

Retirement doesn't slow Hardin down

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

When Hermiston city councilor Rod Hardin says he's busier now than he is retired, that's no joke.

On Sunday, Hardin and his wife Sheila attended an open house in celebration of their retirement from Hermiston Christian Center & School after 38 years of service. Finding time to sit down for an interview, however, was not easy. Hardin was performing a wedding, counseling with a former student planning marriage, attending a funeral, preparing for a city council work session, hosting visiting family and spending weekdays mowing 1,200 acres of wheat stubble for a friend who needed help. He has also signed up to substitute teach in a few local school districts.

While Hardin retired this summer from being principal and teacher at Hermiston Christian School, he has not retired from the city council, where he is currently the council's longest-serving member. He was elected in 1992 after deciding the private school needed to be more involved in the community at large.

"That's one of the reasons I ran for city council," he said. "I wanted to rub shoulders with more people."

Beyond sitting in council meetings every other Monday, Hardin has thrown himself into various city committees and organizations, such as the League of Oregon Cities. The Faith-Based Advisory Committee in particular was a natural fit for Hardin, a pastor. He has helped guide the committee through creation of programs like Family Promise, which matches struggling families with local mentors. He even



Hermiston city councilor Rod Hardin listens to Hermiston Public Library director Mark Rose during a Hermiston City Council work session Monday in Hermiston.

helps out with city committees he is not assigned to — his bus-driving qualifications are in high demand when a committee needs to take a tour.

One of the aspects of his position he prizes most is the opportunity to network with mayors and city councilors around the country. He plans his whole summer around the annual meeting of the steering committee for the national Small Cities Council, of which Hardin is a past chairman.

"It's become just like a family," he said. "It's become a great network, a great resource. When I run into a problem here I have all of these contacts all over the country that I can call and say, 'Hey, have you dealt with this?'"

Many of the mayors and councilors on the Small Cities Council, particularly those that also meet once a year as a steering committee for the council, have become good friends Hardin sees year after year. The same goes for the League of

Oregon Cities, where Hardin is also an active participant. This year, when he was with the steering committee in Minnesota, he got a "pleasant surprise" when he saw a Hermiston shirt and realized it was a past president of the League of Oregon Cities, who had gotten the shirt from Hardin when he hosted an LOC event in Hermiston in 2009.

Hardin always comes back from these conventions and meetings with a report for the rest of the council about problems and innovative solutions he has seen in other cities around the country.

"I like the mobile tours," he said. "You get to talk to people and not just listen to a presentation."

During the September League of Oregon Cities conference, Hardin said he was impressed to see Eugene's "community court" program in action.

Eugene, like every city in Oregon, has struggled with homelessness issues, including helping police

handle homeless citizens, who are sometimes mentally ill, causing a nuisance. Hardin said if someone is cited for a low-level crime, such as public intoxication in downtown Eugene, they can go through a diversion program where they sit down with a judge to talk about the root of the problem that led to their behavior. Instead of paying a fine, they might be asked to perform community service and be connected to local resources or offered another solution to their problem.

For example, Hardin said, in one case a homeless man needed identification to access certain resources or get a job, but he had difficulty waiting a long time at the DMV and kept leaving. So the judge got someone to help him fill out the paperwork ahead of time and had an officer escort him to the DMV, where he was allowed to jump to the head of the line.

School retirement
Hardin said his experiences in education over the

years have helped shape his approach to being a city councilor.

"Being a teacher, I'm always interested in learning something," he said. "Let's see if we can solve some problems, figure out a better way to do it."

He said he has "no regrets" about his career in education, but he does have lots of memories.

Some of them were tough experiences, such as serving as vice principal in charge of discipline at a public high school in Elmira, Oregon. It was a rough school district and he had to handle some difficult discipline cases with students who were only a few years younger than him.

"I learned after I got there they had an undercover agent there to break up a drug ring," he said.

But mostly he has happy memories, including coming to Hermiston to run the brand-new Christian school, where he and Sheila stayed for 38 years. For 18

of those years they raised four children in a manufactured home on the church/school property with "40 acres to run around."

"Both of our parents lived in Eastern Oregon and my mom said she was going to pray me back to Eastern Oregon," he said. "I said, 'Pray ahead.'"

After getting things settled, the Hardins worked in and out of the classroom to keep the school running. They took students on trips to private school conventions and even hosted 600 students for one in Hermiston. The boys slept on the floor of the church's sanctuary and the girls were farmed out in groups to various homes in town.

Now that they are retired, they are turning that energy to other projects.

"I've finally gotten the chance to do a little with my yard," Hardin said.

He said he and his wife are looking at traveling more, including a possible cruise to Alaska.

Kiosk will allow parents to buy groceries and check their children's grades in one stop

Booth at Walmart can also access local students' attendance records

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The Hermiston School District is trying to make it easier for parents to keep tabs on their students' progress.

The district has installed a kiosk at the Hermiston Walmart, at 1350 N. First

St., which has a computer where parents can check their child's grades, attendance record, and homework assignments.

The district office, at 305 S.W. 11th St., also has a kiosk on which parents can find the same information about their school children.

Jeff Kelso, the district's information technology director, said it's a little early to tell how much use the Walmart kiosk is getting. He said many parents have begun using the district office station.

"We're kind of eye-

balling demand," he said. "Based on observations, we may expand the program or keep it as is."

Kelso said Superintendent Tricia Mooney pitched the idea, because she wanted to offer more ways for parents who don't have regular internet access to engage with the district.

In an email to the *Hermiston Herald*, Mooney said the district was looking for a different way to reach parents who may have communication barriers.

"In our continuous endeavor to find ways to meet parents in locations

where they happen to congregate or shop, we realized that we all have to shop for groceries at some point," she said. "We started exploring the idea of having a kiosk at a grocery store."

He said the web browser is highly constrained, and parents can only access school-related information — they can't generally browse the internet at the kiosks.

Each kiosk costs about \$5,800, including installation, supplies and support. Mooney said the district paid for the kiosks with general fund dollars.

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