

WELCOME BACK!



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Rafael Garcia Sanchez embraces his mother and brother on April 27, 2022, after he and fellow Umatilla High School students returned home from competing in the FIRST Robotics World Championships in Houston.

Umatilla High School robotics competitors return home from Texas

By ERICK PETERSON • Hermiston Herald

Having left Houston on April 24, Umatilla High School students and their advisers were exhausted by the time they arrived home.

The competitors represented their school at FIRST Championship, April 20-23. They did not win honors, but they came back from their journey with joy in their hearts and memories on the forefront of their minds.

Shortly after 6 a.m. April 27, members of the Umatilla High School robotics team, Confidential, arrived in town. Their bus pulled up to the front of their school, the doors opened and sleepy students picked up their backpacks, sleeping bags and suitcases, and exited the bus.

Alejandro Escovedo, junior, was among the first people off the bus. "The trip was awesome," he said.

Escovedo said he said he enjoyed seeing different states. Colorado and Texas were his favorites, he said. Texas was of particular interest to him, he added, because of the food.

At one restaurant, he said, he ate a

sirloin steak. The best part, though, was watching a few of his classmates engage in an eating contest, he added.

One of the eating-contest participants was Elias Gomez. A junior at Umatilla High, Gomez said he ate 55 ounces of a 72-ounce steak, with sides.

"It was hard," he said.

He said this was the first trip to a world championship he had made with the robotics team. It also was, according to Gomez, the farthest he had ever been from home, and he was very happy to have encountered other people from many different places. It was especially interesting, he said, to have met teenagers from other countries, including Mexico and Israel.

Another junior, Aaron Ochoa, expressed the same sentiment. It was

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Meghan Owens gets a warm greeting from her dad, Rodney Owens, on April 27, 2022, as she gets off a bus that transported her and other Umatilla High School robotics team members home from the FIRST Robotics World Championships in Houston.

Charities face increasing demand for services, fewer donations

Local charities struggle in post-pandemic period of declining donations, inflation, supply shortages and an increased influx of people in need

By JOHN TILLMAN
Hermiston Herald

Charities in Northeastern Oregon are struggling to meet the needs of an increasing number of clients. While the pandemic has subsided, some donations have declined and prices soared, amid supply shortages.

Mark Gomolski of Agape House food bank painted the overall scenario.

"When everything was shut down during the pandemic, monetary donations increased," he said. "Food donations stayed about the same. Now demand is up for services. We have very

few fresh vegetables. Fresh fruit, yes, and bread, but not vegetables."

Pendleton's Salvation Army faces the same issues.

"During the pandemic, donations went up, but so did our needs," Maj. DeWayne Halstad said. "Now donations have dropped off. We're feeding a bit fewer people, but our costs are way up."

The Irrigon Emergency Assistance Center helps with rent and utilities and finding jobs, as well as providing food. Coordinator Ina Abercrombie said need has increased in the area.

"Three-and-a-half months into 2022, we've

already spent half as much as in 2021. This year is going to be tough," she said.

Lisa Patton of Heppner's Neighborhood Center of South Morrow County echoed that.

"Demand has very much increased," she said. "The need is great. People suffer sticker shock at the grocery store."

Halstad said During the pandemic, The Salvation Army in Pendleton fed about 150 meals daily.

"Now we're down to around 105 per day, with 50 here (105 S.E. Emigrant Ave.) and 55 delivered to elderly and shut-ins. But prices of supplies don't come down," he said. "For example, to-go containers used to cost us \$20 for 200; now it's \$55 for 200."



Hermiston Herald, File

Maj. DeWayne Halstad hands out a boxed lunch at the Pendleton Salvation Army in March 2020 at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Now in April 2020 as the pandemic ebbs, local charities report several factors are pushing an increase for their services.

Serving indoors has hurdles as well, he said, with a need for more staff and with clients getting into

fight and arguments at the tables.

"We could really use support," Halstad concluded. "Especially big, No. 10 canned goods. We have vegetable shortages. Frozen hamburger, chicken breasts, stuff like that. Spaghetti sauce."

Business changes, problems also fall on charities

Gomolski said changes in agribusiness affect the Hermiston food bank.

"Bud-Rich Potato was bought out, so it no longer provided us with onions and potatoes," he said. "One of our staffers got Riverpoint Farms to donate some onions for a while. The loss of Shearer's also hurt. Not only did we lose a

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