



Old house given NEW LIFE

Hermiston comes together to renovate a home

By ERICK PETERSON • Hermiston Herald

As Heather Spinden stepped out onto her lawn and looked at her Hermiston home, she said she felt overwhelmed.

“It’s just so beautiful,” she said.

Heather Spinden lives with her youngest son. She said she has multiple health problems and her son, a full-time Burger King employee, has autism.

Built in 1907, her home has four bedrooms, two baths and 1,164 square feet of space. It is a couple of doors down from the Hermiston Public Library and is a stone’s throw away from the Hermiston City Hall, currently under construction.

The place did not look quite so attractive until recently, according to its owner. Spinden said kind and generous members of her community stepped up to make it into the place it is today.

Holly Woods and Josh Ross, an engaged couple, residents of Hermiston, told the rest of the story.

Ross explained he attended school with Heather Spinden’s son, Ben Spinden, starting in elementary school and continuing to high school graduation. After graduation, Ross left town.

He did not stay gone, however. Ross returned, and one winter he saw his old classmate



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Heather Spinden stands in front of her home on May 11, 2022. A group of residents came together to make improvements to the dilapidated house, businesses donated services and more than \$100,000 was raised for the project.

“WE’RE SO HAPPY THAT THEY’VE MADE IT SO WE CAN ENJOY THIS HOME, AND WE’RE GOING TO ENJOY IT, ONE DAY AT A TIME.”

— Heather Spinden, homeowner.

walking down the street. He picked Ben Spinden up, drove him to his home and met his mom.

Josh Ross said he recalls looking around the home. It needed repair, he said, and this family could benefit from a little

assistance. He passed this information onto Woods, who he was dating.

“We needed to do something, and it kind of snowballed from there,” Ross said.

Ross and Woods explained they started by giving the Spin-

dens a Christmas basket. But they felt they needed to do more. That is when they had an idea to paint the exterior of the house.

They brought a contractor to the home, though, and learned the siding was not good enough to paint. And new siding was

just the start of a laundry list of needs. The house needed roofing, a new chimney, flooring and more.

Fortunately, Ross and Woods were in a position to help. Woods brought the project up to her workplace, Academy Mortgage in Hermiston. It has, she said, helped people through service programs, and her boss thought Academy could help improve the Spindens’ home.

This came at a good time for

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Local schools bucking trend of rising COVID-19 cases

Coronavirus concerns trending down in schools in Umatilla, Morrow counties

By ERICK PETERSON and JOHN TILLMAN
Hermiston Herald

Oregon’s COVID-19 case rate is rising again, and that has state health and education officials worried.

The state issued a health advisory Friday, May 13, effective through Aug. 31, recommending that schools require face masks again in counties where the federally-defined risk level is high.

No Oregon counties have reached this level yet, but six are classified as medium. These six, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting, are Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Columbia, Benton and Deschutes counties. The other 30 counties in



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

A sign at McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla instructs proper mask use on Monday, May 16, 2022. As COVID-19 restrictions relaxed in response to lower case numbers, fewer of the students and teachers are wearing masks.

the state, including Umatilla and Morrow counties, are low, according to federal

ratings, which are based on hospitalization data.

The state’s warning

comes amid rising coronavirus cases, a previously predicted bump brought on by

the highly infectious omicron BA.2 subvariant and the lifting of mask restrictions. Hospitalizations are rising, too, and are predicted to peak at around 320 within about a month.

According to OHA data, pediatric COVID-19 cases have been increasing since the middle of March, similar to cases statewide. Hospitalizations remain low but are on the rise. Health officials have called it “a mild virus” in most cases.

The advisory also recommends that schools monitor for high absentee rates and notify their local public health authority if absences reach a certain level, or if they see an “unusual spread of disease.”

ODE said schools leaders should tell their county health officials if absences exceed certain benchmarks, such as if absences reach 30% or more, with at least 10 students or staff absent at

the school level, and if classroom absences reach 20% or more, with at least three students or staff absent.

Some precautions still in place, others optional

Masks are optional in the Umatilla School District, Superintendent Heidi Sipe reported.

She referred to a March 11 district press release that asks for “respect for others” when it comes to mask wearing, and an additional learning guide states social distancing remains in effect, as well as regular cleaning and sanitizing of high-touch areas and free COVID-19 testing is available at the school for symptomatic students with a parent’s permission.

Sipe said the district tracks cases weekly. On May 16, she said the district’s last case was April 22.

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