

# Lifeguard recruitment season begins

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

There's still snow on the ground at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center, but the search for lifeguards is warming up.

Pool manager Kasia Robbins said lifeguards get 40 to 45 hours of training, so recruitment starts in the spring to fill positions.

"It's not an easy training," she said.

The parks and recreation department will be holding swim tests for applicants at the Boardman Recreation Center March 15-16. The test includes a 300-yard swim, 2-minute water treading session and a timed swim to retrieve a 10-pound brick from 7-10 feet of water. Those who pass can participate in a free lifeguard certification course in April and May.

Katie Bradshaw, a junior who is planning to come back for a second season of lifeguarding this summer, said the distance swim was the part most people struggled with during last year's swim test.

"I think in my group there were 12 to 15 girls, and I know some of them didn't pass," she said.

Bradshaw enjoyed the job and plans to return, but said it's important for applicants to know that, "even though it's a fun job, make sure you take it seriously."

Making sure lifeguards and swim instructors at the aquatic center are good swimmers is crucial, as a life could be on the line. It's something lifeguards like Kora Tratten are acutely aware of.

"It's always my fear of not getting something right, because it could be someone's life," she said. "But the training helped."



HH file photo

Hayley Mele-Seibel, 15, watches over the multi-use pool during swim lessons in 2018 at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center.

Tratten also plans to return this year. She said she applied last year because she needed a summer job and as a member of the Hermiston High School swim team, it seemed like "a natural fit."

"The tan was definitely a bonus," she said.

Robbins said despite a tan being a perk of the job, they do ask their lifeguards to protect themselves with sunscreen and make them "very aware" of the risks of sun and dehydration.

"If they have a longer shift they

work a split shift to get them out of the sun, and keep them hydrated," she said.

Madi Wilson, another returning lifeguard, said that she loves the sense of community and friendship among staff. Coming to work didn't even really feel like a job, she said, because she had so much fun.

"I get to be outside all day, I get to be in the sun, and I get to help people and make sure they're safe," she said.

Lifeguards' training doesn't

end after taking classes on CPR, rescue techniques and other life-saving skills. They participate in "shadow shifts" where they accompanied an experienced lifeguard. During the season there are also "live audits" where supervisors get a customer at the pool to pretend they are drowning, while the supervisor watches the lifeguard respond, and then gives them feedback.

Brandon Artz, recreation supervisor, said the aquatic center hires lifeguards of all ages, from

15-year-olds at their first job to teachers looking for something to do on their summer break. They are also hiring a concessions crew, front desk cashiers and facility maintenance positions.

Jessica Campbell is one of the teachers who spends her summer at the aquatic center, working as a lead supervisor. She said she applied three years ago, and has enjoyed it so much she will probably continue to return for years to come.

"Truly, the summers there have been wonderful," she said. "It's like a little summer family."

She said many people have a misperception they need to be on the swim team at their school to apply, but there are plenty of employees at the pool who aren't. She also said that one thing that holds teens back is worrying that a summer job might make them miss out on a family vacation or sports camp.

"They're nervous to apply because they don't want to miss out on those things, but (pool managers) are very accommodating," she said.

Campbell said there are downsides to the job — it can be a long, hot shift out there some days — but it can be incredibly rewarding, particularly when she sees a lifeguard go through the emotions of having just saved a life.

"You hope you don't ever have to get in to save somebody, but you do," she said.

Registration is now open for lifeguards at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center. Registration for the swim tests can be completed online at <https://bit.ly/2H9xMkq>. Times are March 15 from 4:30-5:30 p.m. and March 16 from 9-10:30 a.m.

# Council clears way for new chamber of commerce building

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston city council on Monday cleared hurdles for a new chamber of commerce building, new school and new water tower.

The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce plans to use the \$1 million it got from the state legislature in 2018 to build a new set of offices and workforce development center on the southeast corner of East Evelyn Avenue and South Highway 395, across the highway from New Hope Community Church.

On Monday the city council voted to approve the chamber's request that the 2.4 acre property be re-zoned from multi-family residential to outlying commercial to allow the project to go forward.

George Anderson, attorney for the chamber, described the property as "truly a superb location" for the new building.

"The chamber of course needs a new home and has \$1 million to find a home and build a home," he said. "It's just wonderful."

Paul Keeler, the chamber board's president, said they hoped to get started on



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce has a deal to buy the land on the corner of South Highway 395 and East Evelyn Avenue to build a workforce development center.

the building "maybe in the next three to four months" if the zoning was approved. The plan is for it to feature offices and a conference room for the chamber and a space where up to 120 people could participate in workforce training activities.

Board member and listing agent for the property, Tim Mabry said he had tried to reach out to developers over the last year and a half but had been told universally that the 2.4 acre property was too small for an apartment complex to pencil out.

City planner Clint Spencer told the council he had heard similar things. He

also noted that the property was already served with the utilities that would be needed for the project and that the surrounding roads would be equipped to handle the resulting traffic. The entrance to the property would be off Evelyn Avenue, not Highway 395.

City councilors — including Jackie Myers, Roy Barron and Rod Hardin (who chimed in by phone from Washington, D.C. while at the national League of Oregon Cities conference) — voted unanimously

to support the change.

"Congratulations to the chamber," Mayor David Drotzmann said. "We look forward to seeing a nice facility there, and workforce development."

On Monday the council also approved a change to the comprehensive plan and annexation of about 71 acres of property owned by Hermiston School District and the Hermiston Irrigation District. After a land swap, the school district now owns 19 acres at the corner of Northeast 10th Street and East Theater Lane and the irrigation district owns another 51 acres behind it.

The school district plans to build a new elementary school on the property, as soon as it can get a bond passed to pay for one. Anderson, who also serves as the HSD attorney, said the district swapped parcels

with the irrigation district so that it could better route traffic by having access off of two streets instead of one.

The council unanimously approved the joint request to annex both properties into the city, and to change them on the comprehensive plan from future residential to an urban status, clearing the way for a future school.

The council's third unanimous vote for the night was to award a \$3.3 million contract to Premier Excavation of Pasco for a water project that will include two miles of new pipes, an upgrade to the Alora Heights booster station and a new 1-million gallon water tower on the corner of East Punkin Center and Northeast 10th Street.

The city has taken out a loan for the project that will be repaid using the \$1 million-per-year payments

in lieu of taxes from Lamb Weston for its major expansion project outside Hermiston. The city and Umatilla County will each get \$500,000 per year for the next 15 years, and Umatilla County is giving its first \$2 million in payments to the water project.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the project has several major economic benefits.

In the event of a major power outage, Morgan said, the city currently only has about 18 hours worth of water stored at a time. The new water tank will increase storage capacity.

Second, the project will provide water (or adequate water pressure) to about 290 "highly developable" acres where the city expects to see new housing development as soon as the project is complete.

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