



Hermiston's Snow White

Jilli Smalley poses
March 30, 2022,
with tiny figurines
that she fashioned
herself.
Erick Peterson/
Hermiston Herald



By ERICK PETERSON • Hermiston Herald

Jilli Smalley is open about her abilities. The 31-year-old Hermiston resident smiled broadly prior to a recent exercise session, and she boasted of her ability to make friends.

“Even Grumpy likes Snow White,” Jilli Smalley said.

Her mother, Kristi Smalley, explained that her daughter, who is autistic and has a seizure disorder, loves Disney and often communicates with references to Disney movies. She will refer to herself as Snow White, though she sometimes calls herself Doc or Sleepy, depending on the situation.

Speaking in a soprano-like, melodious tone, the younger Smalley indeed sounds a bit like Snow White of the Disney movie. Also like the young princess, she is warm and draws people near her. At the exercise session, a gathering of people at The Arc Umatilla County, she met with several other Zumba practitioners. Before rushing over to join the Zumba crowd, she talked about her life.

The first thing she mentioned was her work at Pizza Hut, employment that she said she enjoys. She works as a dishwasher four nights a week, 3.5 hours per shift.

“I wash dishes and mess around,” she said.

She added she likes the people there, and she sometimes makes sugar cookies for them.

Over at the pizza place, her co-workers stated their profound affection for the woman. Manager Dave Beaty, said she is a great asset to his team.

“The mood around here is different when she is not here,” he said. When she is present, the atmosphere is bright. When she is gone, less so.

In addition, he said, she is a hard

worker. In contrast to some other employees, she approaches each task with single-minded focus.

“She’s a highly-valued employee, because she loves repetitive work, so she’s perfect,” her mother said.

A fellow employee, Kimberly Parker attested to Jilli Smalley’s drive.

“She is a bulldog in the dishwashing pit,” Parker said of Jilli Smalley. She added that Jilli Smalley will spray people with water on occasion when they get in her way.

Michele Kietzke, job coach with Eastern Oregon Support Services Brokerage, said that it is not all fun and games. There are times when Jilli Smalley will lose muscle control, succumbing to her seizure disorder. This trouble can last 20 minutes. While temporary, Kietzke said, it does necessitate the presence of a trained professional.

Kristi Smalley said her daughter is “pretty independent with her work skills,” but also needs assistance if something comes up that she doesn’t understand or if there are communication issues. On occasion, the communication issues are due to the Disney references she makes.

“Some of her communication is taking lines from Disney movies and trying to apply them to situations,” her mother said. “So, if you don’t speak Disney, it doesn’t make any sense.”

Kietzke is present, too, to help translate for her. She has been shadowing Jilli Smalley for 13 years. During that time, according to the job coach, they have



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Jilli Smalley practices Zumba at a class on March 30, 2022, in Hermiston.

become tight friends. They are together in social settings, as well as work. They cook and craft together, too. And of course, they watch Disney cartoons.

Asked about the Pizza Hut menu, Jilli Smalley said she does not eat pizza. Instead, she said, she likes eating the breadsticks. Along with French fries and hot dogs, they are among her favorite foods, she said.

A day in the life of Jilli Smalley

Even aside from her dishwashing job, Jilli Smalley leads a busy life. She said she wakes up at 5:20 a.m. and eats breakfast, packs her lunch and readies for the day. She goes to Trenditions Inc., an organization that teaches job skills to people with disabilities.

Shredding documents, she said, is among her favorite activities there.

After Trenditions, she will run errands. Then, she will meet with friends for games before going to work. On good

days, she said, she will be able to attend Zumba classes.

“I love Zumba,” Jilli Smalley said, adding it’s fun because it lets her “shake the body.” Other favorite activities include swimming, bowling and walking. If she has time, she will do crafts, including bead making.

After work and activities, she returns home and gets ready for bed. Bedtime is 8:20 p.m., she said.

Kristi Smalley said she and her husband accompany their daughter on many of these activities, as the young woman would not be able to do these things on her own. Also, she gets help from the Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage, which has been helping people like Jilli Smalley for 20 years.

At the age of 18, Jilli Smalley was able to enter the brokerage. Three years later, after she graduated from high school, the EOSSB stepped up its assistance to

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Candidates in commissioner races come to Hermiston

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

John Shafer told a group of people Thursday, April 7, his hope for his future as a Umatilla County commissioner.

“I want to continue being your humble servant,” the incumbent said.

He added there was work left to do, and he wanted people to reelect him into office so he can resume it.

Shafer is running against two challengers, HollyJo Beers and Rick Pullen, who made their appeals to voters, too, at the county commissioner candidates

forum at the National Guard Armory in Hermiston before about 50 members of the public. The three are running for commissioner Position 2.

Meanwhile, a field of six candidates is vying for votes in their race for Position 1, which is an open seat in the upcoming election. All six candidates, Bob Barton, Jesse Bonifer, Susan Bower, David Nelson, Cindy Timmons and Alvin Young spoke before the Hermiston audience.

The Umatilla County Republicans organized the forum, and a moderator asked the candidates a variety of questions. The format capped most answers at

30 seconds to a minute. Candidates could say whatever was on their mind, provided there was no unruly behavior and they kept to the time limits.

What followed was a cordial series of talks from candidates who offered little disagreement.

They spoke on the priorities of a county commissioner, solutions for homelessness, plans for spending money given to the county for COVID-19, the Greater Idaho movement and more.

Candidates understood a question about what rights do people have when it comes to what to

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Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Alvin Young, a Hermiston store manager, introduces himself at the Umatilla County Commissioner forum on Thursday, April 7, 2022, at the National Guard Armory in Hermiston.

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