

LETTERS

**Moving on to a new community**

To the editor:  
After 44 years of living in Hermiston I have made the hardest decision of my life. I have sold my home and will be moving to Newberg to be near my grandchildren. I came to run the Hermiston Day Care Center. Three months later we started fundraising and I began to see what really made this community work. It is a community of givers and volunteers. Since 1976 I have seen dozens of additions to Hermiston put together by the community, the local service clubs and its many citizens. My dad told us that when we moved into a rental we should make it better than it was when we moved in. It is my hope that in my 44 years here I have left a mark to better Hermiston in some small way because I know it has given me a lifetime of memories. I was very appreciative of Tom Harper in allowing me to write some grant requests to get Victory Square Park started. I have served 20-plus years on the library board and am thrilled to see our library grow. My heart will always be with the Altrusa Club of Hermiston and my first trip back here will be for

our annual fundraiser. I'm sure there will be a feeding frenzy at the over two dozen food trucks to choose your dinner before you begin to bid on live and silent auction items all donated by businesses in Hermiston. Mark your calendars for Oct. 26. Thank you all who have helped me along the way. My phone will remain 541-571-3440. Call me when you come my way.

**Kay Burns-Bennett  
Hermiston**

**Growing school district needs our support**

To the editor:  
A school district faces all kinds of challenges. I've had a front row seat as a Hermiston school board member for the last eight years as we've navigated uncertain state funding, shifting initiatives and mandates, budgetary constraints due to increasing PERS costs, and an ever-growing student population. Through it all, the school board has always asked one question first: What is best for our students? Adequate classroom space is a huge factor in delivering a high-quality education. While the state provides funding for additional educators as our student enrollment grows, it doesn't pay for the classrooms for them to teach in.

That's why the school board is asking voters to approve Measure 30-130. It will fund the construction of two new elementary schools and an annex at the high school to make sure we have the room we need to grow. The district will also be able to purchase land for future growth, because we know Hermiston isn't going to slow down anytime soon.

Thanks to the work of the facilities committee and an aggressive payment plan on previous debt, we can present a bond that accomplishes this goal without raising the property tax rate.

My time on the school board is over, but I'm proud of the work the school district has done and encourage a Yes vote on Measure 30-130.

**Dave Smith  
Hermiston**

**Making room for more students every year**

To the editor:  
There are more than 5,766 reasons for Hermiston voters to approve Measure 30-130. That was the student enrollment for the 2018-19 school year, and the number is expected to increase by about 9% by the start of the 2022-23 school year, passing the 6,000-student mark.

If you've been around Hermiston for a few years, those numbers won't surprise you. We've been growing as new jobs have been created and new housing has been built. The school district's facilities are already beyond capacity, and without building more classrooms, the district will soon have to buy or lease more modular classrooms. That's an inefficient way to spend limited taxpayer money. By approving the school bond, voters can make sure we're keeping up with growth in a cost-efficient way. The facilities committee and school board selected an \$82.7 million bond package that will be funded by leveraging the city's growth. Industrial, commercial and residential property taxpayers who build or expand in Hermiston over the life of the bond will be added to the tax rolls and help cover the cost, allowing current taxpayers to keep the rate that was recently lowered when Hermiston paid off previous debt. It's the right time to make this investment in Hermiston's students and say Yes to Hermiston Schools.

**Delores Piersol  
Hermiston**

**An ode to the opossum**

Everybody seems to have an opossum story. My favorite is we thought it was an ugly cat until we tried to put a flea collar on it.

I have dealt with many opossum and their problems and have found them somewhat amiable and seemingly a clueless wanderer. Their search for free meals brings them closer to humans. Feeding pets outside, especially canned cat food, is inviting them to take up residence. They usually maintain and mark out small ranges and develop attitudes like an old bear's — "You do not mess with me and I will not bother you."

Opossum can be destructive to yards and spread harmful parasites. However, they are known to eat ticks, not be aggressive, and are active only at night. They are more interesting than the average neighborhood pest. Their bad smell and death trances as a defense mechanism are well known. They are one of the oldest mammals in existence at 65 million years.

Males are called jacks, females are jills and young are joeys. They are extremely adaptable and dine on pretty much anything. They never get bigger than the average cat and have a gestation time of 13 days. Opposable thumbs and prehensile tail makes difficult climbing and fruit picking a snap. They are not susceptible to rabies and snake bites and are quiet except for hissing and teeth snapping when attacked.

They are North America's only marsupial and females do carry their young with them. Native to the East coast and properly called Virginia opossum, they were probably introduced to the Northwest by Southern immigrants. Much like exotic fish in the Columbia River, they were brought in and released as food. Everyone remembers the Beverly

and possum sweet potatoes. They naturally reside in densely vegetative swampy areas. They do not hibernate and are increasing their range as urbanization and climate change temperatures increase. I have seen them across all climates except deserts.

My latest opossum encounter was counting them on Umatilla River Road. I have seen the OPM (opossums per mile) go as high as 4. This usually counts dead ones and the running joke is: Why did the chicken cross the road? To show the opossum that it could be done. They probably use roads to eat other road casualties and are susceptible to fast moving, blinding traffic.

After trapping a live one I was in the position of disposing of it. To compromise with my co-workers, I transported it to a wildlife area and released it. Relocating problem pest usually only transfers the problem. The next morning I saw the dead opossum as road-kill next to the wildlife area.

One morning an adult opossum was laying in our yard with our Chihuahua barking at it. I concluded that it passed out from alcohol-laced rotting peaches. It is unknown whether opossum are tolerant to alcohol.

I soon realized that I had just fallen for playing opossum when I poked it with a shovel. It moseyed underneath the deck. From then on we teased the dog about his special friend under the deck.

Get use to encountering opossums. They are tough with good memories for problem solving and toxin avoidance. Their cleanliness is maintained by their constant grooming despite their ruffled appearance. After the initial surprise, you may want to put a flea collar on it.

*Wes Stonecypher is a biologist and Umatilla resident.*

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