

Fireworks are now in season

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

COVID-19 has ruined a lot of summer plans, but Hermiston residents can still celebrate the Fourth of July with a bang.

While some cities, including Pendleton, have canceled fireworks shows and parades for the year, the city of Hermiston will still put on a display of pyrotechnics from the Hermiston Butte after the sun goes down.

The event will be modified from previous years. There will be no live music, food trucks or games set up in Butte Park ahead of the show, the usual pool party has been canceled. But people are encouraged to watch the fireworks from their yards or vehicles or someone else where they can stay apart from other viewers.

The Stanfield Fourth of July Facebook page announced in May that organizers were canceling the parade and activities, but would still hold their usual fireworks display at dusk on the north side of town.

Lesley Phillips, who runs the Black Cat fireworks stand in the parking lot of Hermiston's Grocery Outlet, said she expects to see some additional interest in personal fireworks this year.

"Our volume's always been good, but I think between Landing Days in Umatilla being canceled, and the Fourth of July being more of a stay at home deal, I think we might see a slight increase," she said.

While COVID-19 has impacted trading around the world, Phillips said so far she hasn't seen too many



Fireworks explode over the marina in Umatilla on Thursday, June 4, 2020 in celebration of the Umatilla High School class of 2020.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

problems with the supply chain for fireworks, and she expects to be able to get more if she starts running low.

Like all shopping experi-

ences, fireworks stands are slightly modified this year. Phillips said everyone must come in one side and out the other, customers will wait 6 feet apart to check out

and only 10 people will be allowed in the tent at a time.

"The layout is a little different this year because of that factor, but I think that might actually be good,



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

A Black Cat fireworks stand outside of Grocery Outlet in Hermiston displays its wares on June 23.

because I will get more time to talk to customers about safety," she said.

Phillips tries to work with customers on making sure they use fireworks they take home safely. She said anyone setting them off in front of their house should water down their lawn and bushes beforehand, and keep a bucket of water handy to dispose of used fireworks.

She suggested getting a cinder block with a hollow space in the middle to keep the fireworks from spinning off in a different direction than expected.

The Oregon Fire Marshal's office has set June 23 through July 6 as the fireworks retail season this year.

State fire marshal Jim Walker reminded Oregonians in a news release that fireworks are banned at national parks and forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife properties, state beaches, state parks and state campgrounds.

"In Oregon, consumer legal fireworks can only be purchased from permitted fireworks retailers and stands," he said. "State reg-

ulations limit where those fireworks may be used. Starting in July, risks for wildfire in many parts of Oregon will be high. Fireworks can also start structural fires that threaten lives and property, as we have seen in past years."

Fireworks that fly into the air, explode or travel more than 12 feet horizontally are banned in Oregon. That includes fireworks known as bottle rockets, firecrackers and Roman candles. If police seize illegal fireworks they can charge the person in possession of them with a misdemeanor, which could result in a fine of up to \$2,500 per offense.

According to the fire marshal's office, there were 1,173 reported fireworks-related fires in Oregon in the past five years, causing more than \$4.9 million in damage, one death and 36 injuries.

"All of us share the responsibility to use only Oregon consumer legal fireworks and use them carefully," Walker said. "Please also consider your neighbors and their pets before deciding on when and where you choose to light legal fireworks."

Umatilla County's COVID-19 case count passes 300

In Umatilla County, 10.2% of tests have come back positive, putting the county in second place behind Union County's 20.8%

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Umatilla County continues to see a surge in COVID-19 cases, announcing 32 new confirmed cases and 21 presumptive cases on June 23, bringing the county's total to 313 confirmed cases so far, with 171 recovered.

The county had 174 confirmed cases one week prior, on June 16.

In an interview with the *East Oregonian* last week, Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said the county's contact tracing efforts have traced many cases back to people going to work despite knowingly experiencing minor symptoms of COVID-19. He urged people to stay home from work if they are sick, rather than expose their co-workers.

The Oregon Health

"THIS IS AN INCREDIBLY SAD ANNOUNCEMENT AND ONE THAT WE HAD HOPED NOT TO MAKE IN MORROW COUNTY."

Morrow County reported 36 cases of COVID-19, and one death, as of June 23

Authority reported an outbreak connected to Lamb Weston's Hermiston plant on June 23, with 37 cases connected to the plant through a combination of workers testing positive and close contacts of those workers.

Fiumara also said graduation parties are showing up as another source of infection, but that those cases have been difficult to track because some people are refusing to share the names of family and friends who attended.

Umatilla County's percentage of tests coming back positive is higher than all but one of Oregon's counties.

As of June 21, according to the Oregon Health Authority's reporting, 3.5% of COVID-19 tests in the state have come back positive. In Umatilla County,

10.2% of tests have come back positive, putting the county in second place behind Union County's 20.8% and one spot above Morrow County's 9.8%.

Morrow County is also seeing an increase in cases. As of June 23, the county had reported 36 confirmed cases. Morrow County also reported its first death, of a 53-year-old man with underlying health conditions who tested positive on June 12 and died June 18.

"This is an incredibly sad announcement and one that we had hoped not to make in Morrow County," the county stated in a news release. "We encourage everyone to be respectful as a family in our community grieves."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, underlying conditions that put peo-

ple at higher risk for severe COVID-19 complications include chronic lung diseases, asthma, obesity with a body mass index of 40 or higher, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, being a smoker, and conditions that cause people to be immunocompromised, such as HIV, bone marrow transplants or taking immunity-weakening medications.

People over the age of 65 are also considered at high risk.

Statewide, on June 23 the Oregon Health Authority reported the state had reached a total of 7,274 cases and 192 deaths.

Nationally, on June 23 the CDC reported 2.3 million cases and more than 120,000 deaths from the virus.

The Oregon Health Authority's advice for avoiding the spread of COVID-19 includes minimizing nonessential trips outside the home, staying 6 feet apart from other people, washing hands and sanitizing surfaces frequently, isolating at home when experiencing symptoms and wearing a mask over your nose and mouth in public.

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