

Sweet Potato's Closet seeks new home

Yard sale to raise money, reduce inventory is Saturday

By TAMMY MALGESINI
Hermiston Herald

The clock is ticking — a nonprofit organization that provides clothing, shoes and other necessities for area foster families and other at-risk youths is again searching for a home. Jessie Miller, Sweet Potato's Closet executive director, received notification that the building where the facility is housed has been sold.

Samantha Montee, 17, a local foster youth, said the organization has provided everything from summer clothes when she first entered foster care to personal hygiene items. In addition, she has obtained notebooks and school supplies at Sweet Potato's Closet.

Montee said with limited resources, it's nice that she can pick up quality items at no charge. She visited the closet recently in preparation for prom, finding some glitter spray and a hair clip. But even more important, Montee said she feels like the people affiliated with Sweet Potato's Closet really care.

"It's a safe place for kids — you can make a connection with Jessie or any of the volunteers there, as well as get the supplies you need," she said. "I go occasionally and I help put away clothes."



Jessie Miller/Contributed photo

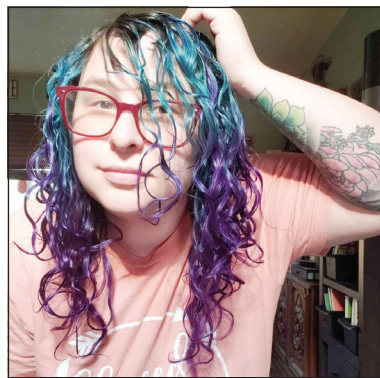
Sweet Potato's Closet, a nonprofit organization that supports area foster families and at-risk youths, will host an inventory reduction/fundraising yard sale Saturday, May 21, 2022, in Hermiston. Executive Director Jessie Miller is searching for a new building for the facility.

Miller is searching for a site in the Pendleton/Hermiston area or north Morrow County. With limited financial resources, Miller also is busy applying for grants and trying to raise money to rent/purchase a building. She said Sweet Potato's

Closet must vacate its current facility by June 10.

Fundraising yard sale is Saturday

With uncertainty about the ability to quickly secure a space that's suitable — Miller said approxi-



Jessie Miller/Contributed photo

Jessie Miller founded Sweet Potato's Closet to aid foster parents by supplying donated goods for their foster children.

mately 3,000 square feet is needed — a fundraiser is planned. In addition to bringing in additional money for the nonprofit, it will assist with reducing the overstocked inventory prior to the anticipated move. A yard sale is planned for Saturday, May 21, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 635 N. First St., Hermiston.

"In 25 days we will have no building," Miller said Monday, May 16. "And we don't have any solid leads."

Miller said anything from retail, industrial or commercial to old storage garages/warehouses, a traditional storefront or basements could work. The nonprofit got its start in June 2020 when Miller and her husband, Kyle, began collecting items

that foster parents might need. They quickly outgrew space in their home and rented a storage unit and then a second one.

In February 2021, Sweet Potato's Closet moved to its current location with the landlord offering its use at no charge. The larger facility, Miller said, provided an opportunity to help even more clientele — increasing the number served from about 60 a month to more than 300. Items are donated by both local businesses and individuals, Miller said. And, the nonprofit is run entirely on a volunteer basis. A number of people are registered as monthly donors to support the nonprofit's mission.

"Everything is completely free. We don't charge for anything," Miller said. "This community is 100% why the closet is successful — people in our community are so awesome."

The facility got its name from a baby the Miller family cared for shortly after she was born. To protect her privacy as a foster child, they referred to her as "Sweet Potato" in social media posts.

For more information about Sweet Potato's Closet, including a link to make donations, visit www.sweetpotatoscloset.org or search www.facebook.com/sweetpotatoscloset. For questions or possible leads on a building, contact Miller at sweetpotatoscloset@aol.com or 541-656-8597.

Annual car show set to cruise into Echo

Event includes afternoon activities, evening concert

By TAMMY MALGESINI
Hermiston Herald

Echo is getting revved up for an afternoon of fun as the Echo Car Show & Concert gears up for its annual event. Serving as a fundraiser for various student groups and the Echo Parent-Teacher Organization, the event is May 28 in downtown Echo.

Registration for the A.C.E. Car Club Auto Show is open from 9 a.m. to noon or can be completed online at www.eventbriet.com prior to the event. The vehicle



Hermiston Herald, File

A 1933 Ford Coupe owned by Todd and Mary Dimbat was on display May 28, 2016, during the Echo Car Show. A fundraiser for student groups and the Echo Parent-Teacher Organization, the 2022 event, which is May 28 in downtown Echo, crescendos with an evening concert featuring Shanks Pony at Echo Ridge Cellars.

registration fee is \$25 or \$5 for the student division.

In addition to hot rods

and classic cars, all vehicles are welcome to enter. Participants will be vying

for special trophies created by students in the industrial arts class. The car show runs from noon to 4 p.m., with the award presentation at 3 p.m. Closing out the show, there will be a car cruise at 4 p.m. Lindsay Murdock, Echo School District curriculum director, said be sure to purchase a "ticket to ride" for \$5 for a chance to ride in style during the cruise.

In addition to viewing the vehicles, there will be plenty to do before the evening concert. A kid zone will feature a bounce house, wood car painting and racing along with other fun and games. Also, food vendors will be on hand — different student

groups will provide various food and concessions. Also, the H&P Cafe will be open for business.

"There are also so many donated items from businesses and individuals that we have for our raffle, which will be displayed downtown during the car show," Murdock said. "Tickets can be purchased at the registration table during the event." They are \$1 each or six for \$5.

Closing out the event is a free concert — although donations are gladly accepted on behalf of the Echo PTO — featuring Shanks Pony. The Walla Walla band, who plays current classics with yester-

day's favorites, will crank things up from 6-9 p.m. at Echo Ridge Cellars, 551 N. Thielsen St. All ages are welcome, but children must be supervised.

The Echo FFA Meats team that is headed to the national competition in October in Indianapolis, Murdock said, is hosting a fundraiser featuring a meal and non-alcoholic beverages. Also, beer and wine will be available for purchase through Echo Ridge.

For more information, search www.facebook.com/EchoSchoolCarShow. For questions, email jthomas@echosd5.org, lmurdock@echosd5.org or call 541-376-8436.

IN BRIEF

Events raise money, awareness for cystic fibrosis

The Bearded Villain East Oregon Chapter is hosting a fundraiser in support of Jessica Brown-Grooms' annual cystic fibrosis fundraising event.

Those in attendance are in for an evening of fun while raising awareness and money to help find a cure for cystic fibrosis. The beard contest is Friday, May 20, beginning at 6 p.m. at The Bridge Bistro & Brews, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla. Beard competitors must register by 5:45 p.m. — or in advance at www.eventbrite.com. The cost is \$25.

The beard competition will feature multiple categories for beard types, and no experience is necessary. For additional details, search

www.facebook.com/rachelle.reed.73113.

The Breath of Life fundraiser is Saturday, May 21, 5:30 p.m. at the Maxwell Pavillion, 255 S. First Place, Hermiston. Tickets, which are \$20 each, will be sold at the door. Kids 8 and under are free.

The Saturday evening event includes a baked potato chili bar for dinner and dessert from Sweet E's cupcakes. A live auction will begin at 6:30 p.m. and entertainment starts around 7:45 p.m. It features live music with Soul Patch, featuring local musicians Luke Basile and Frazer Wambeke as well as Brewer's Grade, a regional band that is fronted by Zac Grooms, husband of the event organizer.

Brown-Grooms of Hermiston was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis when she was

18 months old. A genetic disease, it causes the lungs to produce a thick, sticky mucus, resulting in a shorter life expectancy. However, because of advances made through research, the life expectancy, which used to be age 5, now surpasses 40.

Continued funding of research helps people with the disease continue to breathe. For more about the disease, visit www.cff.org; and for more about the upcoming fundraiser, go to www.facebook.com/events/5094466047264289.

PFLAG hosts educational forum

PFLAG Pendleton is hosting an educational event entitled "Knowing Nancy, A Lesson in Self-Defining Growth." Nancy Peterson, a speaker, organizer and writer, will

share Sunday, May 22, 4 p.m. at Pendleton Center For The Arts, 214 N. Main St. Admission is free and appetizers and drinks will be available.

Born and raised in Alaska, Peterson had plans to join the military but because of a progressive movement disorder, decided instead to focus on a career as an educator and advocate for others. As a non-binary person with disabilities, they have personal experiences

with discrimination. Peterson uses the skills they've learned as a self-advocate and educator to help others.

Peterson is a member of the Hermiston City Council. They've participated in local groups, such as Pride, Disability Day of Mourning, "Celebrate! Faith and Cultures," and the Women's March. Peterson currently works as a disability services accessibility specialist at Columbia Basin College.

PFLAG believes in meeting people where they are and collaborating with others. It realizes its vision through support, education and advocacy. For more information, search <https://www.facebook.com/PFLAG.Pendleton>. For questions, contact Vickie Read at vickie_read@hotmail.com.

■ *Editor's Note: Nancy Peterson is the wife of the Hermiston Herald editor/senior reporter Erick Peterson.*

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