



UPDATES

Melon Fest brings downtown to life

By **BEN LONERGAN**
STAFF WRITER

Downtown Hermiston was buzzing with activity Saturday, Aug. 21, as the city's annual Melon Fest brought seed spitters, bathtub racers and people dressed as watermelons to the closed section of Main Street.

Cheers and excitement erupted as father-son duo of Marvin Hamilton Jr. and Marvin Hamilton Sr. hurriedly pushed a bathtub carrying Tile Hamilton through a slalom course at one end of Main Street. Tile used a plastic cup to douse her opponents with water from her tub as the family team raced to victory.

"It feels great to win," Tile said as she and the family walked to collect their trophy.

The Hamilton Family, representing the Firestarters Youth Group, said they had no way of preparing for the race, but felt excellent communication propelled them to victory.

While the family were a first-time bathtub racing team, Marvin Hamilton Sr. said he and a group of coworkers competed in the event in 2018, though they finished further back in the lineup.

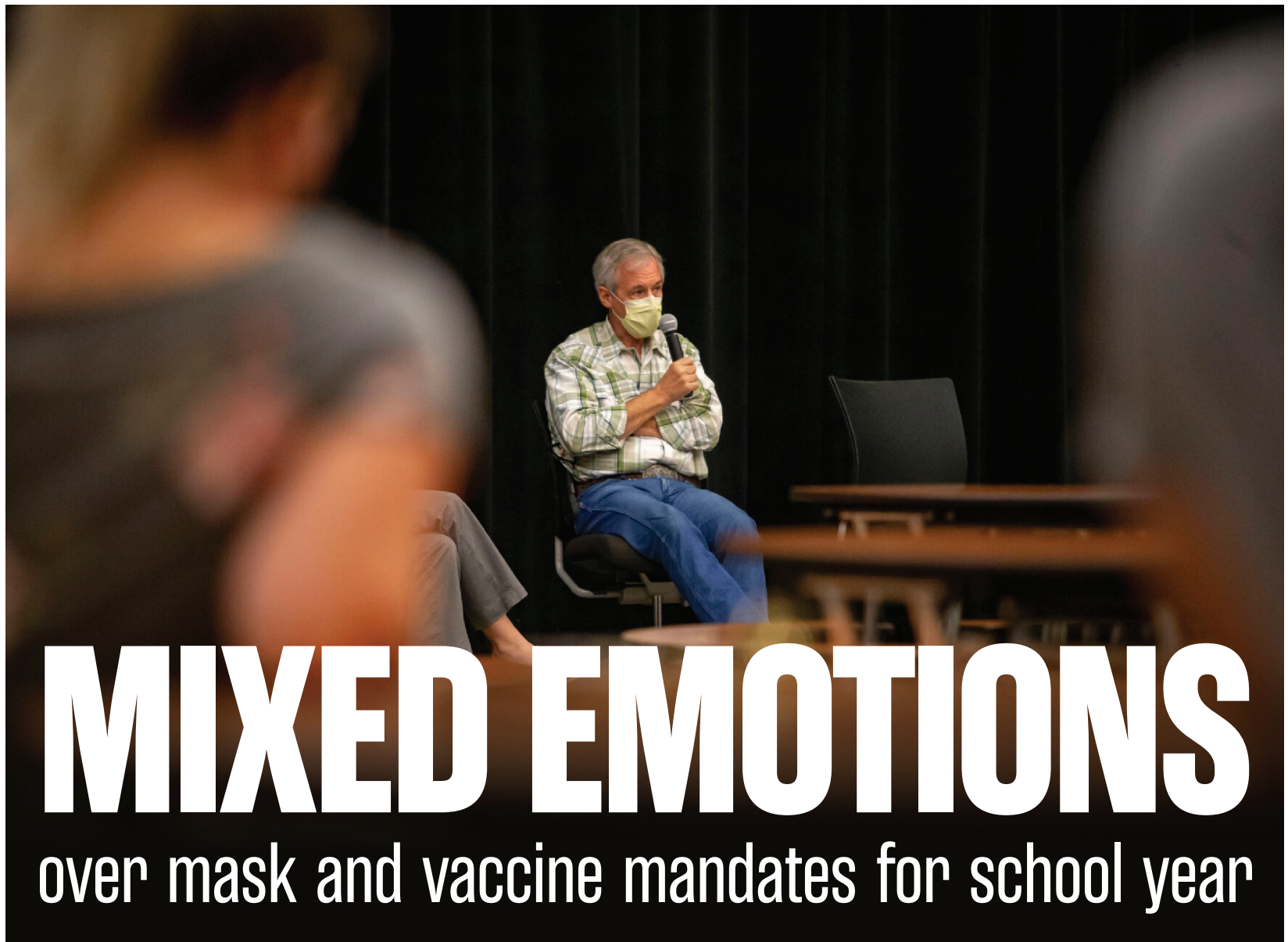
"To come back and win it this time feels great," said Marvin Hamilton Sr. "We'll be back next year to defend our title."

The Hamilton family said they were excited to be able to compete this year and enjoyed being out at events again following the cancellation of last year's festival.

"It's good to see everyone outside," said the elder Hamilton. "I'm happy the city had it."

Melon Fest kicked off Aug. 21 with a costume contest that saw competitors dressed as

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MIXED EMOTIONS

over mask and vaccine mandates for school year

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Umatilla County Public Health Officer Dr. Jon Hitzman answers questions during a public forum Thursday, Aug. 19, 2021, at Armand Larive Middle School to discuss COVID-19 and returning to school amid the pandemic.

Umatilla County's public health officer delivers facts to counter 'untrue information'

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
STAFF WRITER

After Gov. Kate Brown's announcement that all school staff, educators and volunteers must be vaccinated no later than Oct. 18, emotions have been mixed through the Umatilla County school systems — some have welcomed the announcement while others have pushed back.

At times calm and respectful, at other times highly charged and emotional, many of these concerns and feelings were expressed at a community forum Thursday, Aug. 19, at Armand Larive Middle School, Hermiston.

Superintendent Tricia Mooney, along with Dr. Jon Hitzman, the county's public health officer, and Alisha Lundgren, Umatilla County's deputy health director, fielded questions from community members, parents and district employees. For more than an hour, the



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Alisha Lundgren, assistant deputy director of the Umatilla County Health Department, left, and Dr. Jon Hitzman, the county's public health officer, answer questions from community members Thursday, Aug. 19, 2021, during a public forum with the Hermiston School District at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston.

trio patiently answered questions ranging from athletics to substitute teachers to sick leave. The vast majority of concerns, however, focused on misinformation surrounding vaccine efficacy

and safety, rather than the outright refusal of the recent mandates.

"My role here is mostly to provide you with scientific facts and evidence that you may have questions about," Dr. Hitzman said, "I

know that social media has done an incredibly 'good' job of disseminating sometimes untrue information."

Some such concerns include whether it's possible to get COVID-19 from the vaccine itself or whether there is any danger in getting the vaccine. According to Hitzman, the CDC and an exceptional body of research, this is not possible as there is no live virus within the vaccine. Instead, the mRNA vaccine is composed of basic lipids, salts and sugars that "teach" the body how to fight the virus.

"As a doctor and someone in the scientific field, it's actually some of the coolest technology we've ever come up with," he said.

As for the risks of getting the vaccine, Hitzman emphasized that there's a greater chance of someone dying in a car accident or plane crash than dying from the vaccine. In the roughly 360 million doses of the vaccine administered in the United States, Hitzman said there have only been three documented and confirmed deaths stemming from blood clots after getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. That is a percentage of 0.000001%.

According to one study from Tulane University, there's a greater

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Families, locals coverage at Morrow County Fair



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Spectators watch as goats are shown Friday, Aug. 20, 2021, at the Morrow County Fair in Heppner.

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
STAFF WRITER

A deceptively chill breeze and cloud cover over Heppner belied the children laughing and screaming below at the sixth day of the Morrow County Fair on Friday, Aug. 20, where people gathered together from all over the county for fun and action.

The smell of hay and livestock spilled out from the open doors of the main barn, where youths could be found at the 4-H and FFA Master Showmanship competition, the steers, horses and sheep sauntering slowly along to the children's and teens' prodding and commands as they made loops of the pen to soft claps.

Bart Lentz, a tall man with a friendly smile from Heppner, had brought his daughter, Kodie, to the fair

earlier to show her pig and said they enjoyed having the fair back after a year off.

"We enjoy getting to see friends and having family around," Lentz said.

Erin Heideman, the Morrow County 4-H coordinator and a part of Oregon State University's extension office, agreed the community aspect was one of the best parts of having the fair back this year. Between emceeding the youth livestock show and answering questions, Heideman's passion for the future of agriculture is obvious.

"At the end of the day, it's all about how do we support our youth and how do we promote agricultural education. This is how we do it," she said. "Our hope is that as these young people grow and develop that they've

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