

COMMUNITIES
OFFER UP
HOLIDAY
ACTIVITIES »
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INSIDE

LOWER TAXES

Hermiston School District expects school bond property taxes to go down by about 40 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valued after paying off all its pre-2008 bonds.

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PERFECT SCORE

Hermiston's Case Hiatt hits 100 of 100 targets at state trap shooting tournament.

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BED BUILD

Church partners with Sleep in Heavenly Peace to build 30 beds for area children without a place to sleep.

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BY THE WAY

Burn ban in effect

Umatilla County's annual non-agricultural burn ban went into effect Monday.

According to a county press release, the burn ban applies to all unincorporated areas of Umatilla County, excluding land owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the state of Oregon, and the federal government.

Prohibited activities include burn barrels, yard and garden debris piles, and small scale residential burning.

Agricultural burning is still allowed, but smoke management permit holders are required to check for burn day status by calling 541-278-6397 or by visiting the Umatilla County website or its smoke management Facebook page.

Phone lines were down for four days at Two Riv-

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Firefighters attempt to contain a fire burning in a residence on Northwest 13th Street in 2017 in Hermiston. Fireworks were the suspected cause. Staff photo by E.J. Harris



Fireworks line tables at the Black Cat fireworks stand in the Fiesta Foods parking lot in Hermiston. Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Fireworks can spark property damage, injuries

By JADE MCDOWELL AND JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITERS

'Tis the season for burnt fingers and grass fires.

Fireworks on the Fourth of July have been an American tradition since July 4, 1777 when rebellious Colonists still at war with Great Britain used them to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The tradition calls for some caution, however.

While many fireworks accidents end with only minor damage, there have been tragedies in the region. Two years ago a pair of families in Hermiston lost their home after a duplex

on Northeast 13th Street burned down in a grass fire that witnesses said was likely started by children who had been playing with fireworks nearby. And in 2015 a 25-year-old Pendleton man lost his life in an explosion believed to be caused by homemade fireworks.

Lesley Phillips, who sells Black Cat fireworks out of a big white tent in the Fiesta Foods parking lot each summer, said she tries to educate customers about ways to keep their celebration from turning into a 911 call.

"Safety is a very big key," she said.

She recommends that people use a hollow concrete block to stabilize fountain-type fireworks and keep them from blowing over the the wind. She also

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Banner illustration: Vecteezy.com

Friends of Oxbow help keep restoration area clean and safe

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

In her years caring for the Oxbow area, Eileen Laramore has seen a thing or two.

The diminutive 69-year-old is a fierce protector of the 222-acre Bureau of Reclamation property along the Umatilla River in Hermiston. She and a handful of other volunteers she has christened Friends of Oxbow are out each week battling invasive weeds, assisting in restoration projects and keeping the habitat free from garbage.

"One time I found a pair of black stiletto heels," she said. "They were gorgeous. They were stunning. But how did they get there?"

Last summer the amount of man-made trash spiked after a sudden proliferation of homeless camps and criminal activity in the maze of thick brush and trees.

"Last year we had nothing but trouble here," she said. "This year we've only had

two camps so far."

Laramore said the Bureau of Reclamation was able to curb the problems eventually by being proactive, including cutting down swaths of trees through the biggest problem area to increase visibility. There were no active homeless camps visible as she hiked through the property Wednesday morning, but she pointed out former living spaces as she went.

There was the "bicycle chop shop" where police and volunteers pulled out a collection of stolen bicycles, the "party camp" where she found people singing around an illegal campfire, and the "hole-in-the-ground camp" where someone dug a 10-foot hole and covered it with tin sheets.

One woman kept a mattress in a grove of trees that Laramore suspected might be used for prostitution. Then there was the "Taj



Staff photo by Benjamin Lonergan

Eileen Laramore leads a group of activists who clean up the Oxbow area. Laramore has been involved in cleaning up homeless camps and damage in the area since 2013.

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