

CHASE

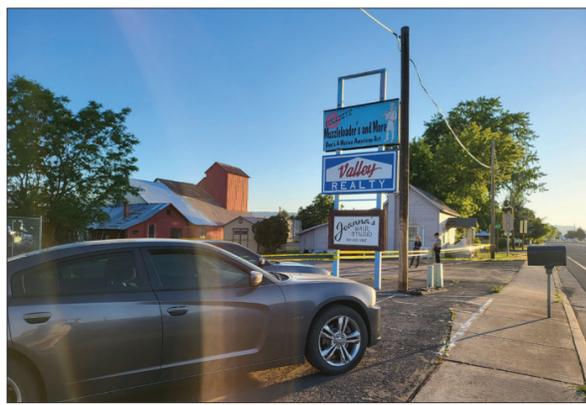
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up for a spike strip deployment, and after learning of the active shooting situation, fired his weapon at the suspects and their vehicle as they came by his location. Troopers were able to successfully spike the vehicle, which ultimately came to a stop on Indian Creek Road near Rinehart Lane outside Elgin.

Three suspects fled from the vehicle into the dense brush and vegetation. As a result, additional law enforcement was called to the scene and a perimeter was set up.

The Northeast Oregon Regional SWAT Team and the Oregon State Police SWAT Team responded to the area and ultimately located and arrested two suspects in the late evening hours.

Ashtin Romine, 26, of Clarkston, Washington, and



Andrew Cutler/The Observer

Law enforcement officers stand in the background Sunday, July 17, 2022, near crime scene tape at West First Street, Island City, where a police pursuit began that involved gunfire.

Jessica Spalinger, 31, of Walla Walla, Washington, were booked early July 18 into the Union County Jail.

Romine was arrested for reckless endangering and for misdemeanor and felony fleeing, while Spalinger is in jail for first-degree assault, hit-

and-run with injury, recklessly endangering and misdemeanor fleeing from police.

Under Oregon Measure 11, Oregon's mandatory minimum sentencing law, first-degree assault carries a mandatory minimum sentencing of seven years and six months.

The unidentified third suspect remains at large as of 1 p.m. July 18. The Union County Sheriff's Office, the La Grande Police Department and Oregon State Police continue to investigate the initial burglary as well as the officer involved shooting and more charges and arrests are anticipated.

The La Grande Police Department — at the request of the Oregon State Police and in compliance with the Union County Deadly Force Plan — will conduct the officer involved shooting investigation. The OSP trooper involved in the shooting was placed on administrative leave per department policy pending the outcome of the investigation.

Law enforcement was assisted on the scene by members of the La Grande Fire Department, Imbler Quick Response and the Union County Office of Emergency Management.

FIRE

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Although the fire danger rating is high on BLM ground, Crouch noted that the agency has yet to impose restrictions on campfires. Nor has the Forest Service.

That's in sharp contrast to 2021, when a dry spring resulted in an abnormally early start to fire season and to its associated regulations on public lands in Northeastern Oregon.

This year, Crouch said, "those late spring rains put a lot of moisture in the ground and greened things up."

Both Crouch and Goodrich agree that the 2022 fire season is more typical for the region, in that the fire danger, rather than rising to extreme levels even before the summer solstice, is beginning to rise only as July nears its middle.

"It feels more like a typical season from the 1990s or early 2000s," Goodrich said.

Between 1999 and 2010, about 80% of the wildfires on the Wallowa-Whitman started between July 15 and Aug. 15, he said.

Although he noted that statistics haven't been updated for the past five years, he suspects there have been more fires in the first half of July than in the past, and that the fire season has extended a bit later into late summer and early fall.

Fire danger remains moderate in most of Northeastern Oregon. The energy release component, an estimate of how fast a fire would spread based on moisture levels in fuels, is below average in each of the six geographic zones that the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center monitors.

The numbers, which briefly went above average in late June before dropping again due to widespread rain in early July, have been rising again for the past several days.

Goodrich said the few lightning-sparked fires reported earlier in July burned sluggishly, generally not spreading beyond the drip line of the tree that was struck by lightning. He expects fires through the rest of the summer will be more energetic.

In addition to the increasing fire danger, Goodrich and Crouch are tracking weather patterns that bring thunderstorms to the region.

That's a crucial factor, since lightning in most years ignites about 80% of the fires on public land. (The percentage is generally lower on private land, where human-caused fires are more common.)

In the meantime, Crouch said the grasses and sagebrush that fed the Willowcreek Fire will continue to be a source of easily burned fuel.

"Our fuel loading in the grasses is much higher than it was last year," he said.

TRUCK

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just as they did when the truck rolled off an assembly line in 1926.

Lisa Goss, of La Grande, also said the truck, produced by International Motor Co., is one of a kind.

"I go to a lot of car shows and I've never seen anything like this," she said. "It is rare and unique."

It is not known how long La Grande's public works department used the truck. After the Mack Model AB truck was retired, it was kept in storage for many years before being restored, according to Ray Clements, who works for the public works department. Clements plays a key role in keeping the truck in operating condition.

Even though its hand-crank starter is in good condition, getting the vehicle's engine running can be dangerous.



Dick Mason/The Observer

A 1926 Mack Model AB truck, owned by the La Grande Public Works Department, draws the attention of people attending the Crazy Days celebration on Saturday, July 16, 2022, on Adams Avenue, La Grande.

Clements said turning the crank can sometimes cause the engine to misfire and send the crank backward with force.

"You can break a wrist, a thumb or an arm when this happens," he said.

Clements uses a special grip to protect his right hand and arm when starting the engine.

The grip allows him to release his hand instantly when the crank slams backward.

A history enthusiast, Clements enjoys driving the Mack Model AB truck occasionally but said that operating it all day would be draining because it has a poor suspension system and requires

significant physical work to operate.

"It would be a long day driving it at work," he said.

The truck's hard rubber tires provide limited cushioning, but on the plus side they will never go flat since they don't hold air.

"I can ride over all the nails I want," Clements said.

Neustel said he is impressed with how well the city's public works department has kept up the truck.

"It is very well maintained. It looks virtually original," he said. "It is cool that the public works department has kept it up. It is a good showcase for the city."

While the truck did not win any awards at the car show, Carter said this is because there was no division recognizing vehicles for how close they look to how they appeared brand-new.

"It would have won if there was a category for most original," he said.

TRIAL

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Opening statements

McDaniel began by describing the night of Williams' death. The evening of Nov. 17, 2018, was bitterly cold and frost covered the ground — a point the state will return to throughout the trial.

McDaniel reconstructed for the jurors the scene at 61307 Conley Road, Cove, where Williams was shot to death. McDaniel played the dispatch call Williams made to 911. The quiet courtroom filled with the sounds of gunshots, screaming and Williams begging the dispatcher, "Get out here please."

Dean Gushwa, the lawyer for the defendant, opened his remarks by telling members of the jury he was going to show them his hand. He held up his hand so the backside was facing the jury box, saying they must believe they have now seen his hand. He then showed the jury his open palm to illustrate his point there are two sides to every situation.

"Now you have seen my hand," he said.

He acknowledged that in 95% of cases where a spouse is murdered the other spouse is responsible.

"But what about the other 5%?" Gushwa asked.

He argued the state has "got the wrong man."

connection, and it was not long before Lee moved to the area. According to McDaniel, Williams always was reclusive, but became even more so after her marriage to Lee. She quit her job because Lee did not want her working outside of the house. The DA described Lee as an obsessive, controlling husband who struggled to let go of Williams and their property.

Gushwa describes a different story to the jury. He also acknowledged the marriage had rough patches but said Lee was a devoted and loving husband who worked to take care of Williams despite difficulties that arose due to her mental health.

"He loved his wife, he still does," Gushwa said.

McDaniel and Gushwa each referenced a previous 911 dispatch to the residence over an argument. McDaniel argued that during a domestic dispute Lee stomped on and injured Williams' foot, and afterward she took out a restraining order against Lee and filed for divorce. Gushwa said the situation arose when Lee was on a step ladder retrieving a crockpot for Williams and accidentally stepped on her foot.

Witnesses take stand

The state's first witness was Toni Grove, the 911

dispatcher who answered Williams' call the night of her slaying.

Upon listening to the recorded call, Grove said she picked up Williams saying she had been shot and heard her say Lee's name. The DA also had a forensic audio expert enhance the recording to clear up background noise from the radio and make the recording of the 911 call easier to hear.

Dr. Michele Stauffenberg, Oregon's chief state medical examiner who performed the autopsy on Williams, told the jury she determined Williams had been shot four times — once in the left shoulder and three times in the head.

The bullet that entered Williams' shoulder continued into her chest cavity, then hit her lung, filling the space with 500 milliliters of blood, before passing through the soft tissue and exiting through her lower back. There were too many factors for Stauffenberg to say whether the gunshot to the torso would have been fatal on its own. However, she said the gunshot wounds to the head were potentially immediately fatal.

During cross examination from Gushwa, Stauffenberg said if Williams was shot and then

talked — which is suggested from the 911 call — that would indicate the torso gunshot occurred first.

The state called law enforcement officers who first responded to the scene as witnesses, including Union County sheriff's deputy Justin Hernandez, who was the primary on the scene. Hernandez documented finding a new yellow leather work glove near the driveway. Due to the environmental conditions and the frost under the glove, he said he believed it had been left there recently.

Senior Oregon State Police Trooper Robert Routt — who was called to the residence to create a scaled diagram of the scene and location of evidence — also was questioned on the stand about the glove. Routt said everything was frosted over except for the glove, which he would expect to frost over because leather has no special properties that would inhibit frost from forming on it.

McDaniel said the glove belonged to Lee during her opening statement — referencing a tag found in his shop for the same type of

gloves, a receipt from Ace Hardware for the gloves along with video security footage from the store of him making the purchase and DNA evidence from Lee within the glove — but this still remains to be confirmed by witnesses or with the physical evidence submitted for review by the jurors without challenge from Gushwa.



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Relationship history

McDaniel told the jury about Williams and Lee's relationship.

The couple met when Williams was working at a gas station and Lee was in the area for hunting season. The pair had an instant

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