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WATER RATES

Conservation tips, water app can help Hermiston residents lower their water bills.

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ICE VISIT

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers were in Hermiston this weekend.

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BIG FINISH

Two Hermiston trap shooters are ranked in the top 100 in the nation.

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BY THE WAY

West Nile virus detected in Umatilla

West Nile virus, a flu-like disease spread by mosquitoes, has been detected in mosquitoes at a testing site in Umatilla County.

Oregon Public Health officials say the mosquitoes, found in Umatilla, are the first to test positive for the disease in Oregon in 2019. The mosquitoes were collected last week by the West Umatilla Mosquito Control District. The Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Corvallis confirmed the discovery.

West Nile virus spreads to humans via the bite of an infected mosquito. About one in five infected people may show signs of the virus. People at risk of serious illness include individuals 50 and older, and people with immune-compromising conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Symptoms include fever above 100 degrees and severe headache, stiff neck, mental confusion, muscle weakness, shaking, paralysis and rash. People should contact their health care provider if experiencing any of these symptoms.

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Famous fruit



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Becky Conant purchases Hermiston watermelons at the Bellinger Farms shop on Highway 395 in Hermiston. Conant is bringing the watermelons to a family reunion in Florence as a remembrance of growing up in Hermiston.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Hermiston seedless watermelons sit in cartons outside of the Bellinger Farms store on Highway 395 in Hermiston.

First Hermiston watermelons of the season roll off the vine

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston's most famous crop is shaping up nicely this year.

Bellinger Farms started selling their first batch of watermelons last week and Jack Bellinger said he was pleased with the sugar content and weight.

"All indications suggest that it's going to be a good year, quality-wise," he said.

He said he was surprised with how much the early melons weighed this year, making him cautiously optimistic about the season.

Heavy snow in February had put the crop behind sched-

ule, Bellinger said, and he had expected to see a gap between when his early fields and late fields were ready. Instead, ideal weather in June helped speed things up and will help keep watermelons rolling into the store.

"I would have guessed we wouldn't start until July 15 or so," he said.

Watermelons are already available for purchase, however, and the farm started shipping them out of Hermiston on Friday.

Walchli Farms watermelons are not quite ready yet, but Patrick Walchli said last week that they are looking good and will be here "shortly." The large family-owned farm sells its melons out of a warehouse on Loop Road.

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STEM Sports Camp provides space for at-risk youth

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

In the middle of summer, Sandstone Middle School is the last place many kids would want to be. The exception stood for the 48 kids participating in Skyhawks STEM Sports Camp last week.

"In our world, sports is the hook. But there is confidence building and character building, those are components that we really drive by," said Tim Sullivan, who owns Skyhawks in the Tri-Cities, a sports academy for children ages 4-12 of all skill levels.

Sullivan said the camp incorporates components of science, technology, engineering and math.

Kids dissected soccer balls to learn more about how they're made before shooting goals, and tested basketballs to see how high they bounce on differ-

ent surfaces.

"No matter what grade they're in, when they return back to school, if they're doing anything with STEM, they're going to have an automatic connection," Sullivan said.

The weeklong camp was open for children ages 6 to 12 who receive services from Made to Thrive, a nonprofit organization that provides funding, transportation, equipment and mentoring for at-risk and foster youth to participate in extracurricular activities.

Kriss Dammeyer, who founded Made to Thrive, said she appreciated the STEM components of the camp.

"I'd not seen that in action before. These kids were measuring and working together. The teamwork that it required, that was awesome," Dammeyer said.



Staff photo by Jessica Pollard

Skyhawks STEM Sports Camp participants play an icebreaker game with the coaches at Sandstone Middle School.

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