



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Elizabeth Loera leads a chant with a megaphone during a protest against racial injustice and police brutality at Village Square Park in Umatilla on Tuesday, June 9, 2020.

## Protest draws small crowd in Umatilla

By BEN LONERGAN  
STAFF WRITER

More than 30 protesters took to Village Square Park in Umatilla on Tuesday, June 9, to protest racial injustice and police brutality. Protesters chanted and carried signs in support of police reform and the Black Lives Matter movement for about an hour at the roadside followed by speeches in the park.

Soledad Estrada, of Umatilla, took the day off from work to come and join protesters. Estrada said she had attended protests in Hermiston over the last week and felt it was important to have her voice heard in her own town.

“A lot of people didn’t think our small towns would do this, so I’m excited that Hermiston did it and now Umatilla is doing it,” she said. “I’m excited that we have people who do care.”

Estrada said she felt driven to protest to protect her three young sons from racial injustice and police brutality in the future.

“Every time I hear about something like this happening it just hits close to home because my sons are Black,” said Estrada of the murder of George Floyd. “They’re going to grow up to be big and they might scare someone and get the cops called on them.”

Estrada said she felt it was important to speak up so that her sons could have a voice and to establish a dialogue between police and protesters. Estrada said she was pulled over in Umatilla on Monday night, June 8, for a broken taillight and felt as though the officer was afraid to approach the car when he saw that her boyfriend was Black.

“It shouldn’t be like that, we’re all people and we weren’t doing anything wrong,” she said. “It’s sad that they get intimidated just by the color of your skin.”

Estrada added that she didn’t think the officer was racist and was more a result of the recent backlash against police in general. Estrada said she has always had a pretty good relationship with the police in Umatilla, but felt as though it was a dialogue that needed to be started.

### HERMISTON PROTEST

Hermiston organizers had planned the city’s third Black Lives Matter protest for Saturday, June 13, but postponed the event due to high winds that would make it difficult to hold up signs. The protest will instead be held on Saturday, June 20 starting at noon on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue.

Among those organizing the protest was 17-year-old Umatilla High School student Alex Norris. Norris said he was inspired to act after seeing similar protests in Hermiston during the last week.

“I saw that there was one in Hermiston and I thought well, if Hermiston can do it, we can too,” he said. “We have a strong and great community here in Umatilla.”

Norris drew on his own experience as a member of the LGBTQ community and the criticism he has faced from people to motivate his support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

“I’m part of the LGBT community and I’ve been criticized before because of who I am,” said Norris. “I can’t say I know exactly what they’re going through, but I have something similar I can compare it to.”

Norris said recent events with the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and widespread protests inspired him to help spearhead protests in Umatilla.

University of Oregon student Elizabeth Loera helped Norris organize the June 9 protest. Loera, who grew up in Umatilla, said she wanted to bring a voice to the people of Umatilla without having to go to larger cities.

“I thought Umatilla is a really small town and

haven’t seen any change or protests going on here,” Loera said.

Loera said she thought that people in Umatilla needed to know they had support and that the Black Lives Matter movement wasn’t limited to big cities adding that protesting at the local level can often see real change.

“It’s important to start here locally so that we can see actual change,” Loera said. “I think choosing to protest is my way of doing something about what’s going on.”

Loera was among several speakers at the event and spent much of the first hour parading the sidewalk with a megaphone leading chants alongside Norris.

“Being able to protest, you can come together and create change,” Loera said. “We can demonstrate to the community driving by what we believe in and that we are here for our Black brothers and sisters.”

Both Loera and Norris said that turnout was better than expected and they intend to continue protesting and are working to organize additional protests in the future.

“There’s change coming, it’s an uprising,” said Loera. “I’m looking forward to this generation and the momentum that we’re building.”



### PRIORITIES

A hundred years from now it will not matter what My bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the Life of a Child.

# Umatilla County COVID cases continue to rise

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County’s cases of COVID-19 rose to 174 confirmed cases and 13 presumptive cases on Tuesday, June 16, up from 140 confirmed cases one week prior.

According to the county’s daily reporting, 137 cases have recovered. The county reported its fourth death from the virus after an 87-year-old male resident died at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton on June 11. The man had underlying health conditions and tested positive on May 30, according to the release.

Counties surrounding Umatilla County are also seeing increases. Morrow County rose from 14 cases to 19 this week.

Union County, to the east, is currently experienc-

ing a major spike in cases, including 99 positive tests on June 15 and another 117 cases the next day. The county had reported only six cases so far in the county as of June 9.

To the north, the Tri-Cities saw a 114-case increase on June 16, bringing them up to 2,226 confirmed cases since the start of the pandemic, according to the *Tri-City Herald*. As a result, the Washington Department of Health is putting Franklin and Benton counties’s applications to move into Phase 2 of reopening on pause.

As of June 16, the Oregon Health Authority has reported 6,098 cases and 182 deaths from COVID-19 in Oregon.

To combat the spread of COVID-19, Umatilla County Public Health officials urged people in a news

release to stay home if they are showing any symptoms of COVID-19 including cough, fever, chills, sore throat or a loss of taste and smell.

“It is imperative that any person who is exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness stay home. UCo Health continues to discover instances where individuals are continuing to work while sick,” the department stated. “Now, more than ever, it is important for businesses to ensure that employees are not coming to work sick. Employees may feel internal and external pressure to work through mild illness. Businesses are encouraged to develop flexible leave policies to support employees who become ill and establish procedures for sending employees who are not feeling well home.”

## City of Hermiston reopens buildings

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The city of Hermiston reopened many of its facilities on Monday, June 15, after Umatilla County was approved for Phase 2 of reopening.

City playgrounds were already opened the week of June 8, according to a news release. City hall, the Hermiston Public Library and the Parks and Recreation offices at the Hermiston Community Center all reopened to the public on June 15, while the splash pad at Butte Park reopened June 13 and the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center will reopen June 24.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said in a statement that the city has

maintained a “high level of customer service” during the shutdown while abiding by state guidelines.

“Even as we begin to reopen and return to normal, we encourage residents who are uncomfortable visiting city facilities in person to call or email, and we will work with them to maintain services in an appropriate manner,” he said.

At the temporary city hall, located at 215 E. Gladys Ave., a customer service window is available on the back side of the building for people who would prefer not to enter the building.

According to the news release, the city will maintain strict cleaning protocols and has added Plexi-

glas dividers at customer service desks and markers on the floor to space out customers. At the library, there will be limits on how many people can be in the building at a time, and items checked in will be quarantined for three days before returning to the shelves.

City council and planning commission meetings will move to the Hermiston Community Center starting on June 22 to allow for a larger audience, but the meetings will also continue to be available on YouTube and the city’s website.

The municipal court will continue to be by appointment only.

For more information, including hours of operation for each building, visit [hermiston.or.us](http://hermiston.or.us).

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