

COLUMN

Hermiston needs a recreation center

Hermiston is a family-friendly place to live. There are parks, a bowling alley, a roller rink, and in the summer an incredible aquatic center. But with an ever-growing population of younger people, Hermiston is falling behind in activities.

According to the Hermiston School District, more than 5,300 students attend the public schools in Hermiston. That's 5,300 students between the ages of 5 and 18 whose favorite phrase — as any parent would know — after school or on weekends is, "I'm bored."

So how can Hermiston make our town become a more kid and teen-friendly place to live? One idea would be adding a public and affordable recre-

ation center. This center could include an open gym for athletes to practice year-round, an indoor pool so swimmers no longer have to travel to Pendleton or Boardman to practice, maybe even a rock wall for simple recreation purposes or an ice skating rink so Hermiston could add a hockey team.

The possibilities are endless, and it would positively add to our community, not just in the fun it would provide, but in the possible jobs. A facility like a recreation center would need employees to run it, clean it and control safety, thus creating even more jobs in Hermiston's growing community. A recreation center would create a perfect place to hold birthday parties, fun family gatherings, and even gradu-

ation parties. The possibilities are endless.

This facility could even offer specials on certain days creating more demand and economic opportunity. A recreation center could open up a world of possibilities for new activities and sports previously not offered in Hermiston. This center would encourage more physical activity and get teenagers off their phones for a while to go have fun with their friends in a safe and exciting environment.

Boardman recently added a recreation center that could be a model for Hermiston. Hermiston already has an incredible pool that provides aquatic fitness, swimming lessons, lifeguard training, and a very fun experience, but it is only open in the summer. The recreation center would easily fix this problem and

continue the fun and opportunity for economic stimulation that the aquatic center provides in the summer.

By providing a recreation center in Hermiston, the community of students would have a safe and fun place to relax after a grueling day of school or hang out with friends on weekends. It would provide new jobs, a place for kids to play and exercise, and better access to new sports. Adding a recreation center may seem to be a daunting task that seems far away, but if plans started now, it is a possibility for Hermiston's future.

So Hermiston, let's really open our arms to the youth in our community and provide a fun and safe place for them to spend their days.

Nadine Ferguson is a member of the color guard at Hermiston High School.



Nadine Ferguson



Umatilla High School teachers wear "Red for Ed."

Contributed photo by Heidi Sipe

Umatilla teachers wear Red for Ed

Each Tuesday for the rest of the legislative session, Umatilla School District's teachers will be wearing "Red for Ed." Staff and school board members will be wearing red shirts to support stable and adequate funding for schools, and to encourage others in the community to learn about school funding and help advocate for more resources for schools.

The district is calling for a \$10.37 billion investment budget to be approved by the legislature, including a \$1 billion school improvement fund. With its share of the funds, Umatilla School District would implement smaller class sizes, a variety of classes to give students a well-rounded education, student physical and mental health services and increased learning time.

The school district sent out a press release saying that in the past several years, teachers in Umatilla have made many sacrifices due to the struggling economy.



Contributed photo by Heidi Sipe

Teachers at Clara Brownell Middle School wear red every Tuesday to bring awareness to the need for adequate education funding.

"Over the years, Umatilla cut positions and reduced expenses due to budget constraints," the press release stated. "Employees at every level voluntarily took pay freezes and cut paid work days to create the best opportunities for students possible in tough economic times. Today, Oregon's economy is strong, yet Oregon is still

ranked 29th in the United States for per-student funding."

The district said that local support for schools is strong, with voters passing a facilities bond in 2016, and often donating to student fundraisers. But at the state level, it said, funding is not where it should be, and Umatilla schools still haven't been restored to pre-recession staffing levels or supply budgets.

The district recently did a survey with staff and community members to identify what they think should be prioritized if additional funding is received from the legislature. Umatilla schools are also hosting an event on May 8, called "Walk in their Shoes." Community members can sign up and complete a background check, and will be able to hear budget updates and spend the day with a student. The goal of the event is to have community members help administration identify the strengths and needs of Umatilla schools.

LETTER

Hermiston fee hikes should be refunded

A century ago, any brazen leaders who had the audacity to raise fees a whopping 50 percent would have been tarred, feathered, and run out of town on a rail. So imagine our shock when we opened our Hermiston water/sewer bill on March 11, and discovered that our rates had skyrocketed a whopping 50.9 percent in one month! You've got to be kidding! As retired senior citizens, whose retirement wages may (or may not) receive a modest wage increase of 2 percent per year, due to inflation, this crazy increase really blew our minds. Indeed, if someone raises fees above the inflation rate, we call it "greed." If the rate is 25 times more than the inflation rate, we call

it "criminal." Actually, we know of a single mother in Hermiston who already uses bath water three times before draining the tub, yet in one city vote her bill increased 50 percent! Seriously? We believe that when our city leaders make asinine mistakes, they deserve a chance to make it right. We suggest that they immediately go back to the drawing board, and refigure an increase that is closer to the inflation rate, and consider a credit refund as well. Failure to do so should result in removal from office. We don't need a frivolous dictatorship, or oligarchy, in Hermiston. Life here should be "sweet" — not bitter, right? Moreover, we need leaders with integrity, who realize this fee hike is unacceptable, and are willing to fix it ASAP!

**Jerald Carlson
Hermiston**

PHOTO OF THE DAY

Bridge Replacement



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A large boom crane is being used to install a new culvert on Southwest First Street on Tuesday in Hermiston. Work is expected to continue through the end of March.

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PET OF THE WEEK

Alvin is a work in progress. He is the last of the hoard situation and the most unsocialized. He needs the right person to give him the chance to get to know him and his amazing personality. No children.

MEET ALVIN!

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