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A YEAR OF DISASTERS

Echo residents recover from floods, pandemic, and smoke

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

When Echo residents began 2020, they probably didn't realize how much bleach they would be using this year.

The cleaning substance has been in demand since March because of the pandemic, but before that, Echo residents were using it to battle mold in homes that flooded during the worst flood in the town's 116-year history.

Mayor Jeanie Hampton remembers bleach and other cleaning supplies being dropped off at Echo Community Church after February 7's "500-year flood" hit.

"We had one side of the basement full of logical things like shovels and bleach and cleaning supplies and gloves," she said. "You would think people knew we were going into COVID."

The church used food donations to hand out free meals to anyone who needed them during the week of the flood, and distributed other supplies to anyone in need, including some Stanfield residents. Crews of volunteers, armed with everything from wheelbarrows to chain saws, showed up wherever there was a need. When another flood hit in May, people cleaned out some of the same properties again using supplies left over from February.

Echo School was temporarily turned into a shelter for displaced residents during the first day of the floods, but Raymon Smith, superintendent of Echo School District, said since the flooding happened on a Friday, students didn't have to miss any school at the time.

"We were back in school Monday morning," he said. "We had some areas that were completely cut off in the Reith Road area, so we worked with those families, but mostly kids still showed up Monday morning even when we said they didn't need to."

Those days of school became even more important when class was canceled a little over a month later because of COVID-19. Then the town saw more flooding in May.

Smith said he was gratified to the way everyone from the fire department to the church to city staff quickly banded together and did an "amazing job" of taking care of everyone. Hampton had similar sentiments, and said Echo residents have shown their resilience throughout the year by supporting each other and having a good attitude.

"The second time the flood came through, farmers were laughing and saying, 'When you find this part, will you send it back up to me because it came off my wheel line,'" she said.

While residents may have been able to keep their sense of humor, the damage they suffered during the flooding was very real, and so are fears it will happen again.

"People are really concerned about another event," city administrator David Slaght said.

He said the Umatilla River's flooding on Feb. 7 permanently altered the course and shape of the river around Echo, slicing new paths through farmland.

The difference between aerial photos taken years ago and ones taken in 2020 are obvious, he said. A high-water event in May brought more flooding, and Slaght said he — like many Echo residents — believes that the changed landscape will make flooding in Echo more common.

Slaght said the effects on Echo's 700 residents still linger seven months later, even as the rest of the world turned its attention to the global pandemic that has also hurt residents.

"A lot of people are still recovering," he said. "We still have a couple of homes that are not livable on the south side of town. There's just only so much money to go around, and there was just so much damage."

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WHAT A YEAR

February: Flooding damages homes and changes the course of the Umatilla River
March: Schools and business close because of COVID-19 pandemic
May: Umatilla River floods properties around Echo a second time
September: Fires around Oregon lead to air quality deemed "hazardous"

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Debris clogs a Bureau of Reclamation dam on the Umatilla River along Ramos Lane near Echo.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Farm equipment maneuvers through the fields outside of Echo under smoky skies on Friday, Sept. 11, 2020.

Hermiston graduate rewarded for 'grit'

By CASEY WHITE-ZOLLMAN
FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

In a world full of divisiveness, Salma Anguiano feels like a breath of fresh air — and hope.

"We all function differently in society because we all have different backgrounds and identities, and we approach things with different lenses," said the 20-year-old Hermiston High School graduate. "We need to step aside from our biases and look at things differently, through different lenses, and really be open enough to listen to others' perspectives. I hope I can be that type of person who can build different understandings among different types of communities."

Anguiano, a junior at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, wrote about her experiences as an Hispanic woman in a predominantly white institution where many students come from wealthy backgrounds in an essay that won her a $3,000 Workers' Memorial Scholarship from the Oregon Occupational Safety & Health division (OSHA). This is the third year in a row Anguiano has been awarded the competitive scholarship.

"I REALLY ENJOY LEARNING FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND FROM ME.

Salma Anguiano, scholarship winner

Anguiano qualified for the scholarship as the daughter of a worker injured on the job. Her father was severely injured in a vehicle crash in 2014 when the van he was riding in on his way to his job at a Boardman dairy ran a stop sign and rolled, ejecting him from the vehicle. He was left a quadriplegic.

At the time, Anguiano was just 14 and in the eighth grade, and her younger sister was just 6 months old. She served as a translator for her parents with medical staff, and cared for her baby sister, all the while going to school in Hermiston.

"It was a lot for me as a young person. I was 14 and didn't want to be dealing with these types of problems," she said. "I just wanted to be a normal teenager. I couldn't do the things other kids my age were doing because I had family responsibilities. I think, while it was a difficult time, it helped me prepare more for real life, because in real life, things don't always go as smoothly as you think they will go. It matured me at a really difficult age."

OSHA looks for students who are resilient and want to pursue higher education goals when reviewing applicants for the Workers' Memorial Scholarship. Anguiano is one of just seven students statewide to receive the honor, which was established in 1991 by the Oregon Legislature. Award recommendations are made by Oregon OSHA's Safe Employment Education and Training Advisory Committee, an advisory group with members from business, organized labor, and government.

Oregon OSHA presents the awards annually to help in the post-secondary education of spouses or children of permanently and totally disabled or fatally injured workers.

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Photo contributed by Salma Anguiano

Hermiston graduate Salma Anguiano won the Workers' Memorial Scholarship from the Oregon Occupational Safety & Health division for a third year in a row in 2020.

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