



# Hermiston Herald

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INSIDE

**HOMECOMING**

Hermiston High School celebrated Homecoming with a dance, football game, the crowning of royalty and more.

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**CONNECTIONS**

A Project Connect event will offer free haircuts, dental exams and other services to veterans and the homeless.

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**VOTING TIME**

Five measures will show up on Umatilla County ballots, as well as races for governor and the 2nd Congressional District.

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BY THE WAY

**Watkins sells Columbia Court Club**

Two years after he had to shut down the **Columbia Court Club** in Hermiston due to a fire, **Steve Watkins** has sold the building and started a new business inspecting and selling fire extinguishers.

Watkins didn't disclose the buyer of the club at 80903 S. Highway 395, but said in the near future they should be announcing plans to renovate and reopen it as a fitness center once again.

The building served for 38 years as a workout center, gymnasium, indoor track and Hermiston's only indoor pool, until a fire broke out upstairs in the summer of 2016. The fire, thought to have been started by an electrical short in a power strip, charred the upper floor of the building and put holes in the ceiling that have since led to further water damage.

Watkins said he spent two years and thousands of dollars in legal fees

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ON THE BALLOT

## DAVIS and GOMOLSKI

FACE OFF FOR HERMISTON CITY COUNCIL



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Challenger Mark Gomolski answers a question as incumbent Hermiston city councilor Lori Davis looks on during the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce candidate forum Oct. 10 at BMCC in Hermiston.

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
STAFF WRITER

**H**ermiston City Council candidate Mark Gomolski thinks there are too many unanimous votes at council meetings.

He used his opening statement during a candidate forum last Wednesday night to attack his opponent Lori Davis, saying she is part of a council where too many decisions seem to have been made before the meeting takes place.

"When has she voiced opposition to anything the city council wants?" Gomolski asked. He later added, "She is just there to go along."

Davis didn't directly address his criticism of her voting record, choosing instead to focus on her local roots (she grew up in Hermiston and raised a family there) and pointed to projects the city has completed in her time on the council

since being elected in 2010.

"It is exciting to see these goals become a reality," she said.

Gomolski, however, said he has been knocking on doors to campaign and no one seems to know who Davis is despite her two terms on the council. He said the public needs leadership from its councilors, "not just someone who shows up to meetings."

He also accused the city council, including Davis, of already having their minds made up before meetings, and of making decisions "in executive sessions behind closed doors."

According to state law, councils can meet in a private executive session to discuss certain sensitive matters, such as litigation filed against them, but "No executive session may be held for the purpose of taking any final action or making any final decision."

Mayor David Drotzmann told the

*Hermiston Herald* he was disappointed to hear Gomolski's accusations and that he "absolutely disagrees" that the council is illegally making decisions outside of open meetings. He said if someone only shows up to a meeting once every six months then it might seem like a vote was "foreordained," but big decisions have usually been discussed in depth at prior meetings and work sessions open to the public before the night they come up for a vote.

Both candidates were asked the same set of questions on Wednesday at the Blue Mountain Community College campus in Hermiston, ranging from what the city's biggest challenge is to what the city's role should be in hosting events.

Davis answered most questions by listing past projects the city has com-

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## Same battle lines in race for commissioner

Murdock, Pullen square off for top county job

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock and challenger Rick Pullen agreed the county's election process could use some improvement.

Otherwise, they took familiar roles last Wednesday night during a local candidates forum in front of about 40 people at Blue Mountain Community College, Hermiston. The candidates during the span of a half hour answered the same questions, ranging from their achievements to the county's role in economic devel-

opment to how to get state money to take on the mental health crisis.

Both fell short of 50 percent of the vote during the May primary — Murdock took about 45 percent and Pullen 31 percent — and in the November run-off are staking similar ground as in their spring campaigns.

Murdock said he was proud of his work managing the county's budget. Umatilla County has a history of budget difficulties, but the county in recent years has been providing a stable level of services. Murdock said the county looks to maintain its programs and perhaps implement the sheriff's long-term staffing plan that would result in coverage just shy of 24 hours each day.

Pullen touted his 10 years of

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STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County Commissioner challenger Rich Pullen gestures while raising a question to the audience as commissioner George Murdock looks on Oct. 10 at BMCC in Hermiston.



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