled.

Once, for example, she saw a board member take home a pair of bras that were among clothing items donated to the Warming Station. She said when confronted later the person said they had given them to their daughter's friend who is on the verge of homelessness. Another time a volunteer

told Shelton they witnessed a board member take home a donated tube of toothpaste with the comment they had run out of toothpaste at home. When Shelton complained, they said the toothpaste was expired and slated to be thrown away anyway.

Shelton said the organization keeps careful track of financial donations and she hasn't seen any indication of embezzlement, but she does have concerns that in-kind donations are handled less carefully. She wants to see the Warming Station keep a detailed ledger of all in-kind donations and put better procedures in place that avoid any impropriety.

"I know they were small things, but theft of small things leads to theft of bigger things," she said.

In addition to the concerns about in-kind donations Shelton brought up a few other concerns during the March 11 board meeting, including what she saw as one board member's aggressive treatment of guests. When she felt her concerns weren't being taken seriously enough, she resigned. She also made an official theft report to the Hermiston Police Department, which is investigating with the cooperation of the Warming Station board.

Trish Rossell, president of the board, said she didn't want to comment on an ongoing police investigation. She did say the Warming Station has a rigor-

ous accounting process for financial donations, which are documented and presented to the board in an open meeting each month. As for in-kind donations, Rossell said the Warming Station throws away expired hygiene and food items and keeps water and toilet paper. Anything else is donated to Desert Rose Ministries or another nonprofit that can use the items to serve the homeless, and guests of the Warming Station are referred there.

"We don't want to be in the business of duplication of efforts," she said.

Local nonprofits — often run by volunteers — set their own policies and procedures for handling donations.

Sara McCormack in mid-January took over managing the thrift store for the Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter. The store sells donated goods and has a small shed near the front door for donations at all hours. When that fills up, people leave items outside. McCormack said some Mondays she has to be part mountain goat just to get to the door.

While a cash register at the front tracks every sale and print receipts, she said, there is no way to track all the items people donate. And too often those donations are only fit for the garbage bin, she said, from soiled clothes to broken goods.

Since taking over, McCormack said she is under more oversight than previous managers because the store was in such disarray, but there is no doubt small nonprofits are vulnerable to theft.

"I am here alone every day," she said. "If I was not an ethical person, I could do whatever I wanted to."

At Made to Thrive, a Hermiston nonprofit that helps outfit and support at-risk kids for participation in extra-curricular activities, director Kris Dammeyer said being good stewards of donations is a top priority.

She emailed statements from board president Tim Handforth and board treasurer Mitch Boylan explaining how every donation goes back to youth in the community. Boylan, a CPA at Barnett and Moro PC, said monthly financial updates are presented to the board and every financial transaction made is scrutinized by at least two people.

"Every dollar we receive is carefully planned for use in accomplishing our mission," Handforth wrote. "Whether it is for participation fees, equipment, clothing or operating expenses it is tracked and recorded. An easy path to failure for an organization is to lose its integrity in the way it operates and laziness in its execution of policies and procedures."

Reporter *Phil Wright* contributed to this story.

Aspen Springs gets approval from state

HERMISTON HERALD

Lifeways is now one step closer to opening its Hermiston-based psychiatric facility. The Oregon Health Authority on Thursday approved the opening of the facility, pending final review.

Before Lifeways can move forward, affected parties have until March 25 to request a hearing. OHA Certificate of Need Coordinator Jana Fussell said an affected party is some-

one who has demonstrated private or public interest in the project, and groups or individuals must apply to qualify as affected parties. If no one requests a hearing, OHA will issue a final decision.

From then, Fussell said, affected parties have 60 days to request a contested hearing.

After that Lifeways still must go through the licensing process for the facility, and may have to take other steps.

The completed facility, which is located near Good Shepherd Medical Center, is slated to have 16 beds, and serve people 18 and older who are going through mental health episodes.

Lifeways applied for state approval on the project in August 2017, a process that was delayed by other facilities' applications, according to spokesman Rick George in August.

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