

Altrusa finds ways to make a difference

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**
FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

Guidelines imposed because of COVID-19 have altered how people work, socialize and participate in recreational activities. Stay home orders, social distancing and restrictions on group gatherings have also changed how people engage in service organizations and volunteer activities. This is the first story in series for the Hermiston Herald that will highlight how area service clubs and groups have responded to the pandemic.

As summer winds down each year, members of Altrusa International of Hermiston are typically gearing up for their annual fundraiser. However, the novel coronavirus has disrupted normal plans and the group was forced to cancel this year's Altrusa Auction.

According to club president Stephanie Hughes, Altrusa is an international nonprofit organization that strives to make local communities better through leadership, partnership and service. The Hermiston club, she said, offers an opportunity to make a real difference in Hermiston and the smaller neighboring towns of Echo, Irrigon, Stanfield and Umatilla.

"We undertake a variety of service, literacy, fundraising and international projects each year," Hughes said.

Altrusans have appreciated the generosity of the community for the past four



Photo contributed by Stephanie Hughes
Altrusa's members met with masks on and over video chat during their most recent club meeting in Hermiston.

decades, as their annual auction event raises money to support a variety of projects throughout the year. The club has provided support to such organizations as the Hermiston Warming Station, Made to Thrive and the American Red Cross, as well as encouraging reading through its Little Red Library project, assisting middle school girls as they transition to high school during their Girls Night In program, and providing scholarships for area residents seeking higher education.

With the auction serving as the club's only annual fundraiser, Altrusans are tapping into creative ways to

raise money and continue to help meet needs in the community. Finding ways to do that in the current situation, Hughes said, is a bit difficult — but not impossible.

"We are a hands-on volunteer project organization," she said. "Being out in the public and helping with what is needed has been something we strive for and always look forward to."

Club members, Hughes said, are looking at different forms of fundraising. In addition to recently establishing a BottleDrop account, they are learning how to write grants and are looking into a "Donate Now" button on their Facebook page.

Hughes expressed appreciation to individuals and businesses who have already responded by making donations. As a nonprofit organization, she reminds people that financial gifts are tax deductible.

"At our auctions in the past, we have had amazing donors of items as well as participants in the bidding and purchasing," Hughes said. "We are hopeful that some of those folks and others will be able to donate funds, or items when we do drives for the community."

The international service organization celebrated its centennial in 2017. The Hermiston club was organized May 14, 1977, and

currently has 35 members living locally.

As a result of the pandemic, the general membership has been meeting virtually. However, Hughes said many of the committees are small enough to utilize social distancing and meet in person.

"We have a committee that is focused on membership engagement and celebrations," she said. "They figured out how to honor our birthdays and anniversaries with special no contact delivery. So, we are trying to do what we can."

Club members represent varying occupations and lifestyles, Hughes said. Each member possesses a shared interest in community service and enjoys the friendship, fun and satisfaction that comes from working together for the benefit of others.

"We are always seeking new volunteers to join our organization and make a difference," Hughes said. "We are looking for projects and new members to help us

overcome and grow."

On the horizon, the club is looking at helping with a room at Martha's House. In addition, they will continue to keep books in the little libraries, award scholarships and provide help where they are able.

In celebration of Altrusa's Make a Difference Day — Saturday, Oct. 24 — club members will be on hand at Little Red Library sites from 1-2 p.m. at Belt Park, Sunset Park and Greenwood Park, all in Hermiston. The public is invited to enjoy ice cream bars, receive free books and learn more about Altrusa.

For more information, email hermistonltrusa@gmail.com, call Hughes at 541-720-9769 or visit www.facebook.com/AltrusaInternationalOfHermiston. A Zoom link is available for virtual meetings, which are the first and third Thursday of each month at noon. Donations can be sent to: Altrusa International of Hermiston, P.O. Box 794, Hermiston, OR 97838.

Boardman food pantry off to a good start

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

A year full of disasters finally got the ball rolling on Boardman's first food pantry for residents in need.

The project has blossomed rapidly since it began in March.

"We went from a closet full of donated food in March to over \$150,000 in mid-September," Anna Browne said.

Browne, Oregon State University Extension's open campus coordinator in Umatilla and Morrow counties, said she didn't think the pantry would exist today if it hadn't been for the pandemic. Boardman received a \$4,325 grant from the Oregon Food Bank in 2018, but talks about how to use the money had stalled until plummeting employment numbers in March spurred community members into action.

An employee of Columbia River Health voiced concerns about people needing food, First Baptist Church of Boardman volunteered to start handing it out and the Oregon Food Bank gave its blessing for the grant to go toward that effort. Browne lent her expertise to help the new pantry gain official nonprofit status and create a board and bylaws. The health clinic donated shelving. Local farms and food processors like Tillamook, Lamb Weston and Threemile Canyon Farms began donating food, along with individuals and other churches.

The donations really took off, however, a severe wind storm in May caused significant damage in Boardman, including mobile homes



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Samantha Weiss fills boxes at the Boardman Food Pantry in the First Baptist Church of Boardman on Monday, Sept. 14, 2020.

destroyed by falling trees in Wilson Road Mobile Home Park. Oregon Food Bank responded with 102 emergency food boxes and three additional pallets of food.

Later, Amazon Web Services donated \$25,000 to the pantry, and the Morrow County Board of Commissioners recently voted to use \$100,000 of its CARES Act funding to help the pantry purchase a permanent location (Browne said they believe they have found a suitable building but it is not

finalized yet).

Mary Killion, board chair for the pantry, said she was thrilled to see how much the pantry was already serving residents in need.

"This is the most exciting thing I think I've ever been a part of," she said. "The volunteers are committed, and they have made it so easy, and everyone has been so supportive, I feel like I can't take any credit."

More than 100 households are being served every week, through picking up

food at the church or having it delivered if they don't have transportation, are sick or are worried about their risks for COVID-19. Food is available for pickup from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Mondays, and Thursdays from 6-7 p.m.

"We are getting new faces every week from people that just heard about us. We don't get the same people every week, because people are trying to make it on their own. I believe that with all my heart," Killion said.

Shara Wiess of First Baptist Church of Boardman said people in the community have been extremely supportive. The first round of food came from a woman whose husband had recently died, and she used a portion of the life insurance check to shop for food for the pantry.

"People (receiving the free food) have asked what they can do for the church — can they clean? Can they pull weeds?" she said.

Boardman residents were previously able to go pick up food at Irrigon's food pan-

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