

SCHOOL

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for having the highest participation in the run, which was also a school supplies drive.

Monday morning also marked the start of a year of bus riding for many Hermiston students, including Hermiston third-grader Neely Foster, who just couldn't wait to hop aboard.

Foster, 8, joined many of her peers on the way to West Park Elementary on Monday morning, the start of the school year for the Hermiston School District.

"I love riding the bus," said Foster, who was priming for her second year of riding.

She said she prefers to sit in either the front or the back, and was ready to get to school so she could show off her donut-themed lunchbox and backpack.

As the bus pulled up to her block, Foster and two of her friends ceased all conversation to dash across the street, bustling with energy on an otherwise dead morning.

According to Stefani Wyant, principal at Rocky Heights Elementary, the bus provides an entirely separate ecosystem from the classroom, complete with its own set of challenges.

"One of the biggest things on the bus is that there is one adult, and that adult is driving. Students sometimes tend to know that they are unsupervised," Wyant said.

She said that at Rocky Heights, teachers have conversations with students about how to ride the bus properly.

"It's an opportunity to be kind, include everybody and notice each student," Wyant said.

Things can get sticky when a parent fails to reregister their child for the coming school year. If a child's registration is not up to date, their bus route may not be made clear to the bus driver, Wyant said.

Mid Columbia Bus Company — which contracts with the Hermiston School District — runs 28 routes in Hermis-

ton, with buses holding anywhere from 15 to 84 students.

Christie Sutherland, the manager for the company's Hermiston office, has just stepped into her new position this month. She said the first day of school was a smooth ride for bus drivers.

She noted that when a child isn't registered with the school and doesn't know if they're on the correct bus, the bus driver will first contact the "bus barn" to see if their address is on file with the company.

If the company doesn't have the child's address, the bus driver will radio the school to assure the child arrives home safely, whether that means getting dropped off at a stop or heading back to the school for a different bus or parent pickup.

"It can be a process sometimes," Sutherland said. "But we always figure it out."

Chuck Moore, vice-president at Mid Columbia Bus Company, said that during the first week of school, bus routes often run a little slower.

"We don't mind," he said. "We don't want anyone to get hurt."

He said they are off to a good start this year, as the company is seeing a lot of employee retention from last year.

"We love having folks come back with us. Most of our drivers take the same route each year. They know their students and their locations," Moore said.

As parents and students alike gear up for the school year, Moore said there's one thing that sticks in his mind — safety.

He said students should refrain from running after the bus, and to wait until the bus is at a full stop before hopping aboard.

He also said that drivers need to remember to stop traffic in either direction when a school bus has its stop sign out.

"We don't want any motorist public to pass when students are getting on that bus," Moore said.

FRIENDS

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The two men, both 34, grew up in Lake Oswego. They played middle school basketball on the same team. In high school, they started Laker Broadcasting at Lake Oswego High School, broadcasting football and basketball games. They enrolled in University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communications with Strong studying electronic media and Olson headed toward a career in print journalism, preferably with the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

"My dream was to be the beat writer for the San Francisco Giants," Olson said.

Strong, however, pressed him to do various broadcasting gigs with him and Olson good-naturedly helped him out. Normally, Strong did play-by-play and Olson provided color. As sophomores and juniors, they announced the University of Oregon softball games for the campus radio station. For that job, Olson was asked for a demo.

"I downloaded a 1989 San Francisco Giants/Chicago Cubs game from the computer," Olson recalled. "I muted it and did the play-by-play. My first baseball demo is a game from when I was 4 years old."

They interviewed athletes during a weekly half-hour show called "Quack Smack" and did various live-streaming UO sports broadcasts. The OSAA hired them to announce a state soccer championship and other games. For Olson, it was all something of a lark.

"I was kind of along for the ride," he said. "I took it seriously because John took it seriously. I was just hanging out with John."

Olson did some solo work, however. He was the public address voice at UO women's volleyball games and news director at the campus radio station. By his senior year, he wholly embraced the idea of a career in broadcasting. After graduation, he accepted a job with sister radio stations KOHU and KQFM in Hermiston to broadcast sports and news. He caught some attention with his smooth and story-telling style. In 2013, Olson was named Oregon Association of Broadcasters Radio Sports Announcer of the Year.

Strong got on an even faster track. He was the first radio and television voice for the Portland Timbers and he later worked for both NBC and



Photo courtesy of John Strong

FOX Sports soccer broadcaster John Strong got his start doing play by play at Lake Oswego High School with his friend Erick Olson.

FOX. Olson watched his friend rise with awe.

"By his mid-20s, he was a national television broadcaster," Olson said. "It was a really fast trajectory."

Olson's first foray into the world of national broadcasting came in 2015 when Strong reached out to Olson to ask if he would be his statistics and research assistant for three weeks of women's World Cup games in Canada that summer.

"My reaction was 'Yes,' now how do I make it happen?" Olson said.

The radio station gave Olson the green light, though he continued to do news segments from hotel rooms and airports. In between soccer games, Olson researched players and teams and assembled notes for the World Cup games. In the booth, he supplied stats and interesting tidbits for Strong to use in his play-by-play.

"I had a dry erase board about the size of a piece of paper," he said. "I wrote notes or used hand signals to pass along statistics and updates as the games progressed."

When he learned of an impending substitution, he alerted a Los Angeles producer, so graphics could be prepared.

Last summer brought men's World Cup action in Russia. The FOX team included Olson, Strong, Strong's broadcast partner Stu Holden, producer Shaw Brown and two Russian security guards. The broadcasters announced 16 of 64 games, including the final match between France and Croatia in Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium. Between

games, the team found food, flew to another city, tried to sleep on the plane and started all over again.

The string of games and constant travel was challenging — even more than the 2007 Oregon state 1A basketball tourney in Baker in which Olson announced 20 games in four days despite having strep throat.

"Three of the matches we called at the World Cup, we had not slept at all the night before," Strong said. "It was a 24-hour adrenaline high. After each game, you recalibrate and pack your bag. You just go."

Olson noted that the older airplanes in which they flew didn't inspire trust.

"Each time you land, everyone claps," he said.

Strong said the team worked well together.

"When I have Erick on my left, Stu on my right and Shaw in my ear, I'm fearless," Strong said.

He called Olson his "information sherpa" who has broadcasting experience of his own.

"Erick knows me so well, he anticipates what I want and need to know," Strong said. "It becomes a symbiosis thing."

An added bonus for Olson is an Emmy Award FOX Sports received for its 2018 World Cup coverage in the Outstanding Trans-Media Sports Coverage category. He is listed with some 70 other people, but it gives him a thrill all the same.

Olson said he is enjoying the ride, just like he did with Strong back in the day when he was "hanging out with John."

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