



EAST OREGONIAN

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139th Year, No. 55

WINNER OF THE 2013 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Comment

A year of seconds

Every weekday in 2014, the *East Oregonian* newsroom set out with the mission of telling our readers what was happening in Umatilla and Morrow counties, the state, the country and the rest of the world. Usually in that order. No small task.

Sometimes that meant driving to the scene of a wreck, fire, shooting or other emergency. Sometimes it required sitting through a public meeting, taking notes and trying to quickly sort out the important bits from the rest. Sometimes it was talking to people on the worst day of their life, sometimes on the best.

It's a moment-by-moment job where tips come in, the police scanner blares, records are collected and dissected, experts are tracked down and public officials are interviewed. And every day we print what we've got in the space we're given, send the paper out the back door to be delivered to homes and newsstands, then start again.

The stories and photos we print represent a slice of time, a first-draft of history in our small corner of the world. Almost always the full story is buried and we are exhuming it piece by piece.

Ben Hecht, a journalist in the early 20th century and later one of Hollywood's most famous screenwriters, said, "Trying to determine what is going on in the world by reading newspapers is like trying to tell the time by watching the second hand of a clock."

It's true. Grab any given *EO* from this year and you'll get a snapshot of a day in 2014. You'll see recaps of city council meetings and articles about local government, feature stories on interesting people, a day's worth of police calls in the public safety log, death notices and obituaries for those who died. You'll find more in-depth reporting about the environment and

See **NEW YEAR/6A**



No. 1 Lukah Chang is led into the courtroom of Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge Lynn Hampton for a plea deal hearing last January in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Top 10 stories of 2014

1 Chang sentenced. The capture, arrest and murder charge levied against Lukah Chang, a Marine Corps deserter who killed Amyjane Branhagen and tried to beat Karen Lange to death, was our top story in 2013. His sentence of at least 35 years in prison is our top story this year, finally drawing to a close one of the most violent and frightening stories in Pendleton history. Chang, 23 at the time, was given the maximum possible sentence under law at the Jan. 8 hearing at Umatilla County Circuit Court, Pendleton. The story of the brutal crimes was documented this fall on the television show *Dateline*.

2 Closing shop. After months of trying to sell its division of AG supply stores, Pendleton Grain Growers announced in September it would close stores in Pendleton, Athena and Milton-Freewater — including the Pendleton Automotive Service Center. Stores in Hermiston and Joseph would soon follow, while the Island City store was reorganized as a commercial pump and irrigation business. The moves came after PGG decided it could no longer support retail services and the co-op could not find buyers for the stores. About 90 people lost their jobs.

3 Top Dawgs. The Hermiston High School football team took the state by storm in November, climbing to the top of the Class 5A playoff bracket and finishing with a 34-12 win over top-ranked Silverton in the title game on Nov. 29. Before their historic run the Bulldogs were 5-13 in playoff games, and the team flew under the radar after playing four nonconference games against out-of-state powerhouses. The Bulldogs defense was stout in the playoffs, allowing less than 10 points a game. After the champion-



No. 4 An Oregon State Police forensic team investigates the scene of an officer involved shooting last April off of Pamburn Road east of Athena. Athena Police Sgt. Erik Palmer was later cleared by a grand jury in the fatal shooting of Tere David King of Athena.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

ship quarterback Chase Knutz was named the Class 5A offensive player of the year, coach Mark Hodges was named coach of the year and nine other Bulldogs were given first-team all-state honors.

4 Fatal shootings cleared. There were three fatal shootings in Umatilla County in 2014 in which the killer's actions were deemed legally justified. In February, murder charges were dismissed against Timothy Kelly in the shooting death of Daniel Dechand near Hermiston. A grand jury decided that Kelly had acted in self defense to try to stop Dechand from assaulting and robbing him. Two months later, Athena police officer Erik Palmer shot and killed fugitive Tere King. A grand jury later ruled the shooting was justified and did not indict. In November, the same grand jury ruled that an Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution tower officer was justified for shooting and killing prison inmate Jayson Withers in August. Withers was attacking

another inmate in the yard when he was shot — the first fatal shooting in the Oregon prison system in at least two decades.

5 Permit denied. A proposed coal export terminal in Boardman was dealt a serious blow in August when the Department of State Lands denied a key permit needed to build a dock in the Columbia River. DSL Director Mary Abrams, a Heppner native, ruled the Coyote Island Terminal would interfere with tribal fisheries and was not the best use of water resources. Project developer Ambre Energy and the Port of Morrow filed appeals, and the case will be heard by a senior administrative law judge in December 2015. If approved, the Morrow Pacific project would export 8.8 million tons of coal per year to Asia and create 25-30 permanent, family-wage jobs.

For the rest of the **Top 10 stories see Page 6A**

Top stories list compiled from a public ballot and East Oregonian poll.

PENDLETON Pistol missing from holiday shooting

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Pendleton police are looking for the gun involved in the shooting of 23-year-old Brandon Valera on Christmas Eve in Pendleton.

Police Chief Stuart Roberts said Valera met Anthony Sabin, 25, at about midnight Dec. 24 in the garage of 723 S.W. 28th St., Pendleton, to make a deal. Roberts said just what kind of deal is still being investigated. Valera and Sabin were only acquaintances, Roberts said, but the occupant of the house



Sabin

knew each man. Roberts said the occupant also has a criminal history, but he does not seem to have much connection with the shooting aside from allowing Valera and Sabin to use his garage for a meeting.

Valera, though, brought a friend to the rendezvous, Roberts said, and that set off Sabin, who was high on methamphetamine. Sabin pistol-whipped Valera with a .45 caliber semiautomatic handgun. Then either Valera's friend or the homeowner intervened, yanking Sabin off Valera. That's when the gun went off and a single round struck Valera in the side.

Roberts said the placement of the bullet wound and the trajectory supported that scenario.

The friend drove Valera to the emergency department at St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, while Sabin fled. Police arrested him on Christmas at his home at 1930 S.W. Runnion Lane, Pendleton.

Roberts said Sabin told officers he had the gun, and eyewitnesses also put the gun in his hand, but Sabin cannot recall what he did with the gun after the shooting.

"We spent hours and hours out there looking, to the point we were raking leaves," said Roberts.

The search efforts so far have been for naught. Sabin remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, on a charge of first-degree assault. Valera's family last reported he was in critical but stable condition following surgeries at a Seattle

See **SHOOTING/6A**



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Rajan Ghimire, Prakriti Bristra and their 3-year-old son Prasad Ghimire are 7,000 miles from their native Nepal.

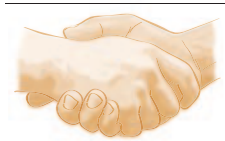
Soil scientist hails from Nepal

Editor's Note: This is another installment in the annual *East Oregonian* series "Our New Neighbors," where we introduce readers to people who have moved to the area within the last year.

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Northeast Oregon and Nepal couldn't be more different.

Compare Pendleton's rolling farmland with Nepal's mountains; the Arkansas-sized country has eight of the world's 10 tallest peaks. While Pendleton is full of open spaces, Nepal has a population density of more than 500 people per square



Our New Neighbors
Meet Eastern Oregon's newest residents

mile and is among the poorest and least developed countries on earth. Weather is subtropical, hot and humid with 70-75 inches of annual precipitation.

However, the two places share some commonalities — crops, such as wheat, and farmer's desire for fertile soil.

That's what attracted soil scientist Rajan Ghimire, a 33-year-old postdoctoral

See **NEIGHBOR/6A**



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