

SAFETY

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skills whether they choose to work at a pool next summer or not.

“They’re going over training that lifeguards go through,” recreation supervisor Brandon Artz said. “They get to shadow some too. It’s a good opportunity to learn.”

On Monday morning the junior lifeguard class was treading water in the lap pool, passing a 10-pound brick between them with encouragement from instructor Brittin Braithwaite as some students struggled to complete the task.

Afterward, she said it was important for lifeguards to build endurance and mental toughness, which is why she tries to push her students to keep going even when they said they were too tired. The HFAC’s real lifeguards have to swim nonstop for one hour each week during their inservice days.

Braithwaite said much of the work the staff at the aquatic center does is preventative, from teaching water skills to asking kids not to run next to the pool.

“People think lifeguards save people from drowning, but really we’re preventing drownings,” she said.

Alysia Garcia, 19, teaches all levels of swim lessons at the HFAC. This is her third year.

“I like working with kids because it gives me practice,” she said. “I want to be a teacher.”

She said most of her lessons are focused on helping kids be safe in the water, so that if they get caught in a current at the beach or venture too far out and get tired they can get themselves to safety or at least stay afloat until they are rescued.

New at the aquatic center

Adding swim lessons isn’t the only thing the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center has adjusted this year. The aquatic center’s public swim hours have been streamlined to 1:10-6:45 p.m. every day.

People can also hold semi-private parties from 9:30-11 a.m. on weekends — they might have to share with a couple of other small parties but it is cheaper (only \$150) than renting the entire pool and they will have their own area. During public swim hours HFAC is also adding private cabanas that can be rented.

Infants under a year old now have free admission, with kids age nine and under \$4 a day (children under nine must be accompanied by an adult). Ages 10-17 or 55-plus are \$5 and all other admission is \$6. The HFAC is offering half-price admission to public swim after 5 p.m.

“This discount is designed for working families who get off in the evening and can’t make it to an all day public swim,” Artz said. “We want them to enjoy the last two hours of the pool day.”

Chantel Osborne is providing concessions this year, including Dippin’ Dots.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Mekena Royer tells her level 1 swim class to hold on to the edge of the pool Monday at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center.

Pool safety important at home, too

With the mercury hitting triple digits multiple times during the summer, many area residents are trying to find ways to beat the heat.

The popularity of swimming pools has increased as portable backyard models are becoming more affordable and easier to maintain. However, people need to remember that safety is important, regardless of the pool’s depth.

With the start of the summer season, Shauna and Mike Smith recently set up their 12-foot-by-30-inch Intex metal frame pool. The couple has two children, ages 12 and 5. While the pool is fairly small, the Smiths have outlined several rules, including appropriate supervision is required, it must be light outside and water play is determined based on the youngest child that’s in the pool. For

instance, “rough-housing” or splashing isn’t allowed with smaller kids in the pool.

In Hermiston, City Ordinance 135.040 outlines requirements for swimming pool enclosures, defined as being at least 18 inches deep. Pools that aren’t totally enclosed by a structure must have a “substantial” fence at least four feet tall and equipped with a self-closing and latching gate.

A standard question on homeowner insurance policies, said John Herrera of the Simmons Insurance Group, asks about swimming pools and hot tubs. He reiterated the importance of pool security with a fence with locked access. Also, Herrera urges people to follow up with their insurance agent to make sure they have appropriate coverage if they purchase a pool after their initial insurance policy is issued.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Monica Arias holds her diploma high Thursday night at the Toyota Center in Kennewick.

GRADUATION

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Anguiano, a student speaker who encouraged her classmates to be patient if they still hadn’t figured out their path in life.

“Finding your passion will happen at an unexpected moment,” she said. “My advice is to seize that moment when it comes.”

Judge Dan Hill, the distinguished alumnus, gave students several pointers.

“Focus on lifelong learning, formal or informal,” he said.

He urged the graduates to engage with the world, put down their cell phones and take their futures seriously.

“If you think for some reason you don’t have the

right stuff, I’m here to tell you that you do,” he said. “I challenge you to prepare for every opportunity.”

After each student had received their diploma, valedictorian Reed Middleton said a few words. She asked her classmates not to back down from the challenges that might come their way.

“We may even have to pump our own gas — the atrocity!” she said to laughs from the crowd.

“Never forget to turn around and thank the people who got you there,” she said.

Then, she led her classmates in the turning of the tassel.

As graduates tossed their caps and reunited with their families, many reflected on the last few years.

Ja’Qwaya Gooden said the reality hadn’t quite hit her yet.

“I’m really happy I made it,” she said. “I thank everyone who got me here.”

Though parents and families faced heavy traffic while traveling from Hermiston to Kennewick, many said they were happy with the new venue.

“It was good to have it here, so many families could come,” said Betty Gutierrez, there to watch her grandson Joey graduate. “Everybody wants to be here to see this happen.”

School board member Bonnie Luisi said counters at the door counted about 4,400 attendees at the event. The Hermiston High School gym, where graduation has been held in the past, seats about 1,800.

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