

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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INSIDE

SPRING RAIN DRIVES DROUGHT FROM UNION COUNTY



## Police locate final suspect in Island City episode

Gun shop owner thankful no one seriously injured

By DICK MASON, ISABELLA CROWLEY and SHANNON GOLDEN  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The arrest of a third suspect involved in an attempted burglary and police chase brings an end to a dramatic manhunt that tied up police resources from several agencies.

Demus Montez, 36, Hermiston, evaded officers following the events Sunday, July 17, that started in Island City. Police finally caught up with Montez during the early morning hours of July 19. Montez was identified by a motorist who reported seeing an individual wearing a black

*“I’m glad that they got him. He was a danger to our community.”*

— Rick Gorte, gun shop owner

hooded sweatshirt crawl out of a field outside Elgin, according to Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen. Police scanner traffic indicated the caller reported the individual was walking down Highway 82 near the Elgin Stampede grounds.

Deputies arrived on scene, took Montez into cus-

tody and booked him into the Union County Jail. He was arrested on charges of attempted murder, first-degree attempted robbery, unlawful use of a weapon, felon in possession of a firearm, criminal mischief, reckless endangering and misdemeanor fleeing.

Montez joins Jessica Spalinger, 31, of Walla Walla, Washington, and Ashtin Romine, 26, of Clarkston, Washington, who were arrested around 10 p.m. July 17 in connection with the episode that began with the attempted burglary of Bullseye Muzzleloader’s and More, 10201 W. First St., Island City, on July 17.

The gun shop’s owner, Rick Gorte, was pleased to hear about the capture of the final suspect.

“I’m glad that they got him,” he said. “He was a danger to our community.”

### Store owner recounts fending off two masked men

Gorte was cleaning up shattered glass on July 17 following a break-in at his gun store the night before.

Gorte said around 2:30 p.m. two masked men attempted to enter the shattered glass door of his store. He and the

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# Trailblazers

Hen Party helped women gain independence decades before the liberation movement

The Hen Party, shown here circa 1936, was led by Jean Birnie, a La Grande woman known for her horse-riding skills, reverence for nature and rejection of modern conveniences.



Grace Carter McKennon family/Contributed Photos

By BRITTA LOKTING

Special to The Washington Post

LA GRANDE — For more than 30 years during the mid-20th century, a group of women who lived in Eastern Oregon went on an annual 10-day horseback ride through the Wallowa Mountains.

The women called themselves the Hen Party, and they were led by Jean Birnie, a local woman known for her horse-riding skills, reverence for nature and rejection of modern conveniences.

From its start in the 1930s, the Hen Party was an early and localized precursor to the women’s rights movement that would sweep the nation 30 years later.

Now, nearly 50 years after Birnie’s death, her three adopted grand-

children — sisters Melissa Over, 68; Sharon Mascia, 78; and Sally Flury-Deitchler, 77 — want to make the Hen Party archive public. Their biological grandmother, a friend of Birnie’s, passed away before the sisters were born, and Birnie — whose only child died at a young age from a horseback-riding accident — unofficially became part of their family.

“If we die,” said Over, and the archive “doesn’t get out there ...” She trails off over the possibility of the lost history.

The Hen Party, the sisters recall, helped influence the preservation work of their father, Dan Reece — who, according to his obituary,

Trail riders in the Hen Party avoided modern conveniences. From its start in the 1930s, the Hen Party was an early and localized precursor to the women’s rights movement that would sweep the nation 30 years later.

worked with Sen. Mark Hatfield to protect 73,000 acres inside the state’s Eagle Cap Wilderness. The sisters possess the Hen Party’s surviving documents, including handwritten menus from the trips, photographs

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## State tackles transmission line project

Energy Facility Siting Council to go over plans for B2H during July 22 meeting

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO  
East Oregonian

SALEM — The latest review of moving the massive Boardman to Hemingway power transmission line from proposal to reality is this week.

Originally proposed in 2010, the B2H line travels from the Longhorn Substation in Boardman to the existing Hemingway Substation in Idaho. Primarily 500 kilovolts, the line would be approximately 300 miles long. Idaho Power Co. is the primary energy producer

behind the project.

The Oregon Department of Energy’s Energy Facility Siting Council meets is Friday, July 22, and B2H is on the docket. The council plans to go over the proposal for the project and its application history and conduct straw polls to determine if any changes need to be made. This review is the latest step in a checkered past for the transmission line.

### The meeting

The July 22 council meeting will not be the final one; instead, it serves as an update point for

the history of the line, which the council has officially labeled as contested since 2020 due to public opposition.

According to a summary of the B2H line project on the Oregon Department of Energy’s website, 37 exceptions — public complaints on the lines — were filed to the department. In most cases, there are only a few exceptions filed.

“In terms of this being a normal number — it’s absolutely not,” ODOE senior siting analyst

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East Oregonian, File

A fence line traces the approximate route of the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line Feb. 2, 2022, along the edge of Richard and Jean Hemphill’s family property near Pilot Rock.



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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

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### CONTACT US

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page A4.