

Green:

Continued from Page A1

remaining Dec. 4.

The trees are from the Estacada area, and summer's severe temperatures burned trees from bottom to the top, decreasing the crop. The Kiwanis Club had to search extra hard for trees, he said. Instead of obtaining trees from a single seller, like usual, the club had to buy from four different sellers.

Frink said the club paid around \$10 more wholesale for each tree. Part of this increase was passed on to consumers, he said, which is why each tree is sold on the lot for \$5 more than last year.

While the heat has troubled business, he said, the bigger challenge has been from competition with fake trees. In the early days of the lot, his club would sell 1,000 trees per year, well more than double the current sales. This was before fake trees were popular, he said.

Still, even with the challenges, Frink said the tree sale is a reliable fundraiser for the club. It is, he said, the second largest fundraiser for Kiwanis, typically earning \$18,000.

"We appreciate that," he said.

Money from the lot goes back into the community for causes such as Agape House, swimming safety lessons and Martha's House, he said.

Up the street from the Kiwanis lot, in front of Grocery Outlet, Hermiston, George Ikonomou also sells Christmas trees. Having started the day before Thanksgiving, he said he expects to stay open through Dec. 20. On a good day, he said, he will sell 60 trees. His trees range from \$10 to \$99, and he carries Douglas fir, noble fir and Nordmann fir trees.

Like the Kiwanis sellers, Ikonomou also saw changes through the years. He first started selling trees around Hermiston 10 years ago. Since then, he also has noticed competition from fake trees, he said, and shortages in trees that predates the past year's heat wave.

Because of the recent shortage, though, he had to buy in larger bulk than usual, he said. He stores about 600 trees now, bringing them out when needed. Ordinarily, he would be free to order trees when he started running low.

He is charging \$10 more for each tree these days, he said, matching rising wholesale prices.

Still, he said, he likes this

business, as it is work he can do with his brother, Demetri Ikonomou. In addition, he said he likes working around trees.

"I like real trees. They put me in the mood for Christmas," he said.

Business picking up in Pendleton

The Scouts BSA Christmas tree lot along Southwest Court Avenue in Pendleton on Saturday, Dec. 4, was able to get its full order of trees.

"We haven't gotten much attention yet, but it's picking up," said Alexander Krokosz, senior patrol leader for the Pendleton Scouts BSA Troop 700.

"We were lucky that all the droughts and fires did not affect the trees we wanted," Holly Krokosz said.

She is the troop's committee chair and said the lot sources trees from the Molalla area each year. The troop

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Ward Walker, owner of Walker's Christmas Trees

used a donated truck to pick up their order of roughly 180 trees.

"We have regular folks that come through year after year," she said.

The Scouts use the money raised through the sale of Christmas trees to help fund trips to summer camp and other excursions. Holly Krokosz said the troop wants to ensure any scout who wants to go to camp is able to afford to do so either at a reduced rate or for free.

Organizers had planned to close the lot on Saturday, Dec. 11.

Pendleton tree lots hold prices steady

Brothers Tom and Jeff Hepler, owners of Hepler's Trees in Pendleton, said they held their prices the same this year and shifted around their stock to try to lessen the burden of increased wholesale costs.

"This year has been pretty good," Tom Hepler said. "It's a bit slow during the week but the weekends have been really busy."

The Heplers said the

lot has 550 trees, up from roughly 500 last year. He said he has a few more forest trees this year as opposed to his usual supply of farm grown trees.

"This year we got more of them," he said. "But they're big and beautiful."

The lot plans to stay open as long as supply allows, and Tom Hepler said the brothers have a tradition of giving away the last tree of the year.

Ward Walker, owner of Walker's Christmas Trees, said he has been able to keep his prices steady for more than a decade by cutting the trees himself in the Blue Mountains. Walker, who sources his trees from private land as well as with a U.S. Forest Service permit, said he considers himself largely immune to supply chain issues.

"If it's 10 days from Christmas and I need more trees, I'll just go cut more trees," he said.

Walker said he would rather sell additional trees than raise his prices, something his unique business strategy allows him to do.

While Walker hasn't changed his business model, he said he has seen consumers change the way they shop in the last two years. Walker said he thinks the pandemic has made people want to get into the holiday spirit earlier in the year.

"Last year I thought I was on track to have an above average year," he said. "I had sold like 80% of my trees before the 10th of December."

Walker said he ended up still selling his usual 400 or so trees, despite the quick start, and added that he is seeing a similar trend this year.

Because he knows when and where his trees are cut, Walker said he guarantees his trees through Christmas and tries to stay open as late in the season as possible to ensure anyone who wants a tree is able to get one.

"A lot of folks think when the other lots run out that's it, but I'll still be here," he said.

To further his mission of getting a tree to anyone who wants one, Walker has been collecting donations to help lessen the cost of trees for those who can't afford them. As of Dec. 5, Walker had collected \$415 to help families afford a tree, including roughly \$120 he rolled over from last year. So far Walker has used about \$160 of that to help people afford a tree or purchase a larger tree.

"I don't want people to skip getting a tree," he said, "just because of the cost."

fidence that immigration officials were not tracking people at vaccination events.

"The information is private," he said.

Andrea Odle, Oregon Health Authority assistant regional COVID-19 testing and vaccine coordinator, also was on hand. A fluent Spanish speaker, she said it is important for people to receive information about the vaccine in their first language. When individuals

hear information in the language they know best, she said, they are more likely to understand and trust it.

Another nurse at the event, Christine Daniel, said she hopes people will overcome their concerns about the vaccination.

"It's very important for health issues," she said. "People are getting sick. People are dying. We want to get back to normal, and vaccinations will help us get there."

Funland:

Continued from Page A1

such vandalism.

"It's unfortunate that there are people who just want to come out and destroy and wreak havoc on our things that are for children," he said.

He added that children 5-12 years old are not going to have such a destructive attitude. It is the older people, he said, who want to get a rise out of people and brag about what they can do.

Artz said this destructive spirit was at work the previous times the playground was vandalized to the point of immolation.

More protection on the way

Waving his outstretched arm to the outer edge of the playground, he pointed to where a fence is going in. It will stand just outside of the pathway surrounding the playground, he said, and stand 4 feet tall.

The director said he was once "on the fence" about building a fence for the playground. He said he sees tall fences topped with barb wire, and he was uncomfortable about such a fence for this playground. Such a fence would be unfriendly and unwelcoming, he said, sending "the wrong message" to playground users.

He thought about this more, he said, and he agreed for the need of a smaller fence, which would keep casual trespassers out and keep young children contained.

"There are quite a few parents like me," he said. As the father of a child who he describes as "a runner," he said he would feel more comfortable if a fence existed to block children from escape.

"I think a fence is definitely necessary," he said, and Farm City Fence is handling that work in the spring.

People already have sponsored pickets to the park, he said, and those pickets will include the name of the sponsors. People can donate



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Funland Playground in Hermiston is a source of community pride and employs several measures, including lasers, to protect the unique features at the park.

to build this fence. Information on sponsorships is on the Hermiston Parks and Recreation website.

The parks department also is adding a speaker to Funland to notify people when they trespass after hours. The police also will receive an alert, as will Artz, through an email.

This automated email service already is operating, Artz said. Recently, when someone entered the playground to jump on a portable toilet, Artz said he was notified of the action and ramifications. In this instance, police officers responded within 10 minutes of his action to confront the intruder, Artz said.

A 10-minute police response is pretty standard, Artz said. Often, police can be faster, he added, even in the middle of the night.

Motivation for protection

Every piece of equipment tells a story, he said, and it should be protected. Discussing his feelings about the playground, he patted the drinking fountain, which looks like a lion. The Hermiston Lions Club raised funds for the fountain and worked to have it installed.

"You look at this, and it's awesome," Artz said. "You come here and you get to stick your head in a lion's mouth to drink some water. This has to be protected."

Hardworking people and donors added other pieces, he said, and Artz was among

those who tightened bolts and put up panels.

"My blood, sweat and tears, shivering out in the cold last winter, went into this, so I have a huge sense of pride in this," he said.

Jason Barron, parks supervisor, and Brian Fricke, municipal service worker, did most of the "heavy work," setting posts into the ground and laying concrete, Artz said, but many people were involved in making the playground a reality. The director said he knows these people, and he does not want to let them, or the community, down by not adequately protecting their work.

He said he was present at the playground's opening. When children started playing on the equipment, Artz's initial feeling was to rush out and tell them not to play on it. After a moment of reconsideration, he said, he remembered children are supposed to jump on it and get it dirty, he said.

"That's what it's here for," the director said.

Though this playground has received much attention, damage, theft and vandalism is not uncommon to such facilities, Artz said. He said he has researched and found other parks around the state face similar issues.

Picking up a lost shoe at Funland, he noted this playground is kept pretty clean and maintained. He said he wants to keep it this way.

COVID-19:

Continued from Page A1

their efforts to become U.S. citizens.

Sergio Gonzalez, a nurse at the clinic, said he has been to other clinics, some draw more than a hundred people and others attract only a handful, and spoken with people about health and immigration concerns. He expressed con-

cerns about the information



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