



TAKING TO THE STREETS



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Protesters hold signs in protest of racism and police violence on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue in Hermiston on Monday, June 1, 2020. The gathering took place at noon and spread along the sidewalks around the intersection.

Protests over George Floyd's death spread to Hermiston and Pendleton

By JADE MCDOWELL
AND ANTONIO SIERRA
STAFF WRITERS

Protests against racism and police violence spread to Hermiston and Pendleton on Monday, June 1, as people gathered peacefully in both cities.

Hermiston's protest kicked off at noon on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue. By 12:30 p.m. there were roughly 60 protesters standing on the sidewalks along all four corners of the intersection. Almost all wore masks, and they held signs with messages, such as "Black Lives Matter," "No Justice, No Peace" and "All lives don't matter until black lives matter."

Some protest signs referenced George Floyd, the black man who died in Minneapolis in police custody on Memorial Day. Cellphone footage from bystanders shows officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 45 seconds while Floyd repeatedly said he couldn't breathe before passing out about six minutes in. Chauvin was charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter after protests were staged in Minneapolis.

Jose Rodriguez was the first to arrive at Hermiston's protest, wearing a handmade "I can't breathe" T-shirt. As he paced up and down the sidewalk, fist in the air, several passersby raised a fist in return.

"I think this town needs to know it's not right," Rodriguez said in reference to Floyd's death. "It's important to make people feel uncomfortable."

Inle Gonzales, who organized the protest, said she wanted to make sure that people saw Hermiston residents join in with the nationwide protests.

"Even though the black community in Hermiston and Eastern Oregon is small, that doesn't mean anything," she said. "People should see we're an ally."

Naxely Jaime of Hermiston held a sign saying, "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention." She said people in Hermiston seem to view race as a taboo subject, but she wanted to make people under-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Protesters hold signs in protest of racism and police violence on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue in Hermiston on Monday, June 1, 2020. About 60 people were present at the peak of the protest, which lasted for more than six hours.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Protesters hold signs in protest of racism and police violence on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue in Hermiston on Monday, June 1, 2020. The protest quickly filled all four corners of the intersection.

stand that "we're not going to be quiet about it."

Avery Szulewski also said the community "doesn't like to talk about" racism.

"I myself, I have white privilege, and I need to use my power to bring light to that," she said.

The protesters drew mixed reactions from passersby on what the Oregon Department of Transportation has reported is Eastern Oregon's busiest intersection. Many motorists honked and waved or raised their fists in apparent sol-

idarity. One woman came out of McDonald's with a bag of food for the protesters.

Others were less supportive. Their reactions included making obscene gestures, veering close to the protesters as their trucks released a cloud of black smoke, and yelling. One woman repeatedly shouted at the protesters while waiting in line in at the McDonald's drive-thru, at one point yelling, "You guys aren't old enough to know (expletive)." At

See George Floyd, Page A10



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Rallygoers filled Festival Street in downtown Hermiston during the "Hermiston Freedom Rally" on Saturday, May 30, 2020. The rally drew in excess of 100 people and sparked a counter protest elsewhere in town.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Event organizer Colin Hodges speaks during the "Hermiston Freedom Rally" in downtown Hermiston on Saturday, May 30, 2020. Hodges said it was not a protest, just an informational event about Constitutional rights.

Hermiston Freedom Rally draws crowd downtown

By ALEX CASTLE
STAFF WRITER

More than 100 people came out to the festival street in downtown Hermiston on Saturday, May 30, in defiance of COVID-19 guidelines against large gatherings for the "Hermiston Freedom Rally," subsequently sparking a protest in opposition elsewhere in the city.

The rally was billed by organizers as a peaceful and apolitical "information sharing event" that would feature about a dozen speakers from across the state. Though organizers said they felt the event could have provided more detailed information for its audience, the rally remained peaceful despite concerns over potential conflict.

"It could have been better. I didn't know exactly what every person was going to talk about," said Colin Hodges, the event's primary organizer. "I just thought, let's bring in as many different people as possible from different positions in different communities and let them speak and see what happens."

Community members and law enforcement expressed specific concerns about the appearance of Joey Gibson, who spoke first and is the founder of the far-right Vancouver, Washington-based group Patriot Prayer, but Hodges said he felt the event ultimately wasn't defined by Gibson's presence.

"As you can see it wasn't all about Joey Gibson, and Joey's a great guy," Hodges said. "He's a great, peaceful guy. He has a bad rap for some things, but that's because the media spins things and portrays people certain ways."

Reports have detailed Gibson



Photo contributed by Jaztography

Brenda Flores holds up a banner while participating in the Essential Not Sacrificial event held in counter protest to the Hermiston Freedom Rally on May 30.



Photo contributed by Jaztography

Nazario Rivera holds a sign as part of the Essential Not Sacrificial protest held in counter to the Hermiston Freedom Rally on May 30.

and Patriot Prayer's history of violent clashes with leftist protesters, particularly in Portland, and previously associated themselves

See Freedom, Page A10

INSIDE

A3 ▶ Strong winds take down trees and power lines around Hermiston

A3 ▶ Hermiston seniors reflect on unique graduation experience

A7 ▶ La Laguna brings Mexican-Japanese fusion to Hermiston

A8 ▶ Election officials dispute accounts of voter registration changes