

UPDATES

City, CAPECO offer housing assistance

HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston residents who have lost income because of COVID-19 can receive assistance with their rent, mortgage or utilities.

The city of Hermiston and the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) are offering financial assistance in the form of relief funds for mortgage payments, rental payments and water, sewer or garbage fees.

The applications are open to all households that fall under 110% of the county's median income. Immigration status is not a requirement.

Applications are available in English and Spanish.

For more information or to apply, visit www.capeco-works.org or call 541-289-7755.

The assistance program is made possible by the more than \$500,000 that the city received from the CARES Act.

The city has also put that money toward other COVID-19 relief efforts, including the most recent round of small business grants from Umatilla County and contributions toward Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Hermiston Energy Service's assistance programs.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative customers can apply for help with their electrical bills through their UCARE program and Hermiston Energy Service customers can apply for assistance through their HEAT program by visiting umatillaelectric.com/my-account/energy-bill-assistance.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Children play at Little Tots Daycare & Preschool in Hermiston on Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. The day care facility, along with many others throughout the state, is working to adapt to shifting guidelines from the state.

Day care dilemma
COVID-19 shifts Hermiston's child care landscape

By CASEY WHITE-ZOLLMAN
FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

In March, Camille Munoz had just recently moved her Little Tots Daycare & Preschool in Hermiston from in her home to a new center location on Kik Road. She and her 10 employees and 47 day care and preschool children had more room to grow and learn.

Then COVID-19 hit, and the restrictions to child care providers came flooding in from the state's Office of Child Care. No longer could Munoz take in children who only needed part-time care, nor could she allow any children to attend whose parents were now forced to work from home or had been laid off. Only the children of essential workers could come to Little Tots under the new restrictions.

And just when Munoz and other providers felt like they had the new restrictions down, a new set of changes would be announced.

"The guidelines changed, literally, week to week, and I couldn't keep up," Munoz said. "We're losing motivation. We used to love our jobs, but now we just feel like robots trying to keep up. It's stress-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A child reaches for another car while playing at Little Tots Daycare & Preschool in Hermiston on Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020.

"IT'S STRESSFUL ON ME, MY EMPLOYEES, OUR FAMILIES, MY OWN FAMILY."

— Camille Munoz, owner of Little Tots Daycare & Preschool

ful on me, my employees, our families, my own family."

Munoz went from having 47

children at Little Tots to 28. To continue affording to pay her eight remaining staff members, she cut

her own salary.

"As providers, we're also parents and there's no in-person school," Munoz said. "I can't bring my kids with me to (Little Tots) because of the size limits. Unemployment hasn't come through and we're now living on a one-person income. It's very difficult."

The restrictions are also hard on families and the children that child care providers serve. Kids need structure and consistency, Munoz said, and the restrictions on child care providers have forced many families to pull kids out of day care and preschool, which can be tough on young children.

"We have a large group of kids who've had the same group of friends consistently for the past year or so. Then that was ripped away," she said.

Carmen Wolfe, who has run Small Wonders Daycare out of her home in Hermiston for 21 years, said it's been hard to see so much change and how it impacts children.

While Wolfe has been fortunate to keep the majority of the 10 children she cares for because their

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Households still missing from Umatilla County's census count



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A sign along Highway 395 welcomes drivers to the city of Hermiston on Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020.

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Oregon residents are responding to the 2020 Census at above-average rates, but there are still households in Umatilla County that need to be counted.

Census takers, officially known as enumerators, are in the process of visiting households that have not taken the initiative to self-respond to the census through mail, phone or online. Joanna Hayden, a census field supervisor in Umatilla County, said if people don't want an enumerator showing up at their door, the best thing to do is to self-respond before that happens.

The next best thing is to give information the first time enumerators come around, so that they don't keep returning. The census works best when it gives an accurate picture of a community's demographics, Hayden said, but they will accept a simple count of the number of people in a

household over getting nothing at all.

"If you say, 'I don't want to give you information, but I can tell you three people live here, but I won't give you their age or sex,' that's at least something we can put in," she said.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's website, as of Aug. 31, 54.2% of Umatilla County residents had self-responded, and 44.7% of Morrow County residents. Hermiston's self-response rate was 62.6% and Umatilla's was 55.4%.

While the website doesn't break its enumerated counts down by county, statewide, as of Aug. 31, 67.9% of Oregon residents have self-responded and enumerators have collected information for another 23.6%, for a total response of 91.4% so far.

Nationwide, a total of 83.2% homes have been counted.

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