

# New softball complex gets started

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

As they stood on a wide expanse of gravel behind Hermiston High School, members of the school's softball team could list all sorts of benefits to the new softball complex that will be built at the site:

"No more potholes out in the outfield."

"No more goatheads."

"No more slippery home plate."

"No more sitting on chipped plywood getting splinters in your booty."

Kendyl Inners said the thing she will look forward to most is not having to rush through changing in the high school's locker room, and then figure out how to get the entire team over to the current softball fields at Rocky Heights Elementary School with a limited number of vehicles.

"Also, people can know where the softball fields are and watch us play," she said.

While the girls have enjoyed their time playing softball for HHS, they are excited at the prospect of a brand new, state-of-the-art complex right on their own campus. Coach Rebecca Pridmore shares their enthusiasm. She said one feature she is particularly looking forward to is having a dugout, because for her, gathering with her team in a dugout for the first time in college was a real "aha moment."

"The girls and I are really excited for this," she said. "They work really hard, so they deserve this."

Hermiston School District broke ground on the project on Tuesday, Sept. 29. The new fields are the

first step in the school district's collection of projects that will be paid for by the \$82.7 million bond voters passed in November 2019. Other projects include a larger Rocky Heights Elementary School, a new elementary school recently christened Loma Vista Elementary School, a new annex added on to the high school and improvements to parking and pick-up lanes at some schools.

"We're here to celebrate a major milestone in our bond projects," Superintendent Tricia Mooney told the crowd at the site.

Athletic Director Larry Usher said the softball team has been a "bright spot" in the district's athletic programs and he was glad they were finally getting the state-of-the-art complex they deserve, similar to the teams that play on Kennison Field.

The \$2 million project includes two softball fields with stands and dugouts plus storage, and a building with restrooms and concessions. The high school's baseball field nearby is also getting a major renovation.

Usher said the location on the high school campus will be more convenient than Rocky Heights, and should also give students more of a sense of ownership of the space. He said the district is



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan  
**Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney hands out hard hats to members of the Hermiston High School softball team during a groundbreaking for the district's new softball complex on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020.**

grateful to the voters who supported the bond.

"I think the community is really going to love seeing this piece of property used for something so beneficial to the kids," he said.



**Shovels sit in the dirt at the site of Hermiston High School's new softball complex during its groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020.**



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan  
**Members of the Hermiston High School softball team pose for a picture at the groundbreaking for the district's new softball complex on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020.**

# Distance learning brings challenges for support staff

By **CASEY-WHITE ZOLLMAN**  
FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

For the last seven years, Erika Esparza has looked forward to the start of the school year bringing laughter and smiles back to the halls of Sunset Elementary School in Hermiston, where she works as the lead secretary. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the hallways at Sunset and all of the other west Umatilla County schools remain quiet and empty.

"It's a big change for us," Esparza said. "We're used to hearing the kiddos' laughter, and parents stopping by to see us or have lunch with their kids. We don't get to see many folks these days."

Support staff at schools are finding the impacts of distance learning to be just as challenging as their teacher colleagues. With all hands on deck to provide support to families, some support staff are learning new skills on top of their regular duties.

"We've become IT here in the office because we're taking calls from parents trying to troubleshoot logging onto their kid's Chromebook or their student's email or something else that isn't working," Esparza said. "We have some of those resources at our hands to help without them having to go to their teacher or to IT. We literally walk them through step-by-step as much as we can, but sometimes there's only so much we can do."

Getting creative about how



Photo contributed by Cristal Delgado  
**Cristal Delgado, a counselor for McNary Heights Elementary School, shows how she connects virtually with students to talk to students during distance learning.**

to continue to serve students and families is necessary. Longtime Echo School Food Service Director Tera Longhorn said she's tried to find ways to continue to provide comfort foods and warm meals to students, even with the challenges of delivering those meals. When the district first closed school in March, she prepared prepackaged or cold meals. Now she's switching things up as Echo delivers meals directly to students' houses.

"I decided when we came

## HELP WITH LEARNING

For families running into technical difficulties with distance learning, Hermiston School District is now offering evening assistance.

From 4-7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, parents can stop by the Hermiston School District offices at 305 S.W. 11th St. to get help with Chromebooks, Wi-Fi hot spots, where to access information and how to communicate with teachers.

Bilingual help is available, and masks and social distancing are required in the building.

back with distance learning that I wanted to do something different," said Longhorn, who's in her 22nd year with Echo Schools. "The students can get tired of the same old sandwich, so I'm trying to make it as much like normal — when they'd be at school — as possible."

That means packaging meals like spaghetti with instructions for reheating so students can have a lunch at home during the week. Longhorn said she has learned to be specific with her instructions for meals for students who are trying to heat meals on their own.

"I had to find the right packaging materials, put a label on it with how to cook it, and then anticipate what the kid's going to do with that meal when they're at home," she said. "I realized I needed to add another label that instructed them to take the sandwich out of the foil before putting it in the microwave. I didn't have to think about things like that before."

All who work in schools are having to do their jobs differently, which has caused significant stress and anxiety for many staff members and students alike.

Cristal Delgado, a counselor at McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla, said she's seen a "huge" increase in anxiety with distance learning and the kids not being in their classrooms with their friends and teachers.

"Anxiety can show in so many different ways," Delgado said. "Living in the unknown has been especially hard for these kids. I want them to know I support you, I'm listening and I got you."

Delgado created a survey for students to use emojis to express how they're feeling, "and they all expressed that they want to go back to school and see their teachers and their friends."

Their teachers want to see them,

too, and Delgado is doing what she can to support teaching staff.

"First and foremost, I want to support the teachers," she said. "If I know the teachers are in a healthy mental place, then I know they can be the best teacher they can be for the kids."

Delgado has created a teacher survival kit with inspiring videos for McNary teachers, and she facilitates a support group on Friday mornings, and has provided valuable information on self-care. Making sure she takes care of herself is also a priority for Delgado.

"I do think sometimes people forget (counselors) are also humans and we hear a lot of things," Delgado said. "When we hear things from parents or children who come in, you have to have coping strategies and ways to debrief after those conversations. I can't take care of everyone else if I don't take care of myself."

For Delgado, that includes running and having her own support group, including keeping in close contact with other counselors in the district.

"It's hard to turn it off when you know these kids need you and the teachers need you," she said. "It's a challenge, and it's a new challenge."

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**WEEK LONG SALE** 20% Off All Solaray Products 50% Off Reg Retail on Clearance Items  
Please maintain 6 feet social distancing while in the store.

**PET OF THE WEEK**

Sausey is a precious boy who is approx 10 months old. He is good with cats and dogs. He will be ready for his forever home at the end of the month.

**MEET SAUSEY**

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If interested please go to [fuzzballrescue.com](http://fuzzballrescue.com) and fill out an application. If you are not able to adopt, but would like to foster or donate, visit [fuzzballrescue.com](http://fuzzballrescue.com) or you can mail in donations to Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, PO Box 580, Hermiston, OR 97838

You're invited to a **Medicare Birthday Party!**

Are you turning 65 in the next year? Join one of our Medicare Birthday Parties on **Oct. 1 or Oct. 6, 2-4pm** to learn all about Medicare!

All are welcome to join and hear about Medicare, Open Enrollment and find coverage that's right for you. Attend in person or virtually.

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