



Manuel Velasco hands out popsicles to the people on the Walchli Farms float. For more photos, see A15.

## All's fair in Hermiston Parade

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

For a chance to see Neveland, Optimus Prime and Paul Bunyan up close, the city of Hermiston turned out in droves.

When the Umatilla County Fair Parade began Saturday evening, the sidewalks were packed as a bevy of floats representing local businesses, school groups and service clubs glided around Hermiston, tossing candy to eager kids.

Floats ranged from elaborate — a Peter Pan themed float built on a street sweeper, from Connell, Washington — to traditional, with groups of people on horseback, pickup flatbeds, or on foot.

For many, the parade was about pride in their city and in their group.

“We’re the 2017 business of the year,” said Maria Garavito of Atkinson Staffing, referring to the Hermiston Distinguished Citizen’s Award. “We feel proud of our workers, so this is for

them.”

The Tillamook float had people from all aspects of their company on board, including employees’ families.

“Everybody from the plant manager to people that do sanitation,” Gonzalo Rodriguez, Tillamook’s safety manager, said.

While many groups handed out candy, some stayed on theme with their businesses. Tillamook handed out individual cheese packets and wooden ice cream spoons. Walchli Farms handed out watermelons, off the back of a vehicle carrying an enormous inflatable slice of their signature fruit.

“We wanted to show some pride in the product,” he said.

Some people reversed roles — Manuel Velasco of Templo Abarim was handing out popsicles and water to parade participants as the parade passed by the church, on Seventh Street.

Church members are

usually in the parade, but this year they didn’t have a vehicle.

“We still wanted to be a part of it,” said Doria Velasco.

On the sidelines, some people watched for their favorite floats, while others wanted to be surprised.

“I’m looking for something new,” said Saul Chairez, who was watching the parade with family on Highland, across from Hermiston High School.

Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann rode in one of several trucks representing the city of Hermiston.

“I dialed in some better weather,” Drotzmann said.

He said he was pleased with the variety of parade entries, and liked some of the new features this year, like the fair kickoff party on Main Street, and using the old fairgrounds as a gathering area for the floats.

State Rep. Greg Smith and his wife Sherri were this year’s grand marshals.

They’re Morrow County

residents, but the Smiths said they attend the parade and fair every year.

Smith said his favorite float, other than a huge Paul Bunyan and Babe from Ranch and Home, were the local Future Farmers of America floats.

“That’s what the fair is all about, families, kids and community,” he said.

Though the parade drew people from neighboring counties and Washington, one spectator changed time zones to be there.

“We traveled 2,852 miles,” said Karen Flabetch. She and her daughter, Sarah, live in Maui. Flabetch grew up in Hermiston, and came back to visit her relatives.

“But we wanted to come so my daughter could see the fair,” she said.

She recalled riding her bicycle in the fair parade with her neighbors when she was young, and winning an award for their costumes.

## School district completes safety projects, maintenance

By JAYATI  
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When teachers and students come back to Hermiston schools in the fall, they’ll notice some changes.

Maintenance and grounds staff have worked on a few major projects this summer, addressing some of the needs that would have been covered by a bond that failed last year: a new roof for Sandstone Middle School, and fencing around Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools.

District operations director Brad Wayland said the chain link fences around Rocky Heights and Highland Hills will be about four feet tall.

“Those are some measures to try and secure the sites a little better,” he said. “We can’t make it like a prison, but we need to make sure there’s a little more of a deterrent for the flow of folks passing through.”

Wayland said both those buildings are open-campus plans, and security upgrades for them were prioritized on the bond.

Facilities supervisor Martie McQuain said those schools may staff the gates during busy times to monitor who was coming through.

Last summer the district made some safety upgrades to West Park and Sunset elementary schools, setting up a system that allows doors to hallways with classrooms to be closed with the push of a button any time the school goes into lockdown. The district also built entrance areas with windows, where a front office worker could

observe people coming in and let them in by pushing a button.

While the hallways door project has been completed, the front entrance project has not.

“Right now, the overall system doesn’t work with that,” Wayland said. “We’re looking at trying to upgrade that.”

Sandstone Middle School’s roof repairs are complete, a project Wayland said was high on the priority list from the bond. He said the roof cost about \$850,000.

Though capacity was one of the main concerns for the district, Wayland said they did not add any modular classrooms this year.

“We will look at that over the course of the fall,” he said.

McQuain said they rearranged some classes to make better use of space.

“Sandstone had a smaller class in a bigger room,” he said. “We moved that around, and tried to fill in all the gaps we have.”

Wayland noted there were also a few empty classrooms that were used for testing and other purposes, but did not have a class in them full-time.

The district is renovating the two remaining buildings on the old Umatilla County Fairgrounds, Thompson and Hoeft halls. Hoeft Hall will be used for storage and equipment, and Thompson Hall will be used for special education classes. They made upgrades to the kitchen, made the bathroom handicap-accessible, and built a wall inside the building to separate the area where students will be from a recycling area.

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