

IRRIGON JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH

School prepares new track for 2022-23



Mike Royer/Irrigon Junior-Senior High School

The Morrow County School District announced the upgraded track at Irrigon Junior-Senior High School is nearing completion and should be ready in mid-September 2022.

Hermiston Herald
Students and staff returning to Irrigon Junior-Senior High School will notice some upgrades with the start of fall term classes this week.

Morrow County School District in a press release announced one big improvement is the new track under construction at Irrigon Junior-Senior High.

"This is something that our school and community can take pride in," according to Athletic Director Mike Royer. "The track facility will provide an opportunity not only to our junior high and high school athletes, but to our youth and community in general."

Construction began on the

project in June, removing the gravel and dirt track to make way for Beynon Sports of Tualatin, a fabricator for track and field facilities, to install the new surface. Much of the heavy lifting has been done, with the Port of Morrow donating more than \$85,000 in labor and engineering.

In the next phase of construction, a synthetic rubberized surface will cover a 3-inch deep base layer of asphalt. The final track will be red, with the finishing lane stripe painting slated for early September. The school district reported it expects the fresh surface to make its debut in mid-September.

Originally built to support a middle school, the old gravel

track's functionality had become limiting for the track and field competitors, the district reported. According to Royer, as the school has grown the need for a better surface has become increasingly apparent.

In past years the track team bussed to Umatilla to have a more professional surface to practice on. The new surface will allow students to have an appropriate facility for practices and track meets. Royer noted Irrigon's track and field team has consistently been competitive in previous years, and this improvement will increase safety for runners and allow for home track meets.

Irrigon Junior-Senior High

School Principal Rose Palmer said the improved facility will be safer for everyone, with lighting in the evening that will provide "an opportunity for the community to expand their recreation options." And according to the press release, she also noted broad community support with helping to fund this improvement, which includes money from the city of Irrigon, Morrow County Unified Recreation District and Columbia River Technologies.

Royer has enjoyed watching this process unfold.

"It was impressive watching things come together this past year to make it a reality," he said in the press release.



Rotary District 5100/Contributed Photo

Steve Williams of Hermiston, the governor for Rotary District 5100 for the 2022-23 term, addresses the Tillamook Rotary Club on Aug. 16, 2022. Williams is the district's first Eastern Oregon resident to serve as governor in more than 40 years.

Hermiston's Williams steps into role as Rotary governor

Williams is first Eastern Oregonian to serve as governor of Rotary District 5100 in more than 40 years

BY LISA D. CONNELL
For the Hermiston Herald

For the first time in more than four decades, a Rotary member who lives in Eastern Oregon is serving as governor for Rotary District 5100 for the 2022-23 term.

Steve Williams of Hermiston joined Rotary in 1999. He said the organization's motto of "service above self" complements his desire for community service. A friend invited him to join, which is a requirement as membership in any Rotary club is by invitation only. Men and women, upon invitation, can join a club.

Williams was raised in Joseph. He works for a bank, and community service is expected or encouraged of its employees, he said.

Throughout Oregon, Rotary members serve the communities in which they live. Rotary is a nonpolitical, nonreligious organization.

"Rotary International is a worldwide customer service organization providing humanitarian service locally and around the world. In District 5100, which encompasses the northern ¼ of the state, from the Idaho border to the Pacific Ocean as well as parts of southwest Washington. The district is comprised of 66 distinct clubs looking to provide service and projects to their communities. There are currently more than 2,900 members in the district," according to Williams.

The need to be involved in such service is the draw for Williams.

"It's a good fit for me in terms of values," he said.

His father and Williams' two brothers also are Rotarians.

Leading by example to other clubs is a role as a Rotary district governor, Williams

said, and by helping assist other clubs in accomplishing their goals locally and abroad. Those goals included seven projects.

"International service projects are often completed in conjunction with clubs in other countries and can be funded by grants provided by The Rotary Foundation for projects addressing needs in any of the seven areas of focus: peace and conflict prevention/resolution; disease prevention and treatment; water and sanitation; maternal and child health; basic education and literacy; economic and community development; and supporting the environment," Williams said.

"Clubs within the district determine which projects are best for their communities as the communities deal with issues of food and insecurities and other needs," he said.

Rotary's youth exchange is one of the organization's key programs. It allows high school students to go to another country to learn. If different cultures understand one another, Williams explained, "there's a better chance of peace around the world."

Because of the pandemic, the student exchange has not functioned for the last two years. However, it is restarting this year, Williams said.

"District 5100 has 35 students leaving for their exchanges, and we are expecting 35 inbound students from non-English speaking countries around the world," he said.

"Some countries that have participated in the past are still hesitant due to COVID, but I know that Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Taiwan, and Thailand are all participating this year. The students are

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— Steve Williams, Rotary District 5100 governor

traveling on a J-21 educational visa and are required to attend and participate in school classes. Immersion into another culture gives the students an opportunity to learn the language and gain a better understanding of the culture. This understanding helps promote peace and understanding," said Williams.

As it functioned in pre-pandemic years, high school students from France and Ecuador, for example, attend classes alongside local students. Participating students have the opportunity to improve foreign language skills and most importantly, learn about other cultures.

"It's just been a good experience," Williams said, citing the friendships made locally and around the world through the student-exchange program.

Some of the students have stayed in touch with Williams and Rotary club members.

Meanwhile, the business community in general also can benefit from the work of the Rotary.

"I think Rotary's message to businesses is that by working together we can better take care of the needs of our communities and that clubs are always looking for participation and involvement from community leaders," Williams said. "There are many opportunities for people to be involved and supportive of Rotary's efforts."

Schools getting 'close to normal' with new COVID-19 guidelines

BY DAKOTA CASTETS-DIDIER
Hermiston Herald

The pandemic made attending public schools complicated, but the 2022 fall term is bringing a return to the norm for Oregon schools.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued new guidelines for schools that loosened previous guidance, and allowed school districts across America to take the lead on how to manage coronavirus within their schools.

"For the most part it's what we finished with last year," Jake Bacon, assistant superintendent of the Hermiston School District explained, illustrating how the district plans to use much of the same techniques they employed last fall going forward.

"This is as close to a normal school year as we've seen," he said.

Pendleton School District Director of Special Programs Julie Smith explained that screenings, which have been standard procedure since before the pandemic, will continue when students don't feel well. The district also will continue to make accommodations through the online learning platform Google Classroom for students should they fall ill and miss class.

Masking will be optional in the Hermiston, Milton-Freewater, Morrow, Pendleton and Umatilla school districts, with some schools continuing to offer optional masks to their students should they feel a desire to wear one. Neither Milton-Freewater nor Umatilla districts will be offering masks to their students this fall.

"We have a hand-washing emphasis, and support for masks being a personal choice. There is signage that you can

see, mask OK, no mask OK ... That's all over the state," Heidi Sipe, superintendent of the Umatilla School District explained, and in Umatilla schools, staff created the signs. "Having those signs is helpful, we haven't had a lot of problems with kids teasing around masks," she said.

Morrow County School District also has placed a great emphasis on hand washing, labeling it the "most important action," in its communicable disease management plan. The district plan also emphasizes a need to limit exposure, explaining that students who feel ill must stay home. Morrow County School District also purchased air purifiers for every classroom to "support better air ventilation in areas with multiple people present," according to its plan.

Above all, each school district has expressed their intent to continue thorough cleaning and sanitation of classrooms that began when first combating the pandemic in 2020, with Hermiston School District even hiring an additional custodian at every building last year.

Hermiston School District, Morrow School District as well as the Umatilla School District will continue to offer on-site test kits for parents and students, while Pendleton School District offers at-home test kits on request. Milton-Freewater School District Superintendent Aaron Duff explained that although there will be no testing at Milton-Freewater schools, there is a clinic in town that offers testing.

Students returned to classrooms for their first day of classes in the Hermiston School District on Aug. 29 and in the Pendleton School District on Aug. 31.



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald, File

A sign at McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla instructs proper mask use on May 16, 2022. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued new pandemic guidelines ahead of the fall term that ease restrictions.

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