

# Lights

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he was waiting in line to see Santa, he said he was going to ask for a series of books called "Who was ...".

"I want something more to read," he said.

Ryleigh Leighton, 8, said she was going to ask for a camera and a realistic baby doll.

While much of the night centered around Santa and the tree, it was also about spotlighting downtown businesses. The Hermiston Downtown District was having its monthly First Thursday event in conjunction with Winterfest, and businesses were open later than usual and offered special deals. Speakers at the beginning of the event also highlighted several local businesses and encouraged people to shop locally this month.

Winterfest also offered a fundraiser opportunity for several good causes, including Vange John Memorial Hospice. The organization was selling Christmas ornaments featuring different branches of the military to raise money for programs for hospice patients. The hospice set up a display in the window of Victory Baptist Church next to the festival street, featuring snowflakes in memory of people who have died.

The festival street will be closed to vehicle traffic until Christmas, but pedestrians are welcome to visit the tree and see a light show each half hour from 5-8 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

From left to right, Harley Camargo, 5, Alivia Lowe, 3, and RJ Camargo, 9, explain their Christmas wishes to Santa during the Winterfest tree lighting ceremony in downtown Hermiston on Thursday night.

# Funland

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In the agricultural section, slides lead down from a tall grain silo, while children can climb on a tractor or giant fruits and vegetables.

In the western section, a large locomotive gives a nod to the railroad that helped bring Hermiston into existence, while Western storefronts can be customized to reflect what Hermiston's early downtown looked like. The section will also include a Native American campsite with teepees, a "fire pit" and drums.

Fetter said he consulted with cultural specialists for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on the American Indian section, and they made suggestions to make the section more authentic to area tribes.

"We introduced a climb-

ing rock with petroglyphs that might actually be found in the Columbia Gorge," he said.

Multiple city councilors said they wanted to do more than just ask the tribes for suggestions to improve the design. If the tribes aren't 100% on board with something, councilor John Kirwan said, the city shouldn't include it.

"Any time you have a cultural element, you need to get their permission," he said.

Drotzmann agreed, saying that he hoped the playground stands for generations to come, and therefore he wouldn't want anything the tribes weren't "completely comfortable" with.

"They gave us a tour (Tamástslikt Cultural Institute) and there's so much detail and so much quality and so much thought in that, it's so easy to get wrong, so I hear you loud and clear," Fetter responded.

Councilor Roy Barron said he appreciated the effort to include the tribes, but he was disappointed there wasn't more to represent Latino cultures. Fetter told Barron he would love to take suggestions on colors or other design elements that would help the playground feel more inclusive for Latino children, who will likely make up the majority of children using the playground.

The final tally of how much the rebuild committee's full vision would cost came to \$1,562,000 (an estimate last week placed it at \$1.2 million). Fetter said the city could downgrade or hold off on some elements if they weren't able to fundraise as much as hoped.

While Fetter asked for the council to sign off on the design as presented, in order to complete construction by the city's July 4 celebration at Butte Park, councilors said they would feel more comfortable fundrais-

ing first and then approving a design after they see how much came in. Fetter said that would likely push the completion date back to Labor Day, but councilors said they felt it would be worth the wait to do such an important project right.

Two committee members, Charlie Clupny and Patricia Alder, told the council a lot of thought was put into the design and they hoped that enough money would be able to be raised to bring that vision to life. Clupny said when he talked to the Lions Club, they were excited to talk about how the club could help.

"I just shared three pictures and by the end of the

hour they were like, 'When are we going to start building?'" he said.

A new committee will be put together to begin fundraising in earnest and publicizing the vision for the playground. Efforts will include the sale of fence

pickets that community members can engrave, and corporate sponsorships of pieces such as the giant watermelon slice.

"You and your committee have the council's blessing, now go forth and make it happen," Drotzmann said.



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