



Santa, a.k.a. Hermiston City Councilman Doug Primmer, chats with Landry and Evelyn Christensen Thursday after the Christmas tree lighting on Festival Street.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney /East Oregonian



EO file photo/East Oregonian

Tyler Knight of Pilot Rock rides the Echo chair with ski instructor Kyle McFarley of Weston at the Spout Springs Ski Area in Tollgate in Dec. 31, 2015.

Christmas kicks off with tree lighting

By JADE MCDOWELL
Staff Writer

Lights and smiles lit up Hermiston's new festival street Thursday night.

The tree-lighting ceremony brought crowds downtown for entertainment, food and a chance to get a picture with Santa Claus.

City manager Byron Smith said the city was excited about the chance to hold the event for another year as it "grows and gets more popular all the time." While the city has placed a giant tree on Second Street every year since 2015, this is the first year since the block was transformed into a more pedestrian-friendly "festival street" with brickwork, trees, benches and other features. This year's tree is the tallest so far, at 40 feet, and is decorated with approximately 2,000 lights.

Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce director Debbie Pedro asked the crowd if they noticed the extra lights, flowers and other improvements to downtown that the city and Hermiston Downtown District have been adding throughout 2018.

"I hope you guys are really proud of what you're seeing down here," she said, prompting applause.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney /East Oregonian

Hermiston's Christmas tree glows on Thursday night on Festival Street shortly after Santa switched it on during the tree lighting ceremony

In addition to Christmas lights, businesses decorated their storefronts for a holiday decorating competition. Pedro announced Hermiston Drug & Gift as the winner of the contest.

After the tree-lighting,

families listened to Hermiston High School's Majazzy choir or stood in line for pictures with Santa.

Mallory Rehmke, 10, said she was going to ask for a unicorn. The adults in her group told her that prob-

ably wasn't going to happen, but she had faith.

Standing with her were Isabelle Newton, 5, who had her heart set on a "big doll house" in pink, and Aurora Rojas, 6, who wanted a skateboard.

"I'm gonna learn with my dad," she said.

Some children in line were still thinking about what they want most to appear under the tree on Christmas morning — JT Hudson, 7, finally decided on a Nintendo, while Reagan Hudson, 4, wants a Barbie Dream House. But others came prepared. Audrey Wright, 5, wrote her list down in a letter to Santa to make sure she didn't forget anything.

"I want a special dolly, and candy cane, and a sled" she listed.

Once the big moment arrived, some children hopped right up on Santa's lap. Others were more shy. A small girl in a bright pink coat resisted getting too near, but did consent to reaching out for a dainty high five.

The Christmas tree and other lights in the festival street area, located on Northeast Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue, will be part of a light show performed each Monday through Friday at 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. until Christmas.

Spout Springs, Bluewood to open this winter

By JADE MCDOWELL
Staff Writer

"We want everyone to be safe," he said.

Spout Springs Ski Area will open this season after a two-year hiatus.

Hill manager Richard Murray said the ski area in the Blue Mountains isn't open quite yet, but should be soon.

"We've got 18 inches of pack and we need another good storm to open," he said last Wednesday.

He said when the ski area opens they will announce it on their Facebook page and their website, www.spoutspringsskiarea.com.

Murray said he will be taking applications for jobs at Spout Springs on Dec. 14 from noon to 4 p.m., Dec. 15 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Dec. 16 from 9 a.m. to noon. Positions include lift operator, general labor, restaurant jobs and a rental shop tech. Interested applicants can visit the rental shop during those days.

The family-owned and operated business, located on Highway 204 between Weston and Elgin, has not opened some years due to insufficient snow pack, and last year did not open due to health problems faced by owner John Murray.

Murray said Spout Springs sometimes opens later in the season than other ski resorts because they want to make sure there is enough snow to protect skiers.

According to the ski area's website, it first opened in the late 1920s. Since then it has played host to competitions hosted by the Blue Mountain Ski Club, served as the Nordic training center for the United State Olympic team and Norwegian jump team in the 1950s and 1960s, and provided a place for the U.S. Forest Service to hold a ski school.

Bluewood

Bluewood, a ski area outside Dayton, Wash., will also open this season.

Its 2018-2019 season begins Friday. It will run Dec. 14-16 and then daily Dec. 20 through Jan. 1, except Christmas Day. In January it will run Wednesday through Sunday and on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

According to a news release from Bluewood, as of Dec. 5 there were 20 inches of snow at the base and 23 inches at the summit. The ski area is also expecting fresh snow early next week.

The Bluewood ski area has added new conveyor lifts in the beginner area and a new yurt at the summit where guests can get a snack or warm drink. The Skyline Express and Easy Rider conveyor lifts are scheduled to run on opening day, while Triple Nickel is yet to be determined.

County health department offers defense against STD surge

By KATHY ANEY
Staff Writer

In the lobby of the Umatilla County Health Department, among the Christmas decorations, is a sign that announces "FREE CONDOMS."

This isn't Christmas cheer gone wild, but rather part of an effort to reduce STDs. The United States is experiencing what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls "steep and sustained increases in sexually transmitted diseases."

The report shows gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis all trending alarmingly upward.

"Oregon is following the national trend," said Tim Menza, who manages the state's HIV/STD prevention

program. "We logged 6,000 cases of gonorrhea in 2017, up from 1,000 in the year 2000."

The gonorrhea spike is especially alarming. The CDC received reports of 555,608 cases in 2017, an increase of 75.2 percent since 2009 and 18.6 percent over the previous year. The increase involved both men and women, and all racial and ethnic groups.

Gonorrhea can lead to scarring, infertility, arthritis, heart valve damage and inflammation in the lining of the brain. The last time gonorrhea rankings came out in 2017, Umatilla County had the third highest rate in the state.

"Our rates were pretty low, but in 2013, they started picking up," said Joe

Fiumara, director of Umatilla County's public health department.

Umatilla County had four cases in 2012, increasing to 88 by 2016, then dropping to 67 the next year. With 82 cases so far in 2018, Fiumara said, the county is on pace to equal or slightly surpass 2016 numbers.

Chlamydia and syphilis also increased nationally and statewide last year.

Chlamydia is most common. The CDC received reports of 1.7 million cases of chlamydia, compared with 1.6 million in 2016. In addition, syphilis diagnoses rose from 17,375 cases to 30,664.

Umatilla County isn't exactly following the wider trend. Instead of increasing, numbers dipped a bit. Last

year, the county reported 323 cases of chlamydia compared with 264 cases so far this year. There were zero cases of syphilis in 2018, compared with seven in 2017.

However, not all cases are reported, not by a shot. Many affected people don't know they're walking around with an STD.

"It's common to have no symptoms," Fiumara said. "Someone can go for quite a while before they know there's a problem."

He urged regular screening for those at risk.

In Umatilla County, when the health department gets a positive report of an STD, a communicable disease nurse contacts the affected person via phone or text.

"We talk about the risk



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A basket full of free condoms sits in the restroom at the Umatilla County Health Department in Pendleton.

factors and provide an opportunity for treatment," Fiumara said. "We try to get contact information and do followup with partners. We

hope they listen and take heed."

Testing and treatment for gonorrhea and chlamydia is fairly cheap, he said, while treating syphilis is more expensive. However, he said, "we don't turn anyone away for lack of ability to pay."

Prevention is the better and less-risky way to go. Those condoms available at the Umatilla County Public Health Department aren't for decoration — they protect against STDs.

"They're not 100 percent," Fiumara said, "but they're close."

He urged routine screenings, available by appointment at the Pendleton office on Mondays and Tuesdays and Hermiston on Thursday and Fridays.

<h2>MEDICAL DIRECTORY</h2> <p>To advertise in the Medical Directory, please call: Jeanne at 541-564-4531 or Audra at 541-564-4538</p>	<h3>FAMILY DENTISTRY</h3> <p>DESERTDENTAL Family Dentistry ~New Patients Welcome~ 541-567-8161 995 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston Ryan M. Wieseler, D.D.S.</p>	<h3>URGENT AND FAMILY CARE</h3> <p>HERMISTON FAMILY MEDICINE & URGENT CARE Sports & Dot Physicals • Minor Injuries • Family Care • Minor Surgeries We accept Medicare & some Advantage Medicare plans NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY HOURS: Mon-Sat 7:30am-7:00pm 541-567-1137 236 E. Newport, Hermiston (across from U.S. Bank)</p>
<h3>PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY</h3> <p>Call Today! 541-289-5433 1060 W. Elm, Suite #115, Hermiston, OR (across from Good Shepherd Medical Center) Advanced PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY www.apd4kids.com Office Hours: Mon-Fri 8am-4pm CareCredit, Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express Find us on Facebook</p>	<h3>MENTAL HEALTH</h3> <p>LET US BE THE ONE THAT HELPS! LIFEWAYS HELPING PEOPLE • Adult, Child and Family Therapy • Psychiatric Evaluation and Treatment • Mental Health and Crisis Services • Confidential and Professional Care LIFEWAYS PENDLETON 331 SE 2nd St., Pendleton, OR 97801 Office: 541-276-6207 Crisis Phone: 866-343-4473 LIFEWAYS HERMISTON 595 NW 11th St., Hermiston, OR 97838 Office: 541-567-2536 WWW.LIFEWAYS.ORG</p>	<h3>VISION CARE</h3> <p>Eye Health & Vision Care Robert D. Rolen, O.D., LLC Optometric Physician 115 W. HERMISTON AVE., SUITE 130 541-567-1837</p>