



A special Santa

Former Stanfield mayor lights Hermiston Christmas tree despite stage four cancer

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Santa Claus, also known as John Perkins, flips the switch on the city of Hermiston's Christmas tree Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, during a tree lighting ceremony on Festival Street in downtown Hermiston.

Community Vision Open House unveils Hermiston's future

Proposed indoor aquatic center among the most popular topics

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Hermiston community members had another opportunity last week to learn about the city's 2040 survey and give input on the city's future.

The Community Vision Open House was Thursday, Dec. 2, in Grace Baptist Church, downtown, while the town's tree-lighting ceremony took place.

"This is a community vision, not just a city staff vision, so we are trying to encourage as much participation as possible," Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said.

The open house attracted the attention of people who had not heard of the project previously, according to Hermiston officials, and city representatives, including city councilors, were present to explain the Hermiston 2040 survey results.

According to the survey, people want more stores, additional restaurants, an indoor pool and aquatic center. City officials and members of the public initially discussed the results at The Hermiston Vision Labs, Nov. 16-17. The open house Dec. 2 was the latest public event regarding the survey.

City Councilor Roy Barron was on hand at the open house and he talked about the survey effort and said there had been a lot of excitement from the public. The item that attracted the most interest at the open house, he said, was a possible indoor sporting facility and aquatic center.

This is something that has long been a goal for the public and the \$28 million cost is a concern, so a lot of planning is necessary to fund it in a responsible way, he said.

"I think it's on the horizon, for sure," he said.

In from Portland, Sarah Singer Wilson of SSW Consulting was in the building to meet locals and discuss the project, which she described as "asking people what Hermiston wants to be when it grows up."

In the church, the list of goals were broken down into categories: "Safe and Healthy Hermiston," "Sustainable Hermiston," "Growing and Prosperous Hermiston" and "Connected and Engaged Hermiston." Those categories were posted throughout a room, with lists of action items.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Brandon Artz, Hermiston Parks and Recreation director, accompanies Santa. Santa Claus, also known as John Perkins, waves to children Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, as he arrives at Festival Street for the lighting of Hermiston's downtown Christmas tree.

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Santa Claus beamed as he made his way through the crowd Thursday, Dec. 2, for Hermiston's annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

John Perkins, sporting his own white beard and wearing a traditional red suit, looked the very image of a jolly old elf. But he struggled to be there.

With the aid of a red-and-white-striped cane, he took the event stage. Santa flipped a switch, the lights on the large tree in the center of town began to glow, and the crowd cheered.

Perkins, 70, might not turn those lights on next season. He has stage four pancreatic cancer.

Fulfilling Christmas duties

After receiving more applause, Father Christmas made his way to a sleigh near the tree, where a line of families waited. He welcomed child after child, hearing their Christmas wishes and offering them candy canes and kind words.

One Hermiston family gave testament to the magnetism of this Santa. Alberto Munoz and Marina Longoria said this was the first time their son, Tito, 3, saw Santa in person, and they liked this one.

"It was great, especially after COVID," Munoz said.

Like many other people in the crowd, they were enjoying the normalcy of a regular event. Last year, the annual tree lighting was broadcast for viewers online, not in person.

Tito, a fan of the cartoon "The Loud House," told Santa he hoped to get presents related to the show, his parents said. After seeing Santa, Tito said he liked Santa and his white beard.

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Bikers ride through west Umatilla County for 18th annual Echo Toy Run

Area bikers bring toys to hospitalized children

By BRYCE DOLE
Hermiston Herald

The parking lot of Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston nearly was silent. It was an overcast and crisp Saturday, Dec. 4, and the hospital spokesperson was standing alone out front, hoping people would show up.

Then Santa Claus came rumbling in on a motorcycle.

With Mrs. Claus in the sidecar, he led a parade of at least 100 motorcyclists as they thundered from Echo to Hermiston, revving their engines loudly for the 18th

annual Echo Toy Run. The bearded and tattooed bikers donned leather jackets and chaps, jeans and bandanas while carrying stuffed animals and toy trucks for hospitalized children.

"Bikers are some of the most generous people out there and, given a chance, respectful," said Santa, otherwise known as Phil Spencer.

The event brings toys to children who are in the hospital over the holidays. What's leftover is given out to sick youths throughout the rest of the year and to the Hermiston Police Department for its Christmas Express program.

Norma Sanchez, who works in the labor delivery

department at Good Shepherd, said the hospital hasn't been able to give children toys due to pandemic protocol. She said she was thrilled to see the gifts were packaged so they could be cleaned and given to local youths.

"It's Christmas, they would love that," she said.

The ride continues in memory of Alan Sells, the event organizer for 15 years before he died in August 2019 near Plymouth, Washington, when a car hit him while he was riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Now, Sells' daughter, Amanda Silvani, runs the event.

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Santa Claus, also known as Phil Spencer, leads the Echo Toy Run out of Echo on Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021, en route to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston.

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