

COLUMN

Hermiston residents building an inclusive community

While driving along Highway 395, my partner and I noticed something different about Hermiston’s welcome sign recently. For one, it’s adorned with a brightly colored watermelon, and I am all about that. But right next to that sign, there’s a smaller one. It’s faded, but it reads “Welcome. We are building an inclusive community.” I’m taking a picture of it with me to Portland, where I’m moving back to after an incredible and eye-opening nine months in Eastern Oregon.

Now, I’m on the “Whats Happening Hermiston” Facebook page, so don’t get me wrong. I know that not everyone is privy to the inclusive community message. I’ve seen people make racist and sexist comments from behind the safety of their computers. Those people should drive to Stanfield, turn themselves around and go read that welcome sign again.

But that Facebook group doesn’t represent my real-life Hermiston experience and as I pack my bags, I’m anxious to return for swimming at Warehouse Beach, and for the smell of sage cooking in the summer sunshine. This place is special, and while I want to say it’s because of the cute baby cows and totally wild tumbleweeds, I know it’s because of the people.

Folks here can be extraordinarily welcoming, just like that sign suggests. In my years of interviewing people for articles, never have I been met with such honesty as I have in Hermiston. When I knock on doors for stories — palms sweating in anticipation of an irritated homeowner — people just let me inside with a smile. They tell me their life experiences and they’re frank about their hardships. I hope to find that level

of integrity everywhere I go. I think this past New Years Eve, I had the greatest snapshot of what it feels like to be part of a smaller — albeit growing — community. It felt like everyone I’d seen around town was crammed into the Festival Street, gazing up at the sky with utter joy as firework ashes rained upon us. That there was a hand-crafted papier-mâché watermelon involved in the celebrations made me feel really humbled to be part of this community, like I was in on a really juicy and sweet secret even if it was for a short time in the grand scheme of things.

Here, I see young people from diverse backgrounds stepping into leadership roles. I see restaurant workers, full-time parents and everyone in between sacrificing personal time and sleep to keep vital aspects of the community rolling at the Hermiston Warming Station, at Agape House and other organizations that work to support the people who need it most. And what’s more, I’ve never heard anyone here complain about feeling tired, through thick and thin.

To the humans of Hermiston, please don’t be afraid to take a nap to reward yourselves for everything you do. Thank you all for accepting me into your community and for patiently explaining aspects of rural life that I didn’t quite understand. Thank you for giving me a chance to actually see stars in the night sky, to eat extraordinary produce and to tell your stories to the best of my ability inside the very pages of the Hermiston Herald.

Jessica Pollard is a former reporter for the Hermiston Herald.



Jessica Pollard COLUMN

COLUMN

Is it time to panic?

So, the coronavirus is here. Technically, coronavirus has always been here — the term covers a broad variety of diseases. But you know the one I’m talking about: COVID-19, the strain which appeared just over two months ago and has already killed more than 3,000 people and spread across the globe.

Whether the arrival of the disease in Umatilla County has been something you’ve worried about or joked about, or some combination of the two, judging by the number of people who read or shared our breaking news story about it yesterday, it’s something people care about.

The big question is how big of a deal it really is, and it’s clear from the arguments raging on social media that people do not see eye to eye. Some are unconcerned about a disease they describe as “basically the flu” that “only old people die from” (sorry, seniors). Others are in full-on panic mode, stockpiling hand sanitizer and canceling plans.

Like almost everything in life, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. On one hand, the flu kills far more people every year than COVID-19 ever has, because many more people have had the flu. On the other hand, the flu kills about one tenth of one percent of the people it infects in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Estimates vary for the mortality rate of COVID-19 as the new disease gets going, putting it anywhere from 1% to 3%. Researchers for China’s center for disease control puts it at 2.3%.

That could be a high estimate, depending on the number of Chinese citizens who contracted a mild form of the disease but never reported it. Time will tell. But if it holds true, that puts COVID-19 at a slightly higher mortality rate than the Spanish influenza that killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide in 1918. It’s the difference between one out of 1,000 patients dying of the flu versus 23 out of 1,000 patients dying of COVID-19.

When you start looking at how many thousands of people in Hermiston get the flu each year, you can see why health officials are concerned about trying to keep this new virus in check. After we posted a story to our Facebook page on Monday, some people criticized us for “fear-mongering” by reporting it at all. But history pretty definitively shows us that making people aware of a disease, whether it’s HIV or skin cancer, is an essential part of reducing its toll. In fact, the Spanish flu mentioned above is a great example. An in-depth account of the spread of that pandemic written in *Smithsonian Magazine* in 2017 describes how World War I censorship for morale purposes helped

expand the flu’s spread. In one example, the city of Philadelphia planned a major parade to boost patriotism and promote the sale of war bonds. The influenza had just arrived in the city, and doctors begged officials not to go through with the parade. Newspaper reporters in the city wrote up articles describing the dangers, but editors, abdicating their responsibility to inform the public, caved to pressure from government officials and did not run those stories.

Two days after the parade ended, the influenza epidemic exploded there, killing more than 12,000 people in the city over the next six weeks. Journalists today don’t want to make the same mistakes as journalists of the past. Sure, sometimes the pendulum swings too far the other way, and some dangers receive an undue amount of coverage in proportion to the threat they represent. But other times, the worst case scenario does happen and when it does, it is helpful for people to be prepared.

In this case, that preparation is beneficial to everyone no matter what the future of COVID-19 holds. Getting everyone in the habit of frequent hand-washing, sanitizing surfaces and touching their face less will slow the spread of all contagious illnesses.

If COVID-19 never spreads farther than a single case in Umatilla County, please use that hand sanitizer you bought anyway.



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- #10 Cliff Hilliard
- #45 Yolanda Baros
- #48 Scott Tassie
- #53 Fidel Zamora Contreras
- #59 Cliff Hilliard
- #73 Leeroy Charles Arzt
- #106 Michelle Warner
- #133 Thomas Carden

A sale of the contents shall occur to satisfy amounts due under the lease agreement and all amounts allowed by law. The sale shall be held on Saturday, March 7, 2020 at 10:00 a.m., a date 15 or more days after the first publication of this notice, at the storage units. This is a public sale and the landlord will be accepting bids on the contents in whole. For further information, contact A-1 Property Management, 398 E. Ridgeway, Hermiston, OR 97838 (541)567-4663.

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\$285,000 - 4 Bedroom 3 Bath Tri Level. Very nice throughout. Large fenced yard. Updated kitchen. Large deck and nice city view. Close to shopping. MLS# 19655891 **Rocky Mikesell Blue Jeans Realty** "Our office is wherever you are" (541-379-8690)

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\$299,900 Great views! 2 bedrooms, 3baths. Hardwood floors, vaulted ceilings, lots of storage. Enjoy your deck and let the HOA do the yard work. **Jason 760-409-6842cell #19580533**

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