

Libraries:

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when he starts making all of the chairs and tables available again.

"We're looking into that," he said.

Morrow County

Kathy Street is the director of the Oregon Trail Library District, which includes three libraries — in Boardman, Heppner and Irrigon. She also said the road to reopening has been long and hard.

The district's libraries in 2020 closed March 16 through April 28. On April 29, the library still was closed to the public but began offering curbside service for materials, copies and faxes. And in June 2020, the library opened for "Grab and Go" service.

"We were limited to 10 people inside the buildings to accommodate for social distancing," Street said.

"Patrons were allowed to pick out books but were not allowed to sit. Computer sessions were not allowed."

It was not until Sept. 8, 2020, that the library began allowing 30-minute computer sessions.

"We increased usage to 60 minutes July 7, 2021," she said.

As regular services were ceased or reduced, the event and program schedule also was limited. The libraries canceled all in-person events and programs, including monthly adult craft programs, story times and teen nights. Use of the public meeting room, which had been used an average of 30 times a month, in Irrigon also came to an end.

"We canceled in-person summer reading programs," Street said. "We changed to a virtual summer reading program."

Now, activities and programs have resumed, but there are limits to some activities.

"We have no plans to return the toys to the children's area," Street said, explaining the library is limited in space and has no place to disinfect toys.

"We have not brought back all of the chairs we had on Boardman. But, we plan on doing that soon," Street said.

Still, she reported low attendance at programs and events. She said other libraries also are reporting the same decrease in attendance.

"Overall usage of the library has not met pre-COVID usage," she said. "We adjusted our schedule and are open 32 hours Tuesday to Friday. We used to have 32 hours Tuesday to Saturday."

To help people adjust to a new situation in which they are isolated and away from library services, her district is circulating Wi-Fi hotspots for patrons to connect to Wi-Fi at home.

Candidates:

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Nearly 85% of the money Bower has spent so far has been with Lori Roach of Heppner and her business Studio 6 Designworks LLC. Roach also is a contracted employee for Eastern Oregon Business Source, where she works as a community development consultant.

Bower said Roach's work with Eastern Oregon Business Source is separate from her work on the campaign. With the latter, Bower said Roach has provided web design and graphic work in addition to ordering campaign material.

Timmons, who co-owns Marv's Glass Shop in Milton-Freewater, has raised nearly \$3,000 while spending a little more than \$2,500. Like Bower, Timmons expected to do a mixture of self-funding and fundraising and she expects her campaign to

be financially in-line with recent history. Early donors include Charles Danforth and Paul Seaquist, both of Milton-Freewater.

Timmons said it was early to start campaigning, but one of her largest expenditures, a booth at the Umatilla County in August, was "worth every penny."

"When you have a booth at the fair, you have access to everyone," she said.

Commissioner Dan Dorran, the newest member on the county board, got an early start on fundraising in his successful effort to win the open Position 3 seat in 2020. He opened his campaign account in November 2019 and would go on to spend more than \$26,000.

But in 2018, Position 2 Commissioner John Shafer didn't start raising money until February of that year. He still managed to raise nearly \$22,000 to unseat incumbent Larry Givens. Shafer has filed to run for reelection in 2022. No one

has filed to run against him so far and he hasn't reported any contributions or expenditures in 2021.

With Murdoch of Position 1 retiring at the end of the year, Bower and Timmons are also joined by Alvin Young, a manager at Elmer's Irrigation & Supplies in Hermiston. Young does not have a political action committee registered with the Oregon Secretary of State.

Candidates have until March 8, 2022, to join the race for either Position 1 or Position 2. Should the Position 1 race retain all its candidates or grow further, then all candidates will run in the May 17 primary. The top two vote-getters will advance to a runoff during the Nov. 8, 2022, general election. Should any of the races feature two or less candidates, the races will skip the May primaries and county voters will cast ballots on the candidates during the general election.

Story:

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Armstrong, in contrast to older writers, has the benefit of technology. He is able to find markets for his writing more easily than people who did not grow up with the internet, Fields said.

Armstrong and his story, evaluated

At the event, Armstrong agreed people often see horror writers as dark, brooding individuals. That is not the case for him — at least not all of the time.

"Maybe when I'm alone," he said. "When I'm around people, I try to be gleeful."

Armstrong's mother, Jennifer Keith Armstrong, boasted of her son's creativity. While she likes his story and is proud of his accomplishment, she does not usually enjoy scary stories.

She said she asks him "to write a story where everyone is happy and no one dies."

While Armstrong has not written the saccharine tales his mother, a nurse practitioner, might like best, he has written historical fiction, which she enjoys. One such story is about drummers in the American Revolutionary War. He has been writing such stories since early in elementary school. She also noted her son is a thinker, always considering and dissecting books and movies he consumes.

Mark Keith, Armstrong's stepdad, also has much respect for the teen. Keith said he has enjoyed watching Armstrong grow as a writer, doing such things as meeting author Gordon Cope on a trip to Mexico.

Cope, whose most recent book is "The Hotel Seamstress," writes

crime/suspense novels and memoirs. He also is a world traveler and journalist, who has made his home in Mexico.

According to Keith, the first thing Cope asked Armstrong was, "Have you been published yet?"

Shortly after his talk with Cope, Armstrong submitted his work for publication.

Keith also complimented Armstrong's "never quit" attitude, which Keith said he believes Armstrong gets from his father, Jeff Armstrong, a frontline paramedic firefighter who recently survived COVID-19.

At the event, Jeff Armstrong said he was "absolutely" proud of his son. In addition to being a motivated writer, Ben Armstrong also is an avid hockey player.

Jeff Armstrong said he, too, likes telling stories. The father said he has long told his son stories of military service from his own life. Also, Jeff Armstrong introduced his son to the "Lord of the Ring" series of books when he was very young.

Jaclyn Armstrong, Ben's stepmother, said she is looking forward to his next stories. This latest story is terrific, Jaclyn Armstrong said, and she credited the teen for being able to "draw you in" to a story.

"The progression, watching him grow as an author and being published, I'm just so proud of him," she said.

Writing has "always been Ben's thing," Hermiston High freshman Amy Armstrong said about her brother.

"I'm glad he's going further in it," she said.

Though more of a sporty person, she has helped her brother as a proofreader. As such, she knows his work very well. She said, this



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Hermiston High School student Ben Armstrong poses with some admirers before signing copies of an anthology in which his story "Sleigh 54" appears. The book signing took place on Armstrong's birthday, Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021.

latest story, "Sleigh 54," is something he wrote years ago and has reworked since. He has many other tales to tell, Amy said.

Cali Simmons, Ben Armstrong's girlfriend, also attends Hermiston High School. She said she likes his stories, which she said makes him "unique."

Kalvin Colpitts, Ben Armstrong's friend and classmate, called him a "nice guy" who loves writing and history. Though he had not yet read the story, he was sure it is great and he was looking forward to it.

He bought a copy, and had his buddy autograph it with a "Star Wars" reference. "Force choke is not a dark side ability," Armstrong wrote inside the book above his signature.

Coleman Hill, another class-

mate, also had good things to say about his friend.

"You don't see someone like this every day," Hill said. He read "Sleigh 54," and Hill credited the story with a gruesomeness that was suitable.

The writer as a student

Armstrong said he is a good student, though maybe not a "scholarship, straight-A student," like some other students he knows.

Teacher John Larson, who stood in line for Ben's autograph, is his Advanced Placement language teacher, and he disagreed with the student's self-assessment. He said Armstrong stands out as a student.

"He's a great student," Larson said. "He's very imaginative, very creative."

Larson said his class with Arm-

strong deals with informative texts on rhetoric. Ben thinks outside of the box and writes enjoyable takes on the material, the teacher said, such as adding flair to the use of rhetoric.

Larson also had high praise for the story.

"I love it," Larson said. "I think it's great." He added that "Sleigh 54," is "creepy," but it fits in with a horror anthology.

Another teacher present at the signing, Erica Hearne, also was happy with Armstrong's achievement.

"At this age, having (a story) published in a national publication is huge," she said.

Into the future

The young author said he expects to expand into novellas and then novels. Not limited to horror tales, he also writes historical fiction and other genres.

Inspiration, Armstrong said, comes from other writers, especially historical fiction novelists, such as Alan Gratz, and fantasy novelists, such as George R.R. Martin and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Armstrong said he wants to be a history teacher. He said he finds the American Civil War intriguing and likes to read and write about it.

"When I was younger, I was mostly interested in the battles and fights," Armstrong said, "but now I lean more toward the time period and setting. I write stories of meaning."

Copies of "What Remains: An Inked in Gray Anthology," are available for checkout at the Hermiston High School library and can be purchased on Amazon.com, as well as other online retailers. More information is at the publisher's website, inkedgray.com.

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Collage of newspaper front pages from the Hermiston Herald, including headlines like 'Umatilla County opens COVID-19 relief small business program', 'Happy Independence Day', 'Hope for healing', 'COVID-19 cases rise in Umatilla County', and 'Goodbye'.