

Funland rises from ashes again

Third iteration of playground opened July 4 to raves from children and parents



Stilt walker Keith Ramsay, right, high-fives a child Sunday, July 4, 2021, during the grand opening of the new Funland Playground in Hermiston.



Children gather alongside Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann for the ribbon cutting Sunday, July 4, 2021, of the new Funland Playground.

By **BEN LONERGAN**
STAFF WRITER

HERMISTON — A group of eager children gathered alongside Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann under the arching entrance to the new Funland Sunday, July 4, for the grand opening of the new facility.

“Three, two, one,” the crowd counted down before Drotzmann’s giant scissors sliced the ribbon and a flood of children flowed across the park.

“It’s amazing,” yelled one child as he sprinted across the playground. A stilt walker dressed like Uncle Sam, a pair of pirates and Santa Claus mingled amongst the crowd, taking photos with children as they explored the new playground.

Elsewhere, Khloe Velasco swung across the variety of playground structures, taking in each one. Velasco still remembers the old Funland and said it was hard to choose which one she liked better.

“I like both,” Velasco said. “They’re different, but both great.”

Velasco said she enjoyed the variety of new slides and the many buildings and storefronts to play in.

While slides and play structures attracted Velasco’s attention, her 4-year-old brother Ivan Velasco said his favorite part of the new playground was the large concrete

IF YOU GO

Access to the playground is limited until construction is complete. Crews will work on it from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. The playground will be open at 2 p.m. on weekdays when construction factors allow and open during the day on weekends. It is recommended those interested in using the playground drive past after 2 p.m. to see if it is open.

corn near the front of the park. “I want to go on the corn,” he said before running off toward the piece of play equipment.

Larry Fetter, director of the Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department, said the corn, and other large concrete structures, were unique to Funland.

“All of the cement structures are custom to Hermiston,” he said.

The Funland Playground features a variety of play structures, including three main zones: the Wild West, Adventure and Farmland. In addition to original playground structures, the playground features a soft, rubbery play surface that has been designed to complement the various areas of play.

For Fetter, the July 4 grand opening marked a major milestone

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“I’VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS FOR TWO YEARS. IT’S A GREAT DAY TO CELEBRATE.”

Larry Fetter, director of the Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department

Stanfield lights up the sky for the Fourth

Pyrotechnician Jim Whelan oversaw show for 40th and final time

By **BEN LONERGAN**
STAFF WRITER

STANFIELD — For the last 51 years Jim Whelan has spent his Fourth of July blowing up fireworks over the city of Stanfield, and Sunday, July 4, was no different.

Whelan, a career firefighter and licensed pyrotechnician, got his start in fireworks when he joined the Stanfield Fire Department in 1970. Within a decade, he was running the annual show.

While Sunday’s firework show started at 10 p.m., Whelan and a small army of firefighters took to the Stanfield High School football



Eldon Marcum ignites a firework during the Stanfield Fourth of July fireworks show Sunday, July 4, 2021.

field three hours earlier to begin setting up the display.

“You have to take into account surroundings and wind,” said Whelan as he used a rangefinder to check the distance from a nearby building.

Whelan instructed a group of firefighters on the proper setup of the launchers and remarked on how the fireworks show had changed over the course of his time, most noticeably the rules and regulations.

“We used to not have any rules,” he said. “It’d be by the grace of God that someone didn’t get hurt.”

After 40 years of running the show, Whelan said this year’s show would be his last at the helm before passing control to fellow pyrotechnician Tom Ramsey. Ramsey and Whelan have worked closely on the display for several years, and while Whelan said he would prob-

ably still be helping out, Ramsey is the future.

“Tom and electronics are the future of the show,” Whelan said.

The modernization of fireworks has brought about the use of electronic firing. Electronic firing uses an “e-match” to ignite the firework rather than the more conventional hand-lit fuses, according to Ramsey.

“Last year was the first time I used it at the Stanfield show,” he said.

As Ramsey carefully wired up the electronic fireworks, Whelan led a crew of firefighters gently and carefully distributing a collector of 3- and 4-inch mortars into their launchers. After each launcher was loaded, Whelan took a stick and pressed down on each one.

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