

COLUMN

Don't burn down your house this winter

A Facebook post by a former college roommate of mine gave me a little laugh recently.

This roommate was a great person, but a menace in the kitchen. She started multiple fires the year we lived together, ranging in cause from frozen pizza packaging that wasn't supposed to go in the oven to spaghetti noodles left hanging, dry, over the edge of a hot pan. Once when a burner ignited some paper towels she tossed them into the half-full garbage can instead of the sink.

So it seemed very fitting, then, that her Thanksgiving Day post to Facebook was accompanied by a photo of a flaming oven and a joke about grease fires being a new family tradition.

Luckily, her current house and our former college apartment escaped unscathed. But not everyone's house does.

Each year at the *Hermiston Herald* we cover house fires that could have been prevented. Sometimes carelessness in the kitchen was the culprit, other times it was an article of clothing or stack of papers that got too close to a heater or lamp. Cigarettes have sent homes and dry grass up in flames, as have unattended burn piles in yards.

All of those mistakes are easy to make. Everyone does stupid things sometimes. I once forgot to turn off a burner and came home to a kitchen full of smoke and a plastic soup ladle melted to the bottom of a pan. It happens.

But let's all try this year not to be the one it happens to.

When I was a little kid, I was scared of basically everything, so my parents got me a plastic Little Mermaid night light to set on my dresser by my bed. It helped for a few days until someone said something to me

about how I shouldn't set it on top of papers in case it got too hot.

Little me couldn't sleep a wink after that, because I was too busy staring at plastic Ariel, waiting for her to catch my wooden dresser on fire at any moment.

My parents eventually got wise to the fact the night light was making me more scared and ditched it (and also, at some point, the clown face on the wall, but that was for non-fire related reasons).

Obviously I was too afraid of a lamp that was specifically designed to be set on dressers and night stands, but little-kid Jade had the right idea about being careful with flammable objects around hot things.

The great thing about technology is that it has evolved in a way to help make up for most of our dumb mistakes. Curling irons and clothes irons eventually go cool to the touch if we leave them plugged

in all day by mistake. Space heaters have sensors that shut them off automatically if they tip over.

Most of us will traipse through life a little on the careless and forgetful side and be totally fine.

But a few of us will not, and that's where the caution comes in. Please don't burn yard waste on windy days. Don't throw cigarettes in flammable places. Keep flammable objects clear from stoves, heaters, heat lamps and other hot things. Read the instructions on your Christmas lights and power strips. Don't leave candles burning unattended. Keep a fire extinguisher handy and your smoke detectors in good working condition.

Consider this your reminder to keep yourself, your family, your pets and your most treasured possessions safe this winter. If we interview you this year, we want it to be for a happy reason.



JADE MCDOWELL
COMMENT



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A segment of trail in Umatilla winds along the Umatilla River near Umatilla High School.

South Hill connection gets priority in Umatilla Trail Plan

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

UMATILLA — The city of Umatilla is finalizing a trail plan that will eventually bring the city's three distinct sections of town together.

The city's parks and recreation committee and community development department have been working for two years on the City of Umatilla Trail Plan, narrowing down ideas into 11 different trail projects, which the public was asked to help prioritize last month.

"The overarching goal is to connect the three neighborhoods," said Tamra Mabbott, the city's community development director.

The plan, which will go to the city council for approval at the beginning of January, gives top priority to the South Hill Connector project. That trail would create a walking path parallel to Powerline Road, from Tyler Avenue to the existing trail near Jackson Street.

Mabbott said the city feels optimistic that it will be able to get at least some of its funding for the project from the Oregon Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School fund. Students living in the South Hill neighborhoods frequently walk to school along Powerline.

Those students used to cross a foot bridge to reach Clara Brownell Middle School and Umatilla High School downtown, but the bridge was destroyed by flood water last spring. Mabbott said the city is working with FEMA and their insurance company on replacing the bridge, but due to all of the utilities that the bridge contained it will likely take two years for a new bridge to open there. The second project listed in the Trails Plan would improve existing dirt trails around the foot bridge.

Residents ranked their third priority as a trail in the McNary section of town, connecting the Lewis and Clark trail with trails along Bud Draper Road and the golf course.

Other trails farther down the priority list of 11 projects includes one linking McNary to downtown, one linking McNary to McNary beach and a trail linking Sixth Street downtown to Third Street by the river.

Mabbott said bicycle/pedestrian trails are a priority for the city because of their many benefits. They provide residents alternatives to driving, promote health, increase livability, increase safety by moving pedestrians and cyclists away from car traffic and provide economic benefits by making the town more

attractive to tourists, developers and potential new residents.

"The council sees value in alternative modes of transportation, but also for recreation and exercise," she said.

It will take a while, in some cases as much as 10 years, for all of the projects to be built. But Mabbott said having a written, formalized plan is a key step in seeking grant funding from sources like ODOT and the state's parks and recreation project.

Mabbott is seeing the creation of the plan through, but won't be around to implement it. She is leaving her job at the city of Umatilla on Dec. 11 in order to become the Eastern Oregon representative for the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development.

"It's kind of my dream job," she said.

Mabbott will continue living in Umatilla and said she hopes to continue contributing to the community through volunteer work. But her job will include traveling to 10 counties to assist them and their cities in land use issues, and she will serve as the land use representative on the governor's Regional Solutions team.

"I'm really looking forward to it," she said.

Bank of Eastern Oregon opens Hermiston branch

HERMISTON HERALD

Bank of Eastern Oregon now has a full-service branch in Hermiston.

The new branch is at 1475 N. First St., Hermiston, in the former Eastern Oregon Telecom building. The building also houses the offices of commercial lending team Lucas Wagner and Jared Lathrop, and mortgage officer Kaitlin Orcutt.

Bank of Eastern Oregon began in Gilliam County in 1945 and has grown to serve communities throughout northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. It recently opened a new La Grande branch in addition to the new Hermiston location.

"Since our beginning in 1945, Bank of Eastern Oregon has focused on providing quality banking services to the rural communities of Eastern Oregon," Melissa



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Bank of Eastern Oregon recently opened a new branch in Hermiston, at 1475 N First St. CEO Jeff Bailey said consumer deposits are up in Eastern Oregon.

Samms, the new branch's local operations manager, said in a news release. "We look forward to meeting and making new friends with the residents, business owners, farmers and ranchers of Hermiston and the surrounding areas."

According to the release, BEO is a "full-service com-

mercial bank specializing in agricultural and small business lending, municipal and special district deposit services." It offers a variety of consumer and business accounts and services.

The new branch is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and can be reached at 541-303-8274.

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