

'A better world'



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Marchers carry signs Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, along East Main Street in downtown Hermiston during the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March.

Hermiston church hosts MLK Jr. Day Peace March

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Jesus Rome has lived in Hermiston for 30 years, and he said he has been to every Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March in the community since its inception in 2000.

Monday, Jan. 17, was no exception. Rome is the treasurer for the Hermiston Cultural Awareness Coalition, which organizes the event each year.

"When I think about MLK and other civil rights leaders, I can't help but remember and appreciate all the past pioneers that have gone before me and paved the way so I can have the rights and freedoms I have now in this country," Rome said.

Rome pointed out injustice in Oregon's past. In 1844, he said, Oregon voted into law the Black Exclusion Act, which essentially made it illegal for any Black families to move into Oregon territory.

"I just can't imagine being my skin color and growing up in those days and even during the days of the civil rights movement era and experiencing the constant racial trauma and discrimination on daily basis," he said.

Around 80 people attended the march, which began at 11 a.m. at the Hermiston First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., and traveled down Main Street.

Police escorts and a United States flag bearer led the procession. People of varied ages, elders to children, took part. Some people sang "We Shall Overcome," and others held homemade signs depicting King.

Pastor Patty Nance, whose church hosted the event, walked at the back of the march. She said she was glad her church could play a role in the celebration of King. In addition, Nance expressed hope that people would hear the speakers and gain understanding of the state of the world and its need for change.

Kicking off speeches, Rev. Chuck Barnes, St. John's Episcopal Church priest, offered a prayer.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith spoke next, focusing on King's optimism, his confidence that people could work together for a better world. Smith challenged listeners to be like King. He also said we should take the example of organizations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who united in a partnership to further causes of justice and progress.

Prior to the MLK march, Smith expressed modesty at his inclusion.

"I don't know if I bring anything extra special" to the event, he said,



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Signs sit on the ground Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, as marchers listen to speeches at the First United Methodist Church in Hermiston following the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Pastor Marlando Jordan speaks Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, at the First United Methodist Church in Hermiston at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March.

but he had reflected on King and his legacy.

"I think he did a tremendous job in bringing things to our country that needed to be addressed," he said.

King's message, especially as it relates to unity, is particularly

important and relevant these days, Smith added.

"He was not trying to draw lines between different races or different peoples," Smith said of King. "He was trying to show that we need to come together."

Smith in his speech expressed confidence that we, as a nation, can unify, even during a time in which many of us are divided. In a discus-

sion in the week prior to the MLK march, he said he wishes many of our nation's leaders could express similar messages of togetherness.

Following Smith in his speech, Carol Jefferies, HCAC member, spoke briefly to encourage community. Also, she introduced Jessica Chavez, high school scholarship winner.

Chavez, who plans to become a high school teacher, said King's message is "a guide" as she and others strive for a better world. Peaceful protest, she said, is key, in efforts toward racial equality.

Pastor Marlando Jordan of Sozo Church in Kennewick spoke at the event and said King was a man of God, a man of vision, a man of courage and a man of love.

Quoting King, the Kennewick preacher said, "Hate is too great a burden to bear."

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney, left, and Jose Aparicio, a construction manager with the Wenaha Group Inc., walk the site of the new Rocky Heights Elementary School on Jan. 12, 2022, in Hermiston.

Hermiston schools set to open in fall

'They're going to be beautiful,' construction manager says of new schools

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Starting this autumn, Hermiston will have two new elementary schools.

Trudging around in the muck Jan. 12, at the construction site of the new Rocky Heights Elementary School, Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney said she was pleased with its progress.

"I am impressed," she said.

This is the first school construction she has overseen, she said, and she is enjoying it.

"It's going up fast, and it's really looking like a school."

She added she also was happy about the advancement on the Loma Vista Elementary project.

She was on the site with Jose Aparicio, Wenaha Group Inc., construction manager, and Jon Fowler, project superintendent with Kirby Nagelhout Construction Co.

Voters in November 2019 approved an \$82.7 million bond measure to pay for projects to address student capacity. The new Rocky Heights and Loma Vista schools are part of the district's plans to address capacity.

Anticipating a grand opening

Mooney, along with the Wenaha and Kirby Nagelhout bosses, said the schools were on schedule to open for classes in the fall.

Aparicio said the schools will have the same "feel and layout" as Hermiston's West Park Elementary School. The two new schools will resemble each other, too, he said. The biggest difference between them will be the direction they are facing.

The buildings will have four classrooms per grade level — kindergarten through fifth grade — and four classrooms for additional programs. This gives the building a total of 28 classrooms. The maximum occupancy will be 600.

This is needed, Mooney said, because the area is

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DEQ fines Port of Morrow \$1.3M

Port violated its permit more than 1,000 times in the last few years, according to regulators

By GEORGE PLAVEN
EO Media Group

Oregon environmental regulators have fined the Port of Morrow \$1.3 million for repeatedly over-applying agricultural wastewater on nearby farms in an area that already has elevated levels of nitrates in the groundwater.

The state Department of Environmental Quality announced the fine on Jan. 11.

Under a DEQ water quality permit, the port collects nitrogen-rich wastewater from food processors, storage facilities and data centers at its Boardman industrial park, which it then reuses to irrigate neighboring farm fields growing potatoes, onions and other high-value crops.

But according to the agency, the port violated its permit more than 1,000 times from 2018 to 2021, exceeding the limit on how much nitrogen can be safely applied to farmland and resulting in 165 tons of excess nitrogen in the fields.

Leah Feldon, DEQ deputy director, said these are "serious violations of water quality regulations that are in place to protect public health and the environment."

The Port of Morrow is Oregon's second-largest port, behind only the Port of Portland. It is in the Umatilla Basin of northeast Oregon, where in 1990 the state declared a Groundwater Management Area due to high levels of groundwater nitrates exceeding 7 milligrams per liter.

In a statement, Ryan Neal, the port's general manager, said it takes the violations seriously and will work in collaboration with DEQ toward finding a long-term

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