

**Warming:**

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She began wanting passionately to live, she said, and she knew that her life, as it was, would lead to a quick death.

With the help of others, she was able to give up her addictions, and she now reports “feeling amazing.” Also, she has a job, as she works for Amazon, and she is studying business management online at Brigham Young University-Idaho.

Volunteering to the warming station is part of her effort to give back to the community, she said. In addition, as she rebuilds her own life, she has sought to make amends for the damage she has done to other people.

One example of this restitution, she said, came when she recently visited Walgreens in Kennewick. There, she spoke with the store’s manager and apologized for stealing, she said.

The experience of asking forgiveness and having her apologies accepted is “freeing,” she said. Now unburdened by the guilt of past wrongdoing, she said she feels better able to continue forward with a better life in which she communicates her past struggles with others.

Speaking with others in person, as well as on her Facebook page, she tells people about the joy she feels in sobriety.

“I have not had a bad day since getting sober,” she said.

**Becoming homeless**

As Seth Hall, 51 of Hermiston, discussed his experiences he mentioned the causes for his homelessness. He was at the warming station on Jan. 8. A part-time janitor, he works 20 hours a week, but he said he does not have enough money to pay rent and child support.

He was able to afford his own home, when he was employed as a forklift driver. He said he lost recent jobs, however, when



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Marie Gonzalez, right, talks with volunteer Brodie Messenger, on Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, while settling into the Hermiston Warming Station for the night.**



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Hermiston Warming Station volunteer Sierra Gilman answers the door to the warming station Saturday, Jan. 8, 2021, during check-in.**

one company closed. He was released from another job, he said, after too many missed days of being ill.

Hall said he is trying to get a better job to pay for a home, but this process is not as easy as many people

think. He applies for jobs, he said, but he does not receive interviews; he does not even get calls back from

prospective employers.

Life is not like one sees on the news, he said. Often, he sees reports of labor shortages and employers who are desperate to hire new workers. Still, he remains underemployed, and he expressed disappointment that he cannot find better work.

These days, he bounces back and forth between this warming station and a second station, in the old Sears building in Hermiston, which is open during the day. He continues to apply for work, he said, while hoping for a better future.

**Waiting for rescue**

Marie Gonzalez, 57 of Hermiston, is in a similar situation as Hall. She, too, travels from the two Hermiston stations each day.

Family troubles forced her out of her Hermiston home originally, and she moved to Lexington with her daughter. She said she had to leave Lexington, though, to be closer to medical services. The problem now, she said, is she does not have a home in Hermiston, which is why she stays

at one station at night and another one during the day.

“It’s a blessing,” she said of the services that have kept her from having to sleep on the street. She expressed gratitude to the community for the space to live while she waits “for rescue.” Soon, she said, she will reach out to her daughters to help her, and she believes one will end her homelessness.

She said she is worried, though, about her medical condition. According to Gonzalez, she has diabetes, which can make her faint. She needs insulin, and she is staying off her disease with fruit and granola bars.

**Helping at the station**

Brodie Messenger, Hermiston Warming Station board chair, supervised the arrival of guests the night of Jan. 8. He offered water and help, where he could, and he engaged people in light conversation.

He said he has seen many people during his tenure. He started volunteering in 2015. He feels happy about the part he has played in helping people, he said, and he has had very few negative experiences.

He told of one day when a guest stole a phone. The guest, according to Messenger, became angry when he was confronted with the theft, and he threatened Messenger.

Other guests, however, stood up for Messenger and prevented a possible attack, he said.

Mostly, he said, his experience at the station has been happy. He spoke of the many friends he has made there and the positive memories he has had.

Only three guests arrived that night, which left much of the warming station empty. He said he usually welcomes more people than that, and he expressed hope that the ones who did not arrive were well.

As it is only mid-January, there are many more nights in which people could use the Hermiston Warming Station to fight off the cold, he said.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Construction crews work on the exterior of the city of Hermiston’s new city hall Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022, in downtown Hermiston.**

**City Hall:**

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**Finding value**

“The biggest thing that folks always are curious about is the cost,” Morgan said.

To many people, Morgan said, the \$9 million price of the project is high, especially when considering it will be a building “for a bunch of bureaucrats sitting there and pushing paper around.”

He stated, though, it is important to remember this project combines multiple city departments under one roof, which will be cost efficient in terms of staffing. It also will, he said, free up space for the police department at the public safety center.

Morgan provided an example of efficiency with the new building. The city council chambers in the old building was used for council meetings and otherwise went unused for 99% of the time, he said. Meanwhile, in the police building, a munic-

ipal courtroom sits vacant nearly all the time.

“What this project is doing is bringing the court function into city hall, so we will be able to combine the city council chambers function along with the courtroom function,” he said. “Now, we won’t have two big spaces that go unused all the time.”

The police department will be able to expand once the court relocates, which Morgan called a benefit “from an operational standpoint.”

Also, the move of the court, as well as the Hermiston Building Department, to the new city hall will be a “long-term cost-savings,” he said. This will reduce the number of front desks, thereby cutting back the need for additional staff when added employees might otherwise be needed.

“This will allow us to absorb more community growth and absorb more demand for walk-up services,” he said.

Morgan said he could not put an exact dollar amount

on the savings, though he expressed confidence this was the right move, fiscally. Likewise, he said he found it difficult to quantify another of the city hall’s likely values — the message the new building sends.

“This is a big signal to everyone in the community and future development interests that (the city is) committed to being downtown, and we’re committing to investing in the downtown a significant amount of resources,” he said. Downtown businesses, current and prospective, should be encouraged that this project brings more people to the shops and restaurants around it.

All this goes to say, Morgan is feeling optimistic about this project and the value it will have to the community.

He added that once people see the new building with its planned red brick facade, they will be as excited as he is about it.

“It’s all coming together,” he said, “and I think it will work really well.”

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**\$2 SHOP LOCAL CHALLENGE**

By trading in \$100 at Columbia Bank or US Bank for \$2 bills and spending those bills locally, you showed your support!

**CONGRATULATIONS TO TERRY D! Terry is the winner of a \$100 gift certificate to a local business of his choice! Terry D. used \$100 in \$2 bills from Columbia Bank in stores around the area in December, including: Pendleton Art Center, Buckin’ Bean, Bi-Mart and El Charrito Mexican Restaurant**

**Thank you to Erika M and Angel A, who also participated in the \$2 Challenge**

**Erika M. wrote:**  
“I spent \$50 at Cecilia’s Art and Crafts, \$30 at Rae’s Dayz Diner and \$20 at Java Junkies. We love our local businesses!”

**Angel A. wrote:**  
“Participating in this challenge was a great experience all together. I spent my money on gifts at local businesses and meals at restaurants, as well as a haircut. I had the pleasure of going to multiple businesses including Ranch & Home, Hales Restaurant and Zila’s Salon.”

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**Thanks for your support of the \$2 Challenge! We’re proud of our community.**