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Believers bask in faith at CityFest

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Rapper George Moss performs Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, at the Greater Hermiston CityFest with Andrew Palau in Butte Park in Hermiston.

Almost 5,000 gather,
few wear masks or
keep social distance

By ERICK PETERSON
EDITOR/SENIOR REPORTER

Thousands of people crowded the Hermiston Butte Park on Friday and Saturday, Aug. 27 and 28, to experience Greater Hermiston CityFest with Andrew Palau, a celebration of Christ and fun.

Attendees included the Hardcastle family of Pendleton. Scott and Terri Hardcastle brought their daughter and her four children to enjoy music, bicycle stunts and praise. Scott said he was looking forward to meeting Christian artist Danny Gokey at CityFest, while his wife, Terri, said she already had enjoyed her favorite part of the event — seeing her granddaughter Lily get up on stage and play a game.

This was a special event for them, Terri said, because they have rarely been able to get out of their home for fun. They have been able to do little more than go shopping, she said.

Chris Hankel, New Hope Community Church's lead pastor, said creating this fun for the Hardcastles

tles and others had been in the works for a long time. The Hermiston pastor had helped organize CityFest, and he said that people had been talking about it for at least three years.

"We wanted to do this a year ago and put this on hold," Hankel said.

Organizers delayed the event because of COVID-19. The disease continues to hit Umatilla County, which has reported at least 17 COVID-19-related deaths this month. Still, they kept thoughts of the festival in mind, and they were seeing, more and more, the need for a message of hope.

"I've dealt with more suicides than I have ever dealt with in my over 30 years of ministry, this year," Hankel said. He also said he has seen an abundance of marital problems and other signs that people have been struggling.

The message of hope comes at a good time, he said, adding God loves us and walks with us through difficult situations. People love us, too, he said, which should make us less isolated.

The message was not just for Christian believers. Hankel said he believes the church has not always shared the message of God's love well, but believers "want to do this better." They want to show everyone they are willing to love individuals regardless of their baggage.

or other troubles.

They also want to show they are present.

Believers were present the night of Aug. 27, for a "Fiesta Latina" preview of the event Aug. 28. This scaled-down presentation was in Spanish, with Spanish-language singers and Spanish translation of English speeches.

Dan Clark, church relations director for CityFest, said the first day was important as outreach to the Hispanic community.

"The good news should reach everybody," he said. "It shouldn't just be a certain denomination of people or ethnicity of people. It should be widespread."

Clark added CityFest even tried to present at local prisons with bicycle stunts and music. Andrew Palau, the headliner for this event, even was planning to speak. The plan was canceled, though.

"This is awesome," said Daniel Longhin, pastor of Hispanic ministries at New Hope, of the Aug. 27 festival. He said he loves music. Also, CityFest has an "interesting approach," sharing a message of hope, which was also expressed in the gospel.

He said, "we live in crazy times," with COVID-19, worldwide violence, and instability. Still, events like this make people feel encouraged.

In contrast to the smaller crowd



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald
Evangelist Andrew Palau welcomes the crowd to the Greater Hermiston CityFest with Andrew Palau on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, at Butte Park in Hermiston.

on Aug. 27, the Aug. 28 event attracted thousands of people. Hankel said he was hopeful he and others would be able to reach out to people in need of mental health. Perhaps he could be a friendly voice to someone and share hope.

"I'm the guy who does the triage," he said. Following his meetings with people, he planned to direct those people in need to proper mental health professionals.

He also was hopeful people

would not get sick from COVID-19. He said his own church congregation includes people who have gotten sick with COVID-19 and knows at least one person who died of the disease.

As he made his rounds during the festival, he said he was most looking forward to Palau's message. And many more people were enjoying the activities on Aug. 28.

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Bulldogs out of the doghouse for first day at school

Hermiston High School students, faculty and staff began in-person learning on a positive note

By ERICK PETERSON
EDITOR/SENIOR REPORTER

HERMISTON — Hermiston High School was buzzing with excitement Friday, Aug. 27, as new students entered for orientation.

Seniors, such as Judith Chavez-Flores, welcomed incoming freshmen, who have not had a full year of school since they completed the sixth grade. Perhaps surprisingly, she said the pandemic lockdown was not all bad.

"I don't think I really ever left my house," she said.

During the lockdown, she got to spend more time with family and focus on school-work, she said. Still, the return to school is a joy. This year, she enrolled in some

advanced placement classes and signed up to be a bilingual tutor.

Unbothered by rules that require students to wear masks, she said she is hopeful for a positive year and wants to be a leader in her school.

"I'm really, really happy to be back in school, and not just online," she said.

Itzel Alatorre, a senior, also expressed enthusiasm for the start of school.

"I'm really excited," she said. "In-person school is better because you learn a lot more."

She recalled having some technical problems last year when studying online, as occasional internet failures would lock her out of class. This will not be an issue this



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Kendal Muniz, a junior at Hermiston High School, pairs up incoming freshmen during an orientation exercise Friday, Aug. 27, 2021, at the high school.

year because she physically will be in class. She also said she has no concerns

about COVID-19 because she believes strongly in masks and vaccinations.

This leaves her free to think about other matters, such as her AP classes, her work

as a bilingual tutor and her college applications. She already has applied to Western Oregon University, and she expects to apply to other schools, too.

Senior Katelyn Heideman, a high school basketball player, also is eager to start school. She said she had to find ways to stay motivated at home during the lockdown. Now returning, she is excited to play sports, attend classes, see her friends and involve herself in leadership roles.

A leader at the school, who HHS success coach Jay Ego praised, Heideman said she hopes to help the incoming freshmen be successful.

"You've got to come in motivated and set goals for yourself, and you'll be fine," she said.

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