

EDITOR'S DESK

Schools need our help this fall

There are still a lot of questions about what school will look like when it resumes in the fall, but one thing is clear: It won't look anything like what the rest of us experienced when we were students.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

I don't envy educators, lawmakers, parents and public health officials right now as they try to find the best balance between health and education. Solutions are going to look different based on each school's circumstances, but for as long as COVID-19 remains a threat, students will be facing a less-than-ideal learning environment.

During a Hermiston City Council meeting last week, I was glad to hear council members express an interest in offering up use of city facilities to Hermiston School District, if that would help the district offer more opportunities for in-person instruction for students while maintaining social distancing.

Nothing may come of the suggestion if logistics, such as transportation, prove too difficult. But the "it takes a village" attitude reflected in the discussion is one that we will need in the coming months. Businesses, nonprofits, government entities and service clubs may all be able to find new ways to contribute to stu-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, File

Allyssa Sullivan organizes bags of student materials while distributing them to students in Umatilla on April 3, 2020. School districts are now working on new solutions for the 2020-21 school year.

dents' learning.

Since most school districts are planning for a hybrid model of some days in the classroom and some days learning online, a lack of reliable internet access and electronic devices at home is a serious problem. Districts worked hard in the spring to address that by loaning out Chromebooks and setting up WiFi hot spots. Continuing that work of helping all students in our community be able to reliably access online learning should be a top priority.

That may look like grants pro-

vided to low-income families for internet access, similar to programs available for assistance paying utility bills. There could be a fund set up where community members could make a one-time donation or sign up to sponsor a student's internet bill for the year. Or businesses may consider donating electronic equipment, books and other supplies that students can take home and use when they're learning outside of a physical classroom.

It may be that businesses can also assist districts in curriculum that can

help prepare students for the workforce. At the high school level, I hope businesses can continue to find ways to provide work studies and internship opportunities for students. Our own summer intern at the *Hermiston Herald*, Nada Sewidan, is having a much different experience than her predecessors had, but we're finding ways to make it work.

Businesses that have in the past allowed for field trips at their facilities might be able to offer a live tour via video chat, followed by a question and answer session with students. Or professionals might be able to send in video tutorials for classes, such as welding or animal science.

In past reporting I have done about preparing students for the workforce, local employers have repeatedly stated that the hardest part of staffing their company is not finding someone who knows the quadratic equation or the plot of "The Scarlet Letter," but finding applicants who are reliable and have a good work ethic.

Teachers may not be able to get through as much curriculum as usual in the next school year, and students may not do as much homework or take as many tests. But whether a student is being home schooled, taught in the classroom or learning online, they can still learn problem solving skills and other important life lessons in the face of adversity.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Community stepping up to support local businesses

To the editor:

Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, Hermiston residents have shown a strong interest in making sure our local businesses have the support they need to navigate a quickly changing environment.

Whether by ordering carry-out when restaurants couldn't provide in-house dining, shopping local when stores opened back up, or simply being patient as businesses implement new state mandates, people have found ways to encourage and sustain our business community.

Uncertainty is one of the biggest obstacles a small business faces, and these are uncertain times. Knowing your friends, neighbors, and community have your back is reassurance. Feeling confident that

you will be able to survive even difficult times is critical to long-term planning.

One of the roles local businesses take most seriously is providing a paycheck for their employees. Many of these workplaces are like families, and employers will go to great lengths to make sure their workers can pay their bills and provide for their families even when doing their jobs is impossible.

As the Hermiston Herald reported last week, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) saved nearly 1,600 jobs in the Hermiston ZIP code over a 60-day period in April and May. The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce and city of Hermiston staff responded quickly when the federal funding became available, reaching out to more than 400 businesses to make sure they had the information necessary to access it.

The city has also partnered with

Umatilla County to provide \$1,000 grants to 38 businesses with fewer than 26 employees to help cover costs incurred by COVID-19. We're fortunate to have active partners who are working toward the same goals as us — creating an environment where businesses can thrive to the benefit of everyone.

We're continuing to look for ways we can support the businesses that are the backbone of our community as we weather this storm together.

Byron Smith, city manager
Hermiston

The Bridge shows how far Umatilla has come

To the editor:

Umatilla has long had a reputation for being the "naughty" town in the area. They had the less than reputable shops, and they had all the strip clubs, and downtown was,

well, run down and uninviting.

Umatilla has been making great strides in revitalizing their downtown lately. They've gotten rid of the ridiculous boulders in the middle of Sixth Street and are reworking the sidewalks and street parking to have more of a friendly and inviting appearance, and some of the businesses downtown are catching on and updating too. The fire department has a beautiful new digital sign and a friendly bench to take a break on, the strip clubs are all gone now, with the Riverside being the first to show and the last to go, and once the construction is complete, it will be a delightful downtown to drive through.

With the pandemic, the owners of the Riverside, Daren and Paulette Dufloth, decided to "go in a different direction." The once-risky business has now been converted into a family friendly, upscale, mid-priced dining experi-

ence. The new restaurant has been dubbed "The Bridge," in keeping with the revitalization of the community and Umatilla's historic landmark.

My wife and I decided to go to The Bridge to check it out and try one of their pizzas. We ordered their "Butcher" pizza, basically a meat lover's, all-meat pizza. It was amazing!

This time, for some variety, we got the "Pit" pizza, a barbecued chicken pizza. I don't know if I'll ever get around to trying another pizza variety at The Bridge, because I just can't bring myself to not get The Pit. The pizzas were there faster than you could get a drink refill in another restaurant.

Don't take my word for it, go to The Bridge and get a pizza (I recommend The Pit, but you do you). I don't think you'll regret it.

Rob Tooley
Umatilla

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111
Switchboard: 202-456-1414
whitehouse.gov/contact/

U.S. SENATORS RON WYDEN

221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

JEFF MERKLEY

313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE GREG WALDEN

185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
La Grande office: 541-624-2400

STATE REP. GREG SMITH, DISTRICT 57

900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Email: Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

STATE SEN. BILL HANSELL, DISTRICT 29

900 Court St. NE, S-423

Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Email: Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

GOV. KATE BROWN

160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582
Email: www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/share-your-opinion.aspx

HERMISTON MAYOR DAVID DROTZMANN

180 NE Second St.
Hermiston, OR 97838
ddrotzmann@hermiston.or.us



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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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