



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Hermiston High School graduates march during an honor walk on Friday, May 29, 2020. Students donned their caps and gowns before parading through town after COVID-19 restrictions forced the cancellation of a conventional graduation ceremony. Graduates will attend a commencement ceremony with limited attendees on Thursday, June 4, 2020, where they will receive their diplomas.

Hermiston graduates celebrate in unique ways

Students parade through town, prepare for ceremony

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

It has been a unique year in a lot of ways, and Hermiston High School graduate are experiencing that as they celebrate a major milestone.

While most districts are planning a drive-in style graduation ceremony this year because of COVID-19, Hermiston School District will provide an opportunity for students to walk across a stage.

On Thursday, June 4, starting at 6:10 p.m., the district will bring 24 students and parents at a time into the high school to give each student a chance to walk across a stage in their cap and gown, and receive a diploma in front of two guests of their choice.

"It's going to be the longest graduation in the history of Hermiston High School, I can guarantee you that," Larry Usher, athletics and activities director, said.

Speeches will be live-streamed online prior to Principal Tom Spoo handing out diplomas to students in alphabetical order, and the diploma presentation, which will take place on the stage in the commons, will also be streamed for the rest of the students' friends and family not present in the room. Students who participate will receive a gift bag, including gift cards and a T-shirt.

Usher said Superintendent Tricia Mooney received some blowback from superintendents on the west side of the state about bringing people into the school, but district administrators felt it was important to allow students the opportunity to walk across the stage.

"We're trying to do the best we can in a really bad situation for our kids right now, and we felt like mak-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Fireworks explode over Butte Park in Hermiston on Friday, May 29, 2020, in recognition of the graduating class of 2020. Students and their families watched the display from vehicles or spread throughout the park after participating in an honor walk through town in their caps and gowns. Diplomas will be handed out on June 4.

ing sure they got an opportunity to walk across the stage, and making sure their parents got an opportunity to see that, and anybody else with our livestream capabilities was definitely going to be a step in the right direction for us," he said.

The district already honored students as a group on Friday, May 29 with an honor walk along Highland and Orchard avenues, where parents and other community members clapped for them, followed by a fireworks display from the Hermiston Butte.

Clad in bright purple caps and gowns, some seniors got emotional as they spoke of the abrupt ending to their school year in March.

"For me, personally, it was very heartbreaking," Kylie Barker said of the day she found out students would not be returning to their classrooms for the rest of the year. "I cried at home."

Some students said they didn't really care that much about what their graduation looked like, while others said they were disappointed they didn't get to finish out a normal school year with their sports seasons and other extracurricular activities. Neveah Cabbage said she thought it was cool that her graduation was different than

the same thing schools do every year.

"I like this, because I'm not traditional, so I like that this is unique," she said.

Jordan Franklin and Destiny Vanfossen, walking side by side, said they thought the strange ending to their high school experience will make their generation more resilient and prepared for the future.

"We'll be prepared to adapt to changes," Vanfossen said.

Tony Gonzales and Pedro Martin said they were glad to get a chance to say goodbye to their friends, and Paul Ernst said he was glad they weren't just doing some sort of online commencement.

"It's really cool they're still trying to pull something together," Ernst said.

Nazly Chavez was one of the only students wearing a mask to the event. She said her robes were too long for her, so the reason her mask coordinated perfectly with her outfit was that her mother used the scraps from shortening her robe to make it.

She described participating in the honor walk as "exhilarating."

"It was really nice seeing friends that I'm graduating with," she said. "It feels like I haven't seen everyone in forever, so it was nice just being with everyone one last time."

High winds cause power outages, property damage

By NADA SEWIDAN
STAFF WRITER

Northeast Oregon residents experienced power outages and property damage following winds of more than 70 mph on Saturday, May 30.

Fast winds uprooted trees and knocked down power lines throughout Boardman, Hermiston and surrounding areas, such as Umatilla and Stanfield, damaging private residences, housing communities and parks.

More than 9,300 residences total were affected by the power outage and some remained without power for several hours. Umatilla Electric Cooperative crews worked through the night to restore power to as many locations as possible. According to Steve Meyers, member services administrator for UEC, service crews are still working on restoring power in some areas.

"Approximately 500 or fewer members remain out of power at scattered locations in the Boardman-Hermiston areas, with Irrigon the hardest hit," according to a June 1 update on the UEC website.

Larry Fetter, the director of Hermiston's Parks and Recreation Department, said it is one of the strongest windstorms he has experienced in years. Fetter said approximately 20 to 30 mature trees were toppled in several parks throughout the county, including at Hermiston's McKenzie Park, where large trees fell on the Arc of Umatilla County community building.

"We are still assessing damages and asking for support from other organizations," Fetter said. "It will take approximately two weeks to repair, remove and restore damages."

Mckenzie, Belt, Riverfront and Newport parks in Hermiston were the most affected. Debris and other hazards have been eliminated and the Oxbow Trail and Hermiston Loop, among other trails, are now safe for use, according to Fetter.

Wilson Road Mobile Home Park in Boardman is also among the residences affected by the windstorm. Lisa Ahumada, the mobile home park manager, said that approximately 30 to 50 trees in the mobile park were uprooted, damaging water lines and causing a power outage. The community was left without water or power as a result.

The uprooted trees also damaged six mobile home trailers beyond repair, according to Ahumada. No one in the mobile park was injured, but the mobile park is looking for mattress donations for those whose trailers were lost as a result of the windstorm.

"I've been manag-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Fire crews work to clear a tree from Highway 395 near Safeway in Hermiston on Saturday, May 30, 2020.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A trampoline, blown by the wind, rests on the roof of a house near downtown Hermiston on Saturday, May 30, 2020.

ing here for 12 years, this (windstorm) is beyond anything I've seen," Ahumada said.

It took approximately 200 community member volunteers to help clean the mobile park from debris that weekend.

The Umatilla School District also canceled their planned drive-in graduation due to the storm.

"We had planned for rain. We had planned for hail. We had planned for wind, but we had not planned for 70 mile per hour winds that would knock out our power and internet and send things flying," Superintendent Heidi Sipe said.

She said she had just arrived at the school with umbrellas to hand out when the storm hit and she saw a full-sized dumpster tumbling by. The danger, combined with the loss of power, caused her and Principal Bob Lorence to decide to cancel the ceremony. Staff quickly began using their cellphones to call each student, Sipe said, but one still showed up in the parking lot with his

car decorated.

"My heart just broke," she said. The district has rescheduled the event for Thursday, June 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Umatilla High School, with a parade through town and fireworks at the marina to follow.

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