

Hermiston HERALD OPINION & READER'S FORUM

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EDITOR'S DESK

Time to put our giving reputation to the test

In my years of interviewing people in Hermiston, there are certain phrases I hear over and over again. One is that Hermiston is a “very giving community.”

It does seem as if the community punches above its weight when it comes to the amount of money raised each year for charitable causes and livability projects. One of my first impressions of Hermiston was being in awe of the amount of donations Hermiston School District was able to raise to build Kennison Field, which had its grand opening the week I moved here.

As we enter this holiday season, it seems Hermiston (and surrounding communities) may need that giving spirit more than ever. Not only have mass layoffs and an economic recession created more need, but the pandemic has also shut down the normal methods of fundraising to help meet that need.

A good example of this is Christmas Express, a program Hermiston Police Department has run for the past 50 years to give out boxes of food and gifts to families and individuals in need. The main source of food for Christmas Express is a canned food drive at the local schools, where classes compete against each other to collect the most food. But this year students can't bring canned food to classrooms they're not attending in person.

Instead, the police department will be collecting canned food (no glass jars) from Nov. 30 to Dec. 11 (except for Sunday, Dec. 6) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway 395 in Hermiston.

As December draws near, other organizations will likely also be announcing efforts to collect warm winter coats, Christmas gifts, school supplies and other needed items. There



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR



Hermiston Herald, File

Donated food sits in the Agape House after a previous canned food drive for Christmas Express.

is also a perennial need for donations to nonprofits, such as food banks.

For anyone who does have the means to donate, I would encourage you to do so — if possible, more generously than you have in the past. If you have the kind of financial comfort that allows you to impulsively buy a \$30 sweater you saw advertised online, consider impulsively feeding a family instead.

If you wish you could afford to donate generously but can't, there are plenty of other ways you can make a positive difference in someone's life. Compliments, thank yous, and “I've

been thinking about you lately, how have you been doing?” messages are free, but when they come at the right time they can mean a lot.

If you're experiencing financial hardship I would also encourage you to not be afraid to ask for help that you need, or accept it when offered. These services are there for a reason. People want to help. Everyone goes through seasons in their life where they struggle in one way or another, and many who receive help during that time want to pay it forward afterward. Don't deny them the opportunity.

Asking for help is hard, and for

those who aren't in a position to need it currently, I hope you'll not make it more difficult with judgment and criticism. Give freely, without afterward trying to police whether the recipients of community programs all deserved it or used it the “right” way. People making such judgments usually don't know the full story.

It's been a difficult year. For many, this holiday season may be more bleak than usual. It's not too early to start thinking what we can personally do to bring a little more light, a little more hope and a little more love to this winter.

COLUMN

Thankful for a community of support

This has been an incredibly challenging year for the Hermiston School District, and especially for our students and families. So much of their learning and growing experience is about being together, yet COVID-19 has forced us to stay apart.

Our teachers and students are doing the best they can with Comprehensive Distance Learning, which has meant adjusting to entirely new teaching methods and learning styles as we wait for approval to reopen our classrooms. But even through the challenges and disappointments of 2020, I've found many things to be thankful for.

I'm thankful for the parents who have generously given their time to make sure their children are getting the most out of this strange year. Turning so many living rooms into classrooms takes a toll, but parents have stepped up to show that education is a priority.

I'm thankful for the support of this community that, time after time, comes through for our kids. The senior parade this summer, approving the school bond last fall, and countless other acts of kindness toward our students makes Hermis-

ton a special place to live. This community stands behind its students, which is why they are fighting so hard to make sure they get the full education they deserve.

I'm also thankful for the teachers and staff who have bent over backward to learn new skills and reach out to their students in new ways. Starting from scratch in April, the entire school district has worked as a team to stand up a new educational platform for Hermiston students. Without the benefit of in-depth training or a gradual rollout, they onboarded thousands of students, troubleshooting along the way, to ensure access was available to every child. There are still frustrations, but our staff has stood up to every challenge and should be very proud of what they've accomplished.

And I'm thankful for everyone who has taken the task of health safety to heart and protected themselves and our community against COVID-19. We have taken every precaution to protect those in our school buildings against the spread of coronavirus, but we have little control of what happens elsewhere. We know that the only way we will be allowed to fully reopen is when the spread of the virus is significantly reduced in Umatilla County, and that's a goal we all share.

The new Oregon Department of Educa-

tion guidelines require Umatilla County to have fewer than 80 new COVID-19 cases over a two-week period to begin bringing elementary students back into the classroom. We nearly reached that number in September and October before a post-Halloween spike lifted us into the hundreds again.

The only enemy is the virus, and the only way to beat it is to protect our own health. The simple measures of wearing a mask and maintaining physical distance in public, washing your hands regularly, and staying home if you're sick are the best ways to stop the spread and protect our community. If we're able to again reduce our number of new cases, we have a shot at opening school in the second half of the school year.

When times are dark, we have to focus on the path right in front of us that lead to a brighter future. Every student in the Hermiston School District deserves a complete education. The only way we can make sure that happens is by getting them safely back in the classroom.

I'm thankful for all of you who are working to make that happen. Happy Thanksgiving.

Dr. Tricia Mooney is the superintendent of the Hermiston School District.



Tricia Mooney

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Divisiveness doesn't help either side

I read with interest the Democrat comments about holding onto their “power” after the last election and the disappointment expressed that they still aren't able to muster a quorum to overcome a Republican walk-out. Nowhere did I see mention of a desire to work across the aisle to discuss issues and pass legislation that would benefit the entire state, and not just the power centers of Portland and Salem.

Those of us living on the east side of the state, as well as the other pockets of conservative lifestyles, are often ignored. The carbon tax that Republicans stood their ground on last session is a case in point. Rather than working toward a solution, it was “our way or the highway” type of legislating. Passing that bill would have been disastrous for the east side economy.

Reading the article, it appears we can continue to expect more of the same out of our Oregon Legislature. The old saying “No taxation without representation” seems to apply to us in a disconcerting way. Our Republican representatives work hard and deserve our thanks, but, realistically, they are outnumbered and outvoted.

Jim Sheffield
Hermiston

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

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.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.

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