

Hermiston votes to discontinue EOTEC contract

General Manager Davis says that the venue is doing well after pandemic setbacks

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The city of Hermiston is planning to take over the management of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center at the start of 2023.

This represents a change for EOTEC. The city had awarded a five-year contract to VenuWorks, an Iowa-based venue management company, to manage the center. This contract is set to expire

at the end of 2022. According to City Manager Byron Smith, the contract gives parties options to renew.

In its most recent meeting, May 9, the Hermiston City Council decided 7-0 not to renew the contract. There was one absence.

The city manager presented the case for the city managing EOTEC.

Smith passed out EOTEC's budget to council members at the meeting, showing total expenses for fiscal year 2022-23 to be



Davis

\$587,950. He said the city could run the event center and roughly break even.

"We've been pleased with a great relationship with the local staff here from VenuWorks, but I think our challenges have been more with the corporate side, particularly on the financial reporting and different things we've wanted from them," he said.

He added there is "potential that we can go after them for breach of contract."

However, he expressed, the company had understandable struggles due to the pandemic. For its part, VenuWorks was able to build a staff, a problem when the city had tried it previously,

according to Smith.

EOTEC is back from pandemic

Prior to a vote to not renew the VenuWorks contract, Al Davis, EOTEC general manager, gave an update about the state of EOTEC. He said before the coronavirus pandemic, the center had a full calendar of events. This soon changed, as only 43 of 173 scheduled events actually occurred in 2020.

In 2021, he said, EOTEC obtained grants to help keep it afloat and add to the facility and certain events.

This year, Davis told the council, EOTEC has 177 event days booked. He said this puts the center in a

spot similar to where it was prior to the pandemic. More events are expected, he said.

EOTEC staff OK with change

Looking forward to 2023, the city of Hermiston is planning to retain EOTEC's three full-time employees. And those employees on May 11 said they are fine with this arrangement.

Davis said he is not a long-term VenuWorks employee, as he started with the company when he was hired to be the EOTEC general manager. He moved to Hermiston from Kansas to take the job, and he said he had not heard of the company prior to his application.

"VenuWorks has been very good to me and good to my family," he said. "I don't have any hard feelings about VenuWorks. I think they're a good company to work for."

He said that Hermiston may have future dealings with the company, especially when it comes to naming rights and future events.

Davis, operations manager Brian Rust and office manager Jennifer Oswald said they do not have negative feelings about joining city staff at the end of the VenuWorks contract.

"I just like working here, period," Oswald said. "I don't care, really, who runs it."

Downtown Hermiston hosts 2022 Art Show



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Attendees peruse vendor booths at the 2022 Art Festival Saturday, May 14, 2022, in downtown Hermiston. The event featured entertainment, story time and art for sale and viewing.

Boardman pool closes following 'incident'

Hermiston Herald

The Boardman Pool and Recreation Center closed its pool the evening of May 10 until Monday, May 16, at 5:30 a.m. due to "staff training and a shortage of staff." The closure followed what the Boardman Park & Recreation District referred to as an incident at the pool.

According to a statement from the district, during swim lessons at about 6:30 p.m. May 10, "there were both a distressed swimmer and an active drowning incident simultaneously."

Beyond that, however, the district is mum about what happened. District representatives said the press release was the only statement they would make at this time.

"At the time of the incident the pool was properly staffed with one lifeguard on the guard stand and eight lifeguards on the pool deck or in the water teaching swim lessons," the press release states. "Ratios for swim lessons do not exceed

1-to-6 in our 4-5-year-old lessons and the instructor ratio for the class was 1-to-2."

The district's press release also stated "aquatic incidents can happen in a matter of seconds and drowning is the leading cause of death for children."

Posts to Facebook claim children started drowning during swimming classes and their parents jumped in the pool to rescue them.

The district in its release reported it is aware of comments on Facebook but stated it "is our policy to not publicly respond to social media posts or comment on personnel matters."

Two local special districts receive grants

Hermiston Herald

One special district in Umatilla County and one in Morrow County received grants to help cover the costs of summer internships.

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, Hermiston, and West Extension Irrigation District, Irrigon, each received a \$3,000 grant from the Special Districts Association of Oregon. The local special districts are among 15 statewide to receive SDAO grants totaling \$42,000.

According to a press release from the association, many districts offer summer internships to college-level students in their area who are seeking

to learn more about local government careers. SDAO provides 50% matching grants to the districts for the internships. The maximum grant is \$3,000 for a project that would cost \$6,000 or more.

For grant consideration, districts must submit applications outlining the details of their project, the benefits it will bring to the district and how they will utilize a summer intern. At the end of the summer, recipients must submit a project summary and receipts to Special Districts Association of Oregon.

Special Districts Association of Oregon represents more than 920 special districts in the state.

Correction

The article, "Patriot Heights: Ribbon cutting planned for new Stanfield homes" on A7 of the May 11 edition of the Hermiston Herald referred to the wrong organization partnering with the Umatilla County Housing Authority. The UCHA worked with Casa and the National Equity Fund for Patriot Heights.

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Good Shepherd Outreach & Events

May is Older American's Month

Good Shepherd's Community Health & Outreach offers free health screenings for community members of all ages!

Healthy Cooking on a Budget

Second Tuesday of the month (May 10, 2022)

Walk with Ease

May 23 - July 1, M/W/F

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