

Car seat technicians help parents keep children safe

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

New parents may feel like they need an engineering degree to figure out their child's car seat, but there is plenty of help available for navigating the straps and buckles.

Umatilla Morrow County Head Start, Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston and St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton all have certified car seat technicians happy to do a free assessment for anyone worried they might not be buckling a child in correctly.

Amy Hendrix, health and nutrition director for UMCHS, said even a member of Head Start's own staff came in with a car seat installed "very incorrectly."

"It doesn't matter your education level — car seats are complicated," she said.

Four different technicians offer car seat and booster seat checks Mon-



Car seat technician Ina Abercrombie, right, inspects a new car seat for Annabelle Berry, while her mother Jennifer Berry watches, at a clinic in 2017 in Hermiston.

HH file photo

day through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Hermiston UMCHS office, 110 N.E. Fourth St.

Maria Arroyo, one of the certified technicians, said

one of the biggest problems she sees is car seats installed in a way that allows them to move too much in the event of a crash.

"Oftentimes I find I'll tug

on it and it will move three inches," she said.

The harness over the child might also be too loose or the wrong height.

An infant or toddler can

slide out the top on impact if the straps are lower than their armpits.

For older children with a booster seat, the seatbelt should be on their shoulder, not their neck or under their arm.

In addition to checking car and booster seats and teaching the parent how to buckle their child in correctly, Arroyo said she also teaches them how to make adjustments as their child grows, and when they will require a new seat.

Oregon law requires children over 40 pounds to use a booster seat until age eight or growing to 4 feet, nine inches tall. But Arroyo recommends keeping them in the booster seat after age eight even if they haven't hit the height requirement yet.

Parents can be ticketed in Washington for allowing their child under age 13 to sit in the front passenger seat. While Oregon does not have an age limit for sitting

in the front, experts recommend that children under 13 remain in the back.

Hendrix said she can personally testify of the effectiveness of a properly-installed car seat, after she got in a crash years ago with 3-year-old daughter strapped in.

"The car was totaled, but my youngest daughter was in a car seat and she didn't even cry, she was so protected," Hendrix said.

Car seats expire after six to 10 years of use, and should be replaced if they are in a serious crash.

"There can be hairline cracks the eye can't see," Arroyo said.

UMCHS recognizes that not everyone can afford to pay for a car seat, which is why they also offer car seats for \$10 to \$30 for low-income families who receive benefits such as WIC or SNAP, or have been referred through agencies such as Domestic Violence Services.

Hermiston school bond campaign pays for local management

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
STAFF WRITER

Local connections are proving a boon for the political committee urging voters to pass a new school bond in Hermiston.

The political action committee Yes for Hermiston Schools has raised \$11,040 in cash and spent almost \$6,000 this year, according to ORESTAR, the Oregon Secretary of State's public website for campaign finance activity.

The largest chunk of the spending — \$3,731.76 — has gone to the public relations and communications firm Pac/West Communications to run the election campaign in support of issuing \$82.7 million in bonds and receiving \$6.6 million in state matching funds. Pac/West this summer hired former *East Oregonian* editor Daniel Wattenburger of Hermiston and opened an office in town.

"We're the ones coordinating the door knockers and campaign signs and online messaging and everything else," Wattenburger said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Vehicles pass by a sign advocating the Hermiston School bond measure alongside Highway 395 in Hermiston on Tuesday afternoon.

The PAC has been around since 2008, when it was Vote Yes for Kids and Hermiston voters passed a \$69.9 million general obligation bond for school construction and renovation. The campaign committee was active again in 2017, but the Hermiston School District's \$104 million bond failed that May. According to ORESTAR, the committee in 2017 did not hire a professional firm to manage the campaign.

Pac/West has on occasion been involved with campaigns in the area, but Wattenburger said the company's move to staff an office

in Hermiston opens the door to handling more local campaigns.

Pac/West also is the biggest contributor to Yes for Hermiston Schools.

Wattenburger explained once the company fulfilled the amount of the retainer, the rest of the work lands in the in-kind box. ORESTAR shows that amount so far comes to \$9,010.

The largest cash donors are the Hermiston Association of Teachers and the Oregon Education Association, with \$2,200 apiece to the effort. Kim Puzey, general manager of the Port of

Umatilla, is the largest private donor with a \$1,000 check to the group.

Hermiston attorney George Anderson and accountant Dennis Barnett gave \$500 each, as did Ric Sherman, chair of the board for Umatilla County Fire District 1. Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann, Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo and the Oregon AFL-CIO also joined the \$500 club. And a multitude have contributed more than \$1,200 in miscellaneous cash contributions of \$100 or less.

The Umatilla County Elections Division mailed 44,642 ballots last week for the Nov. 5 election. Kim Lindell, county elections manager, said 923 — 2% —

have trickled in so far. She expects this election to have a lower overall turnout in the county.

Hermiston should have a higher turnout because of the school bond, Lindell said, and other communities with something at stake could show up in greater numbers.

The two countywide measures may not spark a lot of interest.

One measure asks if voters want to change the language in the county charter from "law enforcement department" to "sheriff's office" as set out in Oregon law. That would have the practical effect of having the county's foundational document reflect the name the county and locals

already call the law enforcement agency. The measure also aligns the charter with the functions of the sheriff under Oregon law with the exception of tax collection.

The second measure amends the election process for county officials. Under the proposal, the county would require a primary election only if more than two candidates filed for the election, and the two with the most votes would face off in the November general election. The change could end situations where a losing incumbent remains in office more than six months.

Whether the ballot is exciting or not, Lindell said the election will cost about \$45,000, or around \$1 per registered voter.

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