

Great Shakeout points to preparation

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

On Thursday morning, students at Highland Hills Elementary School scrambled under their desks and waited for instructions. As Principal Jake Bacon directed them, they learned important tips for what to do in an earthquake.

Students throughout Hermiston School District participated Thursday morning in the “Great Oregon Shakeout,” a statewide drill to encourage schools to prepare their students for an earthquake.

At 10:18 a.m., Bacon came on the intercom and talked students through the drill, telling them that if a real earthquake happens, things might be different.

“An earthquake is likely to cause damage to the intercom,” he said. “Things may fall off the walls. Remain calm, and when the earthquake stops, be prepared to evacuate the building.”

He added that there may



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
First grade students at Highland Hills Elementary School sit under a table during the Great Oregon Shakeout earthquake drill Thursday morning.

be aftershocks, and that if they are outside, to go to a clear area away from power lines and buildings.

“You need to be alert,” Bacon said.

Students listened, crouching under the desks. When the drill ended, they emerged, and discussed with their teachers other things to be aware of during earthquakes.

Teacher Emily Adams told her first grade students the most important thing to do in an earthquake is to protect their heads.

“What do you do when an earthquake happens?” she asked students. “Get under a table, and don’t move anything.”

Earthquake preparation has become more of a focus across the state recently

— from drills to seismic upgrades in schools and on bridges.

Scientists have found that the Cascadia Subduction Zone, a 600-mile fault that runs from Northern California to British Columbia and is located about 70 to 100 miles off the West Coast, could see a massive earthquake. Geologists estimate that there is a 7 to 12 percent chance that a major earthquake and tsunami will rock the Pacific Northwest within the next 50 years, and a 37 percent chance that Southern Oregon and Northern California will experience a large earthquake in that time.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown released a plan this week called “Resiliency 2025,” which lays out six goals for earthquake preparation statewide. The first goal listed is to continue state investments in seismic upgrades of schools and emergency service buildings in Oregon.

Brown’s plan lists three

programs that need to be funded, including the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program. By 2021, the plan says, the state must also have a formal assessment of school seismic rehabilitation programs, and complete an economic forecast for how to reduce risk and fund emergency services like hospitals, fire stations and dispatch centers.

Other goals include implementing a statewide earthquake warning system by 2023, ensuring 250,000 vulnerable homes have two week’s worth of supplies, and strengthening local emergency management organizations to have better staging areas and supply chains.

According to the state’s report and action plan, Oregon’s Department of Geology and Mineral Industries conducted an assessment in 1999, which underscored the state’s lack of preparation for a major seismic event, and predicted an economic

loss of \$12 billion and more than 7,800 casualties. It predicted that 17,300 households would be displaced, and more than 12,400 people would need emergency shelter.

In Hermiston, two of the elementary schools are more than 35 years old, and district officials have repeatedly called for upgrades to the buildings.

Bacon said Highland Hills, which was built in 1980, has not been examined specifically for vulnerabilities during an earthquake, but he said the layout of the school could cause problems after one.

“One of the challenges with an open campus is accessibility to the campus during an emergency,” Bacon said. “The ability to keep our students from public access becomes a real challenge.”

Hermiston Communications Officer Maria Duron said the district has not recently applied for any grants for seismic upgrades.

Candidate forum focuses on Umatilla’s improvements, future

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Optimism was in the air on Thursday night as Umatilla residents packed into the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center to hear from candidates for the city council and mayor.

Candidates spoke of their love of Umatilla and excitement for the city’s progress, and audience members asking questions praised the quality of the school district and the city’s growth. One woman said the city had never looked so good.

It was a markedly different vibe from four years ago, when residents were showing up to city council meetings to complain about empty buildings downtown, unkempt properties, pan-

handlers and a proliferation of businesses, such as strip clubs and smoke shops. They testified that they were embarrassed by the city’s appearance, and one woman said Umatilla had turned into “a little Tijuana sideshow.”

A lot has changed since then, something that incumbents have pointed out in their campaigns. The city has stepped up code enforcement and created a spring cleanup event. The chamber and the local museum have added events to engage the community. Two major housing developments have come in. New businesses, such as Rae’s Dayz Diner have opened, and Amazon data centers have provided money for new parks and recreation projects.

“There are a lot of mov-

ing parts to the city’s success,” Mayor Daren Duffloth said.

Duffloth was joined by challenger Mary Dedrick; city council incumbent Mark Keith and his opponent Corinne Funderburk; Leslie Smith, who is running for the seat Mel Ray has decided to leave; and Josy Chavez, who is running unopposed to replace Selene Torres-Medrano.

While incumbents ran on the city’s successes, the newcomers also tended to keep it positive instead of attacking what the city has been doing. Funderburk, a language arts teacher at Umatilla High School, said she was thrilled to be raising her three teenage boys in Umatilla. Now that they are older and she has more flex-

ibility, she said, she wanted to get more involved with the community.

“I’m so proud of Umatilla and of living here,” she said.

Funderburk is one of three candidates who work for the school district — Dedrick is a volunteer coordinator at McNary Heights Elementary School and Chavez is an administrative secretary for the district.

Questions for the candidates at Thursday night’s forum ranged from what the role of the planning commission is to how the city should support small businesses. One recurring theme was how the city could encourage more citizen involvement, particularly with the Hispanic community.

Chavez said she believes

having a bilingual councilor helps. She pointed to when she worked in the office at one of the schools, and her co-worker who didn’t speak any Spanish said when Spanish-speaking parents walked in and saw that Chavez wasn’t there they would leave.

Dedrick also pointed to her experience with the schools as a volunteer coordinator, saying in her experience it helps to recruit specific people and address whatever might hold them back from getting involved. She told the story of a parent who said she would love to help but she didn’t think her English was good enough. Dedrick convinced her to try it out, saying she could leave any time she felt uncomfortable. The woman loved it so

much she now works at the school.

Keith said he speaks “very good” Spanish and helped start the Mexican Independence Day celebration in Hermiston. Chavez asked Keith in Spanish if he knew when Mexican Independence Day was, to which he (correctly) answered in English that it was Sept. 16.

In their closing statements, candidates reiterated the positive things they saw in Umatilla and laid out how they believed they could help that growth and improvement continue. Smith, a retired nurse, said she had a love of Umatilla’s people and plenty of time to dedicate to the city.

“I want to serve,” she said. “I think I can do good things.”

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— Winnie, mother from Grants Pass