

‘Unfortunate nightmare whirlwind’

Hermiston, Heppner DMV closed for a day, reopened but staffing problem remains

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The Hermiston DMV was closed for a day it would ordinarily be open.

Posted hours on the front door are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Still, the doors were locked at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 28. A sign on the door Thursday explained the reason.

“This office is closed due to staffing,” the sign read. Also, it guided people to the DMV website, oregondmv.com, for more information, and it notified visitors to check their email for more information if they had scheduled appointments.

The DMV website stated the Hermiston and Heppner offices were both closed Thursday. There was no further mention about when they would reopen.

Upset people at the door

People were frustrated as they arrived at the Hermiston DMV and found the doors locked.

“I came a long ways to come here, and now it’s not even open,” Sarah Krebs, of Ione, said. She had wanted to update her driver’s license.

She said her license was set to expire on her birthday, Sunday, May 1, and she would need to update it by then.

The Pendleton DMV was

open, according to the DMV website, and Krebs said she would try it, as she got back into her vehicle and left.

Another disappointed person, Dominick Giefing, had been waiting in front of the Hermiston building, located at 810 S. Highway 395.

He said he had been at the office the day prior but was not able to get his driver’s license because he had forgotten his eyeglasses.

“This is the biggest inconvenience ever,” he said. “They should be open. DMVs don’t help people. They just make their lives harder.”

His mother, Mina Edwards, was sitting in her vehicle out in front of the DMV with her son. They are both from Ione.

She said they had been through a lot of bureaucracy on the road to get Giefing’s license. She had tried

the DMV’s customer service phone number, but had not received help after half an hour of being kept on hold.

“It’s been an unfortunate nightmare whirlwind,” she said.

Problem remains after reopening

On Friday, April 29, the Hermiston DMV reopened. As the Heppner office is ordinarily closed on Fridays, it was not open then.

“We’re suffering across the state,” David House, DMV spokesman, said. He called the situation “critical,” stating that the DMV is receiving a fraction of the job applications it had in previous years.

People are retiring or leaving for other jobs, and not enough new applicants are stepping in to fill open positions, he said. The Med-



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

The Hermiston DMV, 810 S. Highway 395, was closed on Thursday, April 28, 2022, during normal business hours.

ford office is at half its regular staff, and offices like the Hermiston office, which he said operates with two or three workers, can shut down when a single person gets sick and has to stay home.

There are 60 offices statewide, and many of them are staffed by two or three

employees, like the Hermiston office, he said.

He added that all of the Oregon Department of Transportation is facing this problem, not just the DMV.

House recommended that people in need of services visit the DMV website to see if they can be helped that way.

Port of Morrow receiving new executive director

Hermiston Herald

Lisa Mittelsdorf starts as the Port of Morrow executive director May 9.

Mittelsdorf is the port’s economic development director. The port announced the move in a press release April 27.

Mittelsdorf has been with the Port of Morrow for more than 30 years, working closely with previous directors, the announcement stated. As executive director, she will be responsible for the management and administration of port activities.

Port of Morrow Commission President Rick Stokoe said Mittelsdorf is an exceptional leader.

“Lisa’s successful collaborations with her many board positions, strong community and business partnerships and experience managing success-

ful teams will elevate the port’s success as we continue to be the second largest port in the state,” he said according to the release.

Port Commissioner Joe Taylor in the release complimented Mittelsdorf’s experiences and relationships as “a huge advantage not only with our port partners but also with our county, region and state.

The port commission began an internal search to fill the position, which was left vacant by the death of Executive Director Ryan Neal in January. By April 4, it received letters of interest from candidates and then conducted interviews. According to the release, there were three very qualified internal applicants who made the decision difficult.

The commission also thanked all the candidates.

Stanfield city manager turns down job offer

Hermiston Herald

Stanfield City Manager Ben Burgener will remain in his current post, at least for now.

“The council and I are glad he decided to stay,” Susan Whelan, incoming mayor for Stanfield, said.

Burgener, who was a finalist to be

the city manager of Warrenton, said he was offered the job but turned it down.

“Housing costs were pretty extreme compared to what they were willing to offer,” he said.

A job posting for the position advertises a salary of \$110,000 to \$140,000 plus



Burgener

“excellent benefits.”

He stated that his current annual salary is \$95,004.

Also, he cited “a lot happening in Stanfield” and the “amazing people” at the Stanfield job for keeping him in town.

“In the end, there just was not enough benefit to incentivize my family to want to relocate from a great situation,” he said.

He added that his current contract ends Sept. 16 and will be up for renewal.

“I anticipate there would be a pay increase with the renewed contract,” he said.

Burgener will be working alongside a new mayor. During the council’s April 18 meeting, it selected Whelan, a fellow city councilor, to succeed Mayor Thomas McCann.

Echo Fire Department gets grant from Wildhorse

By WYATT TEGGINS
Hermiston Herald

The Echo Rural Fire Protection District has received a \$20,000 grant from the Wildhorse Foundation to repair the fire station roof, helping to alleviate the \$26,000 price tag.

Operating on an annual budget of \$100,000, the district already spent \$25,000 on a new engine for a truck

in early July 2021. Then the roof at the station began leaking in late December.

“At first, we thought it would be an easy fix,” Fire Chief Delbert Gehrke said, “but then insulation began to fall into the firehouse, exposing a hole that allowed you to see through the ceiling.”

Gehrke decided to put an application in with the Wildhorse Foundation,

despite only a couple of weeks left in the application window, hoping for funds to help alleviate some of the cost.

To his surprise, the foundation was able to approve the request and write the grant in a short time.

The Wildhorse Foundation uses 3% of the net gaming revenue made at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino to invest in commu-

nity matters.

According to the Wildhorse Foundations website, thewildhorsefoundation.com, since the foundation’s indoctrination in 2001, the organization has provided \$13 million to local cultural, educational and public health endeavors. In 2019 alone, the Wildhorse Foundation provided more than \$1.1 million to 127 organizations within the state.

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