



## Warming station offers respite

Guests, volunteers at Hermiston Warming Station address homelessness

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

When Sierra Gilman was homeless, she did not know of the Hermiston Warming Station, but she said she wished she had.

She worked her first day as a volunteer at the station on Saturday, Jan. 8. In this capacity, she checked in people as they sought refuge from the elements. She and others at the warming station spoke of life on the streets and their gratitude for this service.

Starting at 7:30 p.m., people who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets in the cold checked into the Hermiston Warming Station, 1075 S. Highway 395. The station opens every year as the weather becomes cold. Come

morning, the guests of the station leave to resume their homelessness.

Gilman, 27, of Hermiston, said she learned of this volunteer opportunity last year. Her friends at her church — she is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — told her of the warming station. Now sober and free of drugs, she said she finally felt able to help out at the building.

Her training included a 30 to 40 minute session to learn the rules. Among other things, guests must turn over their possessions and store belongings in a plastic tote. They also must maintain a clean environment and a respectful tone with others.

In trade for following the rules, guests have access to cots, where they sleep throughout the night. Also, they are provided with food and hygiene supplies. In addition, they can use washing machines and a shower. Volunteers stand ready to meet the needs of guests.

Gilman remembered back to her three to four years living without a home. She was addicted to drugs, she said, and she lived under the stars. She would camp on a space off Theater Lane in Hermiston. Hiding away, among trees, she was able to get rest.

It was a trying time, though she accepts responsibility for her troubles. She said she was making bad decisions, which included her drug use. Despite trying several times to correct her problems, she said she lacked the strength to turn her life around.

It was not until her sister died, she said, that she finally experienced an epiphany, and she had a “God moment.” Suddenly, she realized the pain she was causing other people, including her parents, she said.

“It was the gift of desperation,” she said.

See Warming, Page A7



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Brodie Messenger, a board member and volunteer at the Hermiston Warming Station, washes clothes for a guest at the shelter Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, in Hermiston.**

## City Hall project on track

The \$9 million facility may be ready to open by the end of 2022, Hermiston officials say

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan fields a lot of questions every day. Nowadays, he is receiving many inquiries into his city’s ongoing city hall and public safety center project at 180 N.E. Second St. Morgan stood across the street from the project Wednesday, Jan. 5, in the rain, to discuss progress on the facility.

Construction is on track, he said, for opening city hall at the end of 2022. Recently, roofing went up on the building. These days, workers are wiring and plumbing the structure. Much of their work is not visible from the outside as they recently started installing walls.

“From here on out, it’s going to seem to be moving very slowly,” Morgan said, as workers fill out the building’s “guts.”

The weather is not causing delays. Workers are protected inside the newly roofed and walled structure. And there are not material concerns, which was a worry last year; Morgan said materials have been acquired as needed.

See City Hall, Page A7

## Taking the *PLUNGE*



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Angie Cooke, left, leads a pack of polar plungers out of the water Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, at the Umatilla Marina Swim Beach during the Coats for Kids Polar Bear Plunge in Umatilla. The event collected more than 60 coats for the program, according to organizers. If your family is in need of a winter coat, contact Rita Campos at 541-969-3338 or rcampos@umchs.org.**

## Transgender woman sues state for discrimination

Former Echo resident serving prison time for killing girlfriend

By PHIL WRIGHT  
Hermiston Herald

A former Echo man serving time for killing his girlfriend in 2014 is suing the state of Oregon for failing to provide protection in prison after he transitioned to female.

Zera Lola Zombie, 37, is a transgender woman serving time for manslaughter for the bludgeoning death of Samantha Brown. Zombie was Daniel Lee Smith at the time of the killing. She changed her name in July 2020 along with changing her gender to female, according to state court records. She filed the lawsuit Sept. 10, 2021, in the U.S.

District Court of Oregon.

Zombie in the 18-page complaint alleged she “suffered ongoing harassment and verbal, mental, and psychological abuse by both prisoners and (Oregon Department of Corrections) staff as a result of her sex, gender and gender identity” while she was in custody at Oregon State Correctional Institution and then Oregon State Penitentiary. The lawsuit also alleges other inmates physically and sexually assaulted her and staff did not protect her from the attacks.

The lawsuit names the state as the lead defendant, plus numerous correctional officers and other staff and Josh Highberger, superintendent of Oregon State Correctional Institution, and Brandon Kelly, superintendent of Oregon State Penitentiary.

The harassment and assaults

began in November 2019, according to the pleading, when a male officer at Oregon State Correctional Institution strip-searched Zombie in front of a male inmate. The abuse escalated from there, and on Christmas Day 2019 staff denied she could have toilet paper for bathroom hygiene. The lawsuit claims she uses her socks to clean herself and had to dispose of them in a biohazard bag.

Sometime after that the Department of Corrections transferred Zombie to the state pen. There, she claims, another inmate, Allen Howard, physically assaulted her on Oct. 9, 2020, and staff ignored the assault.

Zombie also claims OSP staff housed her from March 2020 until June 2021 with Mikal Shabazz. Court records show he is serving at least 40 years for convictions in 1997 in Multnomah County for

a slew of crimes, including robbery, assault, sodomy and first-degree rape. Zombie claims Shabazz physically and sexually assaulted her, sometimes on a daily basis. She reported the assaults to prison staff at least twice, according to the lawsuit, and they did nothing to protect her.

Other inmates also assaulted and harassed Zombie, the pleading states, and she now suffers “psychological trauma, anxiety and mental anguish as a result of the physical, mental and sexual abuse she has experienced” while in the custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Zombie did not specify how much she is suing the state for. Rather, she wants a jury trial and compensation for physical pain and suffering, emotional distress, economic losses and an award for punitive damages, plus court

costs and attorney fees and “other and further relief as the court may deem just and equitable.”

Oregon Department of Corrections online inmate information shows she is serving her sentence at Snake River Correctional Institution, Ontario. But in the lawsuit she claimed she was an at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the only prison in Oregon that houses female inmates.

Attorneys John Burgess and Katharine Edwards with the Portland firm Law Offices of Daniel Snyder represent Zombie and filed the lawsuit on her behalf. Judge Ann L. Aiken is presiding over the case and set Tuesday, Jan. 11, as the day to complete discovery and Feb. 10 for other filings, including a Joint Alternate Dispute Resolution Report.

The state as of Jan. 4 has yet to file a response to the lawsuit.