

EDITOR'S DESK

# Churches can be a valuable asset for communities

Recently about 200 volunteers spread out over Hermiston to cheerfully weed flower beds, sweep sidewalks, wash cars and do other chores. The activity was one of many "I Love My City" events hosted in recent years, each organized by an informal coalition of local churches.



Jade McDowell  
NEWS EDITOR

It was a reminder of the power for good that churches can represent. In a community that is sometimes too small to catch the notice of major charitable organizations, churches or other religiously affiliated groups help fill in the gap.

There is Desert Rose Ministries, for example, which has proved an invaluable resource for helping homeless residents of our community, providing everything from breakfast to sleeping bags. First Baptist Church donated the space needed to start the Boardman Food Pantry. Other churches provide the space and volunteers to facilitate free community meals, blood drives, canned food drives, coat drives, informational events and more. They offer scholarships, clean up parks and pass around sign-up sheets to supply local nonprofits with desperately needed volunteers.

Unfortunately, churches sometimes get a bad rap.

Look in the comment section under any news article about religion, and you'll find people with very hard



Jade McDowell/Hermiston Herald

Members of New Hope Community Church wash a truck at a free car wash during the I Love My City event in Hermiston on Saturday, May 1, 2021.

feelings toward religion.

That is, to be frank, understandable. I say that as someone who has attended church regularly my entire life. As valuable as religion has been for me personally and for many people I know, I've also seen church be a pretty awful experience for some who have suffered at the hands of those who choose to wrongfully twist their religion into a weapon of shame and exclusion.

Bullies and predators will always find ways to use things to their advantage. Take sports, for example — some student athletes have suffered horrible things in locker

rooms, as coaches use their position to groom young victims for sexual abuse, or cruel students use "hazing" as an excuse to torment others. On the other hand, participation in sports has given others confidence, close friendships and invaluable life lessons. The resulting feelings both groups may have are valid and shouldn't result in banning sports or forcing everyone to participate.

In the same vein, we must respect others' autonomy in choosing what they believe about religion, even if it doesn't make sense to us based on our own set of experiences.

For those who do participate in

churches, that collective power is a force to be reckoned with, as shown in the examples I gave at the beginning of this column. Those who are doing religion right — guided by charity instead of judgment — achieve amazing things in our communities every day.

Some, like I Love My City, are highly visible. Others are known only to the person who needed help and the religious leader who bought their groceries or paid their utility bill.

For those who consider themselves outside the religious community, it's important to recognize that when you're working to make your city a better place, it would be unwise to avoid opportunities to work together with other groups also looking to improve the community. Churches are often good at mobilizing people, and have strong local networks they have built up over decades, if not centuries.

For churchgoers, it's important to work to make sure your own church community is really living up to its ideals of service, love and integrity. Speak up if the way those around you talk about or treat certain groups of people isn't aligned with what they supposedly believe about loving your neighbor. And don't neglect opportunities to serve.

Life is a rich tapestry, and when all colors of threads come together, it is all the more beautiful.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Retain Pitney for his expertise on school board

It is great to see so much interest in our Hermiston School Board. In the 12 years that I have served on the board, I have never seen so many candidates run to serve the students and families of the Hermiston School District.

Even though each candidate brings their own strengths and qualifications, I believe Brent Pitney has earned another term. He has a strong background in construction at a time when our school district is heavily involved in building new schools, and his expertise is highly valuable.

It would be unfortunate to lose his experience and training as our district moves towards normalcy again.

**Ginny Holthus**  
Hermiston School District Board of Directors

## Keep equipment, facilities up to date with 30-148

Take a look around and you'll notice western Umatilla County is growing fast. It's important that our emergency response capability is able to keep up.

You can also track the growth in our area through the number of calls for fires and emergency response. At more than 5,000 calls for service in the past 12 months, the current vehicle fleet is running nearly non-stop. We need a plan to make sure we're able to replace these vehicles as they reach the end of their expected lifespans.

Measure 30-148 invests in facilities, vehicles, and equipment for Umatilla County Fire District #1. It

will provide our first responders with modern tools while saving expensive maintenance costs to keep outdated vehicles on the road. It also makes sure they have the most up-to-date safety equipment.

In the end, making this wise investment today will lead to cost savings down the line while giving our local fire district the tools it needs to continue providing a high level of service. I'll be voting in support of Measure 30-148.

**Bruce Jones**  
Hermiston

## Gomez would be a valuable asset to Hermiston schools

I have had the pleasure of knowing Lili Gomez and her family for the past two decades and it is because of this connection that I know Lili is an exceptional choice for Hermiston School Board Position 3. Her background in education, knowledge of business management and cultural competence makes her ideally suited to serve our district's diverse community.

Education has always been a high priority in Lili's life. The daughter of immigrant parents, she had been in the Hermiston School District's English as a Second Language program through middle school. Her enthusiasm for improving the educational experience for others started during this time while serving as a tutor for younger students. As a first-generation college student, she has since earned a degree in business administration, and continued on to work as a teaching assistant and English language teacher.

With over half of the district's stu-

dents coming from Hispanic/Latino families, Ms. Gomez's education and experience would make her a valuable asset on the school board. She has the passion, understanding and cultural awareness needed to work with the rest of the board members as they guide our staff, students and their families moving forward. Please join me in voting for Lili Gomez for HSD Board Position 3.

**Michelle Kane**  
Hermiston

## Support the first responders who keep us safe

When there's a fire, a wreck, a medical emergency, a hazardous spill, or any number of other potentially disastrous situations, local firefighters and EMTs are the first ones on the scene. They often put their own health and safety on the line to help others.

Measure 30-148 is the community's chance to give back to those first responders. The bond package includes new protective equipment, radio systems, vehicles, and other tools that protect firefighters and EMTs.

It also includes upgrades to current vehicle exhaust systems to reduce the cancer risk. Protecting these responders while they're in the line of duty and in the long term is important.

For around \$4 a month for the average property owner in Umatilla County Fire District #1, investing in our first responders make a lot of sense.

Join me in voting yes on Measure 30-148.

**Cathy Stolz**  
Hermiston

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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.

