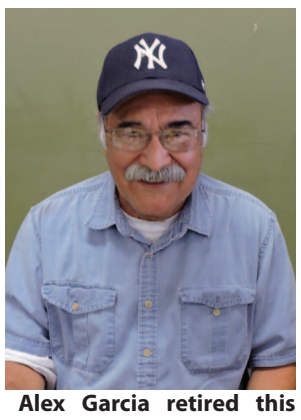
Hermiston Marlette employee retires after 50 years

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR



Alex Garcia retired this week from Marlette Homes after 50 years on the job.

When Alex Garcia started working at Marlette Homes in Hermiston, the Vietnam War was in full swing and Richard Nixon had just been elected president.

Garcia retired on May 6 after more than 50 years at the manufactured home plant. He started work there on Nov. 7, 1968, at age 21.

He started out installing floors and during the ensuing five decades moved through plumbing, insulation, framing, painting and welding.

"The only thing I haven't done is shingles," he said. "I've learned just about everything else."

Most recently he ran the tool crib. His job included keeping track of the facility's tools, loaning them out and repairing them.

Garcia said he has seen plenty of changes in the industry over the years, down to the very tools used to build the homes.

"We started with a hammer and nails, and now we use air tools," he said.

Tom Shimp, production manager and Garcia's supervisor, said Garcia will be "very hard to replace."

He described Garcia as a "super great guy" with an impressive work ethic and attendance record.

"He's one of those guys who you don't have to manage his time, he manages his own time," Shimp said.

He said Garcia was an important part of the team and will be greatly missed.

During a barbecue at Marlette in Garcia's honor on May 6, Shimp presented him with a $500 gift card to Ranch & Home and told him that he was welcome to come back and visit at any time.

Members of Garcia's family, who were also present for the celebration, thanked the company and said they had enjoyed the decades of attending company picnics and other events.

General manager Glen Alessandri said the staff wanted to make sure Garcia's family was present because he is a "family man."

He, too, said Garcia would be missed.

"He's quiet and unassuming — you would never know he had been here 50 years," Alessandri said.

Christina Mendoza, one of the many employees at the barbecue, said Garcia's job in the tool crib touched every department and everyone at the Hermiston facility knew Garcia.

"He's always nice and always puts a smile on my face," Mendoza said. "He's just a good guy all around. If you don't know who he is, you're not going to make it here."

Garcia waved off most of the attention at his surprise party, saying there wasn't much to his longevity there.

"I needed the work, I got a good job and I stuck to it," he said.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Hermiston City Council approved a contract to resurface West Hermiston Avenue during the council meeting Monday evening in Hermiston.

Council approves Hermiston Avenue project

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston city council awarded a contract Monday for an overlay of Hermiston Avenue.

Pioneer Construction will work over the summer to resurface the road between First Street and 10th Street, with a full rebuild between First and Third streets. The city has stipulated the work must be complete by Aug. 2 so as not to interfere with the Umatilla County Fair parade.

Pioneer Construction was the low bidder at $597,787 — more than $80,000 below engineers' estimates.

During Monday's council meeting the council also cleaned up some language in its Local Improvement District ordinance in order to comply with state and federal law. The ordinance allows the city or neighbors to initiate projects such as sidewalks or street paving and split the cost between neighboring property owners.

Two residents voiced concerns about the city's ability to charge residents for work and place a lien on their property if they can't pay upfront. But councilors stated that the city has always had that power and is not interested in forcing unwanted changes on neighborhoods. The city's last LID was in 2004, and councilors stated that all of the projects in recent memory were voluntarily initiated by property owners.

On Monday the council also gave needed approval for Umatilla County to adopt McKinney Avenue as a county road. The road had previously been considered a public road but due to an oversight was not officially a city or county road. The designation caused problems when the well-used road behind Safeway developed a network of wide, deep potholes and there were questions about whose responsibility it was to fix them.

During Monday's meeting parks and recreation director Larry Fetter gave councilors an update on Riverfront Park, which was damaged by heavy flooding in April.

The layers of silt have been scraped from the parking lot and trails and large piles of branches and fallen trees have been carted away. The work being done now is less visible, Fetter said, as they unbury and in some cases replace the park's sprinkler heads and fix the damaged septic system. He said they plan to turn the collapsed section of asphalt trail into gravel for now and then repair it next time the city is doing a project involving asphalt.

Before Monday's regular meeting, city councilors participated in a workshop as part of the city's ongoing work on a strategic plan for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. On Monday councilors discussed pricing and marketing for the center.

Umatilla County's total proposed budget exceeds $90 million

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County's budget for the upcoming fiscal year will crest $91 million, an increase of almost $12.6 million from the ongoing budget.

The county also plans to boost its ranks of equivalent full-time employees from 311 to 324.

Robert Pahl, the county's chief finance officer, explained revenue from development deals, boosts in certain state funds and increases in capital spending and a larger beginning balance contribute to the total $91.3 million budget proposal.

The general fund for 2019-20 approaches $32.4 million, a 9% rise, while special reserve funds reach $53.8 million, a jump of almost 18%.

Law enforcement has the largest share of the county's budget, with the sheriff's office alone accounting for nearly $15.5 million. Pahl said the county continues its trend during recent budget cycles of adding law enforcement positions.

The sheriff's office is getting two new deputies, and the distinct attorney's office gets a new position to handle the state mandate to record grand jury proceedings. The Community Justice Department, which includes parole and probation, is getting three new positions.

Special reserve funds will pay for 148.4 full-time positions in the upcoming fiscal year and the general fund will pay for 175.6, a combined increase of 13 positions. General fund positions have been around the 167 mark the past two cycles.

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