

Ice skating and winter festival brings people to revamped Umatilla

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The city of Umatilla on Friday and Saturday, Dec. 3-4, opened its ice skating rink to the public as part of the Umatilla Winter Festival.

Hanna Keister, Umatilla community development coordinator, said the original plan was to do something big in 2020, but coronavirus concerns created a delay. There was not a festival last year, so plans changed, she said. Otherwise, the city might have had a big celebration with another idea — live reindeers — as the center to the event.

This year, too, may have included reindeer, Keister said. Unfortunately, she added, the animals were in low supply and high demand elsewhere, so the festival had to go with another plan.

“We decided we’d get an ice-skating rink,” she said, “and the city manager, David Stockdale, ran with that idea, and thought we should just buy one because it would be a boon to the community.”

The rink is 2,900 square feet.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

People watch as the city of Umatilla’s Christmas tree is illuminated Friday, Dec. 3, 2021, at Village Square Park in Umatilla.

So far, she said, a lot of people have shown interest, and the city had tried it out before the festival. The Monday before Thanksgiving, staff members skated on the rink, Keister said.

She added the rink is available for rental during the week, \$150 for two hours. On the weekends, individuals can use it for \$3 per person.

She said she envisions the rink being a permanent fixture in a festival street, which could be built in the near future. For now, though, she said the rink will stay where it is December through February.

“We’ll see how it goes,” she said. She noted that there is “a lot of buzz around town” about the rink. On the first day of the festival, though, just prior

to the start of the event, she admitted to being a little nervous whether people would attend.

Skaters took to the rink during the festival, which had nine vendors. Head Start also had a booth.

Keister said this was a special event for Umatilla, which has worked to revamp this section of the town.

“Sixth Street in the last couple of years is completely different,” Keister said.

Esmeralda Perches, development and recreation manager, also boasted of the town. She said new recreation activities will continue occurring alongside revitalization projects. A resident since 1995, Perches said she is excited about these projects. Improvements to local businesses, made possible by development revitalization grants, have made a difference, she said.

“We’ve funded about \$225,000 this year to help them revitalize their buildings,” Perches said. She pointed to nearby businesses, including Java Junkies and The Bridge Bistro & Brews, and said, “We’re coming up.”

Weather service anticipates wet December to follow warm November

Hermiston Herald

According to preliminary data received by NOAA’s National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures at the Hermiston airport averaged warmer than normal during November.

The average temperature was 45.2 degrees which was 3.5 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 54.1 degrees, which was 3.6 degrees above normal. The highest was 71 degrees on Nov. 15. Low temperatures averaged 36.2 degrees, which was 3.4 degrees above normal. The lowest was 24 degrees, on Nov. 17.

There were eight days with the low temperature below 32 degrees.

Precipitation totaled 1.15 inches during November, which was 0.04 inches below normal. Measurable precipitation — at least .01 inch — was received on 12 days with the heaviest, 0.42 inches reported on Nov. 11.

Precipitation this year has reached 4.93 inches, which is 4.18 inches below normal. Since October, the water year precipitation at the Hermiston Municipal Airport has been 2.40 inches, which is 0.41 inches above normal.

The highest wind gust was 67 mph which occurred on Nov. 15. There was one day when the wind exceeded 50 mph.

The outlook for December from NOAA’s Climate Prediction Center calls for near normal temperatures and above normal precipitation. Normal highs for the Hermiston airport fall from 43.0 degrees at the start of December to 40.0 degrees at the end of December. Normal lows fall from 28.0 degrees to 26.0 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is 1.45 inches.

The National Weather Service is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Think Big Space draws crowd for grand opening

Hermiston Herald

The first Amazon Web Services Think Big Space on the West Coast is ready for students and more.

Thursday, Dec. 2, the Port of Morrow, Morrow County School District and AWS hosted the grand opening of the AWS Think Big Space at the Port of Morrow’s SAGE Center, Boardman.

The new Think Big Space is a dedicated space for students, educators and communities to explore innovative and imaginative ideas through interactive, hands-on technical education and cloud computing training. This new educational space, funded by AWS and the Port of Morrow, is intended to inspire students to explore and cultivate interests in science, technology, engineering and math using cloud computing and various AWS technologies.

Morrow County Commis-

sioners Don Russell, Melissa Lindsay and Jim Doherty, Port of Morrow Commissioners Rick Stokoe, Jerry Healy and Joe Taylor, Morrow County School District officials Erin Stocker and Marie Shimer, and Ryan Neal, CEO of Port of Morrow, were among the attendees.

Grand opening activities included a ribbon-cutting, a tour of the space led by Don Walker, lead instructor of the AWS Think Big Space at the SAGE Center, and a showcase of computer-aided design drawings and robots programmed by students from Ione, Irrigon and Windy River elementary schools.

“This initiative wouldn’t be possible without the partnerships and shared vision for our youth,” Stokoe said at the event. “STEM education plays a vital role in preparing students for their future. We know the Think Big Space will cul-

tivate these learning opportunities that inspire innovation.”

AWS selected the SAGE Center as the first location on the West Coast to receive an AWS Think Big Space. The Morrow County School District will oversee the curriculum, and a robust set of regional collaborators that include early childhood education and post-secondary schools will support programming.

“AWS is committed to making a positive impact in the communities where our employees live and work,” said Cornelia Robinson, global leader of AWS InCommunities. “We were incredibly impressed by the vision of the AWS Think Big Space at the SAGE Center. We’re thrilled to have the opportunity invest in the students and residents of Morrow County and provide the tools and connections they need to build, imagine, and innovate their best future.”

Boardman community comes out for tree lighting

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

A group of preschool students sang and danced for a large gathering of local residents. This was how the Boardman Tree Lighting celebration started, Saturday, Dec. 4. While the youngsters performed, other attendees stood, watched and smiled. They talked about their enjoyment of the event, their pleasure that they could gather as a community, even on a cold, dark December night.

The event was at the Sustainable Agriculture and Energy Center in Boardman. Besides the performance from the little ones, the event included a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus and cookies and hot cocoa from the Mid-Columbia Bus Company.

Ariel Lissman, owner of The Lariat Adventure, was at the event. She led the 15 children, who were from her school, in their performance. She said it was a warm-up for

a Christmas presentation, which will take place later in the month for their families, also at the SAGE Center.

The event had a good turnout, according to Kelsey Salata, Boardman Chamber of Commerce member and events director. She credited the kids, refreshments and Santa for much of the attendance, but mentioned also the SAGE Center light show for attracting people.

The show, which started Dec. 4, will continue through the rest of the year, Lissman said. Hours are 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., seven days a week. Music accompanies the light show, and it can be heard on 88.3 FM or on the center’s outdoor speakers.

Torrie Griggs, SAGE Center manager, said she was also pleased with the event’s turnout. She added that community gatherings like this one are important, as they create unity. These days, they are especially important, she said, as people have struggled many months through the pandemic.

Man armed with knives loses to police armed with less-lethal rounds

By PHIL WRIGHT
Hermiston Herald

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston reported officers early Tuesday, Dec. 7, used less-lethal rounds to subdue and arrest a man who refused to drop knives and threatened to kill the officers.

Police at about midnight responded to a residence on the 1000 block of West Hermiston Avenue on a report of a man, Matthew

Earns, 30, armed with a gun. Officers found Earns in the parking lot, but instead of a gun, according to Edmiston, Earns pulled out two large hunting knives.

Four Hermiston officers in all responded — and one was still in field training, Edmiston said.

“Earns kept officers at bay with the knives for approximately one hour,” according to Edmiston. “During that time, Earns threatened to kill each offi-

cer more than once. Earns was highly intoxicated and still drinking during the encounter. At one point, Earns stabbed a knife into the Tonneau cover of a department pickup.”

Edmiston also said police repeatedly told Earns, who jail records show is 6 feet tall and weighs 230 pounds, to drop the knives, but he would not. And as he was advancing on police, one officer shot Earns with a 40mm less-lethal round.

Even then, Edmiston said, Earns did not drop the knives, so police shot him a second time.

The police chief explained given Earns’ state, the 40-mm rounds — which are about 1.6 inches diameter, have a plastic body and a sponge nose — were the best options. The weapon is accurate, he said, while a Taser stun gun needs both prongs to hit a person to be effective. Edmiston said if one of the

prongs missed Earns, the situation could have been much worse.

Police took Earns to the emergency department at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, for X-rays, Edmiston said, and once medical staff cleared him, it was off to the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

After taking Earns into custody, police questioned his girlfriend and her elderly mother. Edmiston reported officers found

Earns strangled his girlfriend and threw her on the floor and forced her mother into a bedroom and threatened to kill her if she came out.

Earns is behind bars on the following: one count each of felony strangulation, first-degree kidnapping and second-degree criminal mischief, two counts of misdemeanor harassment and five counts of menacing. His preliminary bail is \$55,000.

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