

Homeless numbers increase tenfold

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Case managers for Community Action Program of East Central Oregon had a problem with their 2017 count of the area's homeless population.

The point-in-time census counted 55 homeless people in Umatilla County, one in Wheeler County and none in Gilliam or Morrow counties — the regions where the nonprofit aims to help low-income populations. Glenda McDaniel, one of those CAPECO case managers, said the figure was surprising because it was so small.

They conducted a second count at the end of the summer, that time finding 64. Still lower than their estimates.

The latest count came Jan. 31, and it revealed 557 homeless people in the four counties.

"We knew the numbers were out there," McDaniel. "And there are probably even more."

Gilliam and Wheeler counties had no documented homeless population. But 46 were counted this time in Morrow County, including 17 females and 18 males in Heppner. Umatilla County had 511, with 292



A homeless woman who identifies herself as "Nana" and Christopher Stad of Kennewick panhandle at the Hermiston Walmart store in December. HH FILE PHOTO

in Pendleton, 123 in Hermiston, 51 in Athena, 44 in Milton-Freewater and one in Echo.

Males outnumbered females 274 to 252, and 31 people did not identify their gender.

The census found they ran the gamut when it came to where they spend the night: 1.4 percent squatted; 15.1 percent stayed on the street; 40.6 percent stayed with friends.

"A lot of people are one

paycheck away from losing housing," McDaniel said.

Susie Stuvland and Sean Ruud, fellow case managers, said the organization examined its methodology and added more volunteers to arrive at a more accurate

picture of the area's homeless situation. The effort included talking to school districts to find homeless students and going to where the homeless gather, from churches to The Salvation Army to the banks of the

Umatilla River. They also worked on asking better questions and asking questions in better ways.

"It's more just making sure we're doing it appropriately, going to the right places and talking to the right people," Ruud said.

The higher number shows the area has greater needs than previously thought, Stuvland said, and that opens the door to more grant funding for CAPECO and other institutions to combat homelessness, including schools.

Ruud, Stuvland and McDaniel also are part of Home 4 Hope, a local coalition that helps the homeless. The group held its annual forum March 8 in Pendleton, where about 30 members identified key obstacles for the homeless and brainstormed solutions.

Previous forums helped hatch the idea of warming stations in Hermiston and Pendleton, and this time McDaniel said she hoped the forum would address two big hurdles for the homeless: a place to get mail and phone service. McDaniel said both are essential for people to connect to everything from employers to the Social Security Administration, which requires an address to receive benefits.

Stanfield hires new principals

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Stanfield School District will welcome two new principals for the 2018-2019 school year. Last week the board unanimously approved the hire of Steve Sheller as the next principal of Stanfield Secondary School, and of Lacey Sharp as the principal of Stanfield Elementary School. Both will begin their positions July 1, 2018.

Sheller is currently an athletic director, science teacher and year-book advisor at Irrigon Junior/Senior High School, and has been at that school for four years. He served as the football coach at Stanfield for the 2013-2014 school year. He has also taught in Umatilla and Hermiston.

Sharp is the interim principal at Stanfield Elementary, and was the vice principal under superintendent/principal Shelley Liscom, who resigned at the end of 2017 and was placed on paid leave shortly after.

Stanfield Superintendent Beth Burton said she posted the open principal position for two to three weeks, and got several applicants. A group of school employees were on the hiring committee, as well as board chair Scott Morris, in his capacity

as a baseball coach.

She said they screened applications in late February and interviewed the top three. She said the committee was united in their support for hiring Sheller.

The position became vacant when Burton was appointed to the superintendent's position, after Liscom announced her resignation. Burton had previously served as the principal of the secondary school. She said the interim principal for the remainder of the school year was hired in late February. The interim,



Steve Sheller

Wayne Kostur, is Burton's father and was the interim superintendent of Stanfield School District for the 2013-2014 school year. Burton said she cannot supervise Kostur directly, so an InterMountain Education Service District employee has been appointed as his immediate supervisor. Burton said that Kostur retired from the Molalla River School District six years ago, but many years ago he had worked in the Athena-Weston School District. She said she turned to him when the position became open because she couldn't think of anyone else who would be able to start the job immediately.

"The board loved him when he was here," Burton said.

EOU gets 'rural university' designation

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

Eastern Oregon University has always been a home for students looking for a smaller, more rural college experience in Oregon, but that role is now official.

The La Grande-based university has been designated by the state legislature as Oregon's Rural University.

"It defines our role in the state and shows our unique mission," said Tim Seydel, EOU's vice president for university advancement.

The designation — which passed both chambers of the legislature unanimously and was signed by the governor earlier this month — doesn't come with a boost in state funding or new rules for how the university is run. But Seydel said it could help set EOU apart when applying for state and federal grants for programs that are targeted toward helping first-generation college students, for example, or those from rural communities.

"When they say, 'Why Eastern?' we can say, 'That's what we do,'" he

said.

Seydel said it could also help with recruitment at the university, which was at 3,016 students during the fall term. He said some students are searching for a smaller, more rural experience where their professors know them by name.

Many of those students come from Umatilla and Morrow counties. Umatilla County students have made up roughly nine percent of EOU's enrollment for the last decade, and this year there are 311 students from Umatilla County and 48 students from Morrow County. The university has increased recruitment efforts in both counties as it looks to boost its numbers.

Rep. Greg Smith, who sponsored the bill, agreed that the designation as Oregon's Rural University could help EOU with recruitment of students from rural areas who don't want to attend school in a big city.

"They'll know that they'll be coming to an environment they'll be comfortable in," Smith said.

Officials in other parts of the state have sometimes eyed closing the small uni-

versity as a way to save the state money, so Smith said he also felt the designation will remind lawmakers from more urban areas of EOU's importance in serving Eastern Oregon residents.

Jer Pratton of Hermiston, who serves on EOU's board, said being Oregon's Rural University sets EOU apart from the state's other public universities and helps define the university's purpose.

"When funding issues come up it sends a better message and we can advocate for EOU in a stronger position," he said.

Pratton said as a fiscal conservative he was worried about the university's financial position when the board of trustees was created in 2014 (before that, a single board oversaw all of Oregon's public universities). But he credited the board, its financial committee, then-interim university president Jay Kenton and current president Tom Insko — who is an EOU alumnus but came from a business, not education, background — with working together to help turn the situation around and put the university on solid financial footing.

Harkenrider center surges with donation

HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston area seniors recently received a huge boost from the Umatilla Electric Cooperative.

Tami Sinor, UEC member services representative, was welcomed by the seniors in early February during a lunch at the parish hall at Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church. She delivered a check for \$25,000 from the Co-op's Community Giving Program. The money will be used for the Harkenrider Senior Activity Center project. Judy Fordice, senior center secretary, said the donation was a very pleasant surprise.

While construction of the facility is edging closer to completion, the move-in date likely won't take place until late summer. In the upcoming months, construction will move outside with the development of an extensive parking area, including additional handicap spaces and a bus drop-off area. The new location



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY JUDY FORDICE

Umatilla Electric Cooperative member services representative Tami Sinor, center, recently presented a donation to Hermiston Senior Center representatives Irene Miller, president, and Virginia Beebe, vice president.

is in the 100 block of Northeast Second Street between East Ridgeway and East Gladys avenues.

Meanwhile, the senior meals will continue to be served at the parish hall. The group is appreciative of the temporary home after moving out of their old site

when the property was sold. "We have so many things coming at the senior center right now," Fordice said. "It's amazing."

For more information, call 541-567-3582 or search Facebook, which is updated often, for "Hermiston Senior Center."

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