



Year in review

COVID-19, Funland Playground among 2021 stories

Hermiston Herald

As 2021 comes to a close, we remember the many stories. From the pandemic to Funland, VFW troubles to a bank robbery, this past year is one for the history books. A full recap of this eventful year could be much longer than this, but here are a few happenings that shaped us.

January 2021

School protest: In the first week of the year, about 20 students and parents protested the continued closure of Hermiston School District schools. It was Monday, Jan. 4, when about 20 people stood outside the school district's offices with signs pushing for a return to in-person classes. Students voiced their opinions, with one student upset that he would miss out on opportunities to play sports. Other students also expressed the opinion that online school was not as good as in-person studies. Soon after the start of the protest, Superintendent Tricia Mooney visited with the protesters to tell them that the district, too, missed in-person school.

COVID-19 continues: Umatilla County continued to see new COVID-19 cases. In mid-January, Umatilla County Public Health announced 483 new cases in Umatilla County Jan. 6-12. Three new deaths of people with COVID-19 were also announced during that period. This brought the total of reported deaths in the county to 61. Meanwhile, the state death total was 1,613. There was some good news, however, as the Oregon

Health Authority reported 100,783 vaccinations as of Jan. 11.

Hermiston VFW Post 4750 worries of declining membership: The Hermiston branch of the Veterans of Foreign Wars has "barely enough members to hold all the positions of the post," Harold Roberts said. Roberts was, at the time, the new post commander for the Hermiston group. He said the VFW may have to close its doors permanently if new members did not join.

February 2021

Students return: Local school districts began returning students to the classroom in February. Precautions included having students use sanitizing wet wipes to wipe down their desk and chair every time they come into a classroom or leave it. Umatilla brought back all its students by Feb. 1 for "hybrid" studies, meaning that half of the students would split their days between online and in-class days. Hermiston and Stanfield school districts returned all of their students by Feb. 16.

Vaccination effort builds: Previous to the schools returning students, Hermiston High School hosted vaccination clinics in its parking lot. As Oregon opened COVID-19 vaccinations to school employees and child-care workers at the end of January, many educators were in line to receive shots at HHS. The vaccinations were given via drive-thru clinics, with people able to receive their jabs while still in their cars. Also, Umatilla County seniors, age 80 and up, were receiving vaccina-



Christina Garcia, right, receives her first shot of the COVID-19 vaccine from Sharon Waldern during a vaccination clinic at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston on Feb. 12, 2021. Garcia, who works as a caregiver, said she had been anxiously waiting to get her vaccine. "I was really excited to be able to get it today," she said.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

tions. Umatilla County Public Health announced on Feb. 5 it was scheduled to receive 400 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to begin vaccinating elderly residents the following week.

Money for Funland: A \$250,000 investment through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program was announced to help pay for Funland Playground in Hermiston. The Butte Park playground burned down in a suspected arson in 2019, and the city was rebuilding the site with a larger, improved version. It was planned to be made of materials less susceptible to vandalism or arson.

Distinguished Citizens Awards: The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's annual Distinguished Citizens Awards banquet was held, and award recipients were announced. Cindy Middleton won Woman of the Year honors. Ken Huber



Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney, right, speaks to protesters outside the school district offices in Hermiston on Jan. 4, 2021.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

was named Man of the Year. The Bob Severson Rotary Business of the Year award was presented to M&M Potato, Inc., of Hermiston. The Merit of Honor award, given to honor service and

leadership in the community, went to Doug Alvarez.

March 2021

Local COVID-19 numbers decrease: From March 3-9, Umatilla County saw

55 new reported cases of COVID-19, which was down from 77 in the seven days prior to that. The county did not report any new deaths in

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TRCI inmates donate goods to Agape House

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A club of men in custody at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Umatilla, donated approximately 200 pounds of goods to Agape House in Hermiston.

The inmates are members of the Paradigm Shift Club, a leadership group that strives to improve the quality of life for adults in custody and the community through charitable donations and social events, according to a press release from TRCI.

The leadership group on Dec. 13 started a food drive. Inmates can donate new food and personal care products to local charities from their weekly purchases before leaving the commissary. The items they donated included candy, snack cakes, peanut butter, toothpaste and toothbrushes.

"In just three days, approximately 200 pounds of items were collected, an estimated \$700 value," according to the press release. "The club decided tangible donations were important for participants to see the impact of their donations. In prison, snacks, treats, and preferred personal items are gold. Seeing what they contributed was rewarding to those involved."

Dennis Aiken, volunteer at Agape House, a nonprofit food bank in Hermiston, picked up the donations Dec. 17.

The food drive will continue until the end of the month, the press release also reported, and all donations from the food drive will go to other local food banks and shelters.



Staff at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Umatilla, load donations from the Paradigm Shift Club on Dec. 17, 2021, into a truck for Agape House, a nonprofit food bank in Hermiston. The club is a leadership group of men in custody at the state prison and strives to improve the quality of life for inmates and the community through charitable donations and social events.

Two Rivers Correctional Institution/Contributed Photo

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