



Photo contributed by Darla Irwin

Darla Irwin, second from right, presents a check from Club 24 to UCFD stair climb team Danny Hinton, left, Corey Gorham and Gaige Phillips.

Club 24 members, staff to put in 43 hours on stair climb machine for charity

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A simple fundraiser idea turned into a group workout challenge after Hermiston Club 24 manager Darla Irwin decided to help raise money for cancer research.

Firefighters from Umatilla County Fire District 1 were in Seattle on Sunday for the SCOTT Stair Climb, which gets firefighters around the country to

climb 69 flights of stairs in full gear to raise money for leukemia and lymphoma research. The UCFD team had been practicing on the stair machines at Club 24.

The cause inspired Irwin, who offered to let people sponsor minutes on the stair machines for her to complete in fire-fighting gear weighing 45 pounds. She got more than she bargained for — the sponsored minutes ended up totaling more

than 43 hours of exercise.

"I have a whole new respect for what our fire team does out there after spending numerous hours working off minutes," she wrote in an email. "It is very humbling to know that's what they do for our families and homes everyday."

Luckily, other staff and a few club members have offered to help her work off the minutes, something Irwin said she is extremely

grateful for. She said she wanted to thank Laney Irwin, Makara Reth, Paige Esterbloom, Kasi Vertrees, Javier Echeverria, Erika Ceja, Cayla Barthel, Kristi Smalley, Jo Jo Garcia, Erik Peterson, Dave Gracia, Dennis McClure, Danny Hinton and Jeremy Gillette for their help.

The staff presented UCFD with a check on Friday for \$3,655 to take to Seattle with them.

West end cities host housing open house

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo are holding an open house to discuss housing with members of the public.

The event is March 13 from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Stafford Hansell Government Center, 915 S.E. Columbia Drive, in Hermiston.

The three cities have partnered together for the West County Housing Study, paid for by a grant from the Department of Land Conservation & Development. Hermiston did not participate because it recently completed its own study. Consulting teams will present an overview of the residential build-

able lands inventory and a needs assessment for housing and residential land, including a forecast of new housing the three cities will need to accommodate forecasted growth for the next 20 years. Staff from all three cities will also be present to answer questions and take input.

Stanfield City Manager

Blair Larsen said in a statement that the partnership "reflects the regional housing and employment markets" that the three cities have together.

"We share many of the same challenges and opportunities, and it just made sense to join together for this study," he said.

Hermiston, Pendleton don't meet rent burdened criteria

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

The state has placed new requirements on cities considered "severely rent burdened," but Hermiston and Pendleton don't fit that criteria.

The state defines severely rent burdened cities as those where more than 25 percent of rental households are spending more than half of their income on rent.

Hermiston, in particular, is a good place to be a renter according to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and used by the state. Of all the cities in Oregon with a population over 10,000, Hermiston has the second-lowest percentage of severely rent burdened households, at 15.5 percent.

Pendleton comes in at 18.7 percent, with only eight of the cities coming in lower. Overall, 27 of the 49 cities in Oregon with a population over 10,000 are considered severely rent burdened.

The data is being tracked by Oregon Housing and Community Services, a government agency that promotes affordable housing through measures ranging from downpayment assistance programs to housing choice vouchers.

Ariel Nelson, communications liaison for the agency, said OHCS published the list of severely rent burdened cities as part of House Bill 4006, which passed during the 2018 legislative session. The data concerning households spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent is gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau as part of its annual American Community Survey.

"That's a data point we often use at the agency," she said of the 50 percent statistic.

Each year, cities that meet the criteria of "severely rent burdened" will have to complete a survey about housing affordability and conduct at least one public meeting to discuss the causes and consequences of rent burdens and possible solu-

tions to reduce the number of rent burdened households in the community.

Since Hermiston and Pendleton fall below the 25 percent mark, they don't qualify as "severely" rent burdened.

Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said he couldn't say for sure exactly why Hermiston had a relatively low number of rent burdened households, but Hermiston is "obviously a totally different market than some of the metro areas."

The cost of purchasing a home, for example, is much lower than Oregon's largest cities, leading some residents to make the jump to home ownership rather than pay prices on the higher end of Hermiston's rental market.

"More people here who want to own, have the ability to own," he said.

Morgan also said he hears from landlords in the area that if rents in Hermiston get too high people often decide they can pay just as much in the Tri-Cities while living closer to amenities such as Costco.

Hermiston has 2,537 renter households, many of which contain multiple people, according to the survey data. The city hasn't had luck in recruiting a new apartment complex is several years, although Morgan said it's "not for lack of trying."

"Their response is that they can't get the rents they need," he said.

There have been some smaller rentals such as duplexes built in the past few years, as well as the new Cimmaron Terrace town homes off Theater Lane. He said there are some larger rental complexes in the works.

According to the rent burden data put out by the state at the beginning of the month, Pendleton has 2,660 renter households, with 497 of them considered severely rent burdened. The city has experienced a recent housing boom and in November approved the sale of property on Westgate for a 200-unit housing complex by I&E Construction.

BMCC goes off book to save students \$1 million

By ANTONIO SIERRA
STAFF WRITER

At a time of rising costs for tuition and fees, it's not often that a college can celebrate what it helped students save.

But Blue Mountain Community College did that when it held a small get-together to tout a large number: \$1 million.

That's the figure BMCC

officials estimate the college has saved students over the past two years in textbook costs, savings made possible by a long-term effort to convert its course material to open educational resources, or OERs.

BMCC's effort comes at a time when textbook prices are skyrocketing.

According to Vox, textbook prices have risen 1,000 percent since the 1970s

and a 2014 report from the Public Interest Research Groups showed that two-thirds of students surveyed had skipped buying or renting course materials because they couldn't afford it.

BMCC is no different. Before getting involved in OERs, Bruce Kauss, the BMCC e-learning coordinator, said it wasn't unusual for a course to require a \$300 textbook.

Kauss said BMCC started introducing OERs into their courses in 2012, but the college really started gearing up its efforts in the past two years.

Using \$98 as the average cost of a textbook and factoring in enrollment and the number of classes that use OERs, BMCC estimates it now saves students at least \$500,000 in textbook costs.

BMCC is able to avoid

using traditional textbooks in many of its courses by encouraging instructors to build their curriculum through online resources like CK-12 and OpenStax.

It's a trend that colleges and universities across the country are taking advantage of, and BMCC wants to be a leader in that trend in the state.

John Fields, the BMCC vice president of instruc-

tion, said it isn't always easy to get faculty on board with OERs.

A former administrator at Florida State College at Jacksonville, Fields said some faculty members preferred using textbooks because of the additional supplementary material that provided lesson plans and tests.

But Fields said there isn't the same cultural resistance at BMCC.

PET OF THE WEEK

Holly was found as a stray on the streets with a large mass that turned out to be malignant. She has had two surgeries now and it appears that the cancer has all been removed. She is a very sweet dog that is great with kids. She would love a lap to lay in and be your little shadow. Holly is spayed, Microchipped, Vaccinated. She is potty and crate trained.



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