

GANG: Major crimes team not sure who was at scene of crime

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In response to a question he clarified that the major crime team could not yet say with confidence that everyone involved with the March 4 shooting was from outside of Hermiston.

Committee chair Eddie de la Cruz urged everyone in attendance to trust the police with information about not just Madrigal’s death but any crimes in order to get justice for victims and to keep the community safe.

“We shouldn’t cower down,” he said. “If we hear something we need to con-

tact the police.”

Edmiston appeared in front of the committee in response to a request for information about the department’s policies on use of force, sparked by a fatal officer-involved shooting in Pasco that has grabbed national headlines.

Edmiston said in the last five years Hermiston police have made an average of 1,525 arrests a year and used force to effect an arrest 12.4 times a year.

“Fourteen percent of our training is dedicated to use of force yet we only use force less than 1 percent of the time,” he said.

Every use of force is reviewed internally, and Edmiston said if there is any question that an officer’s use of force was not reasonable and could constitute criminal activity then he hands the investigation over to the district attorney and Oregon State Police for an independent review.

Hermiston’s last officer-involved shooting was Dec. 31, 2012. After reports of a robbery at Community Bank, two Hermiston officers followed the suspect into the Hermiston Liquor Store, 1895 Highway 395, and fatally shot him. A grand jury

ruled the shooting justified after witnesses reported the suspect pointed a pistol — which turned out to be a realistic-looking BB gun — at the officers and their attempt to disarm him with a Taser was unsuccessful.

Hermiston police have been using body cameras they can voluntarily switch on and off for about two years, but Edmiston said the department is getting trainings on April 1 on more user-friendly cameras that will be mandated at all times.

He said the cameras hold officers accountable but also hold citizens accountable for

their behavior during a traffic stop or arrest.

Edmiston said the department is also researching shotguns with less lethal bean bag rounds instead of slugs or buckshot, giving officers another option when a situation calls for force.

He said in some cases the department retreats rather than using force. In a recent example, a man barricaded himself in his apartment but officers felt confident he was drunk and would soon pass out and sleep it off. Instead bringing him in by force they stationed an officer outside of his apartment while he slept.

Edmiston said the department does all it can to hire the best people, give them extensive training, encourage them to be involved in the community and provide resources like chaplains so that he has healthy officers making healthy decisions on the streets. He encouraged audience members to sign up for a ride-along to see the police in action themselves.

“We’re only successful if we have the trust of those we serve,” he said.

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FIREWORKS: Lawson uses imagination to design displays with different effects

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censed and started his company in 2002.

Lawson has put on the Wildhorse anniversary fireworks show for the past 10 years. Each time, after receiving the music — this time a feel-good mix of ’80s rock, country music, patriotic songs, old songs and brand-new releases — he lets his creativity roam.

“He’s got quite an imagination when he’s designing,” said his wife, Barbara, who is a licensed pyro on the crew.

The result is a patchwork of fireworks effects such as horsetails, strobes, glitter, comets, chrysanthemums (they look like huge fiber optic balls) and ghost mines (a red fire that shoots up about 60 feet from the ground). The crowning glory is a 40-foot waterfall with a golden curtain cascading almost the ground.

Lawson said he controls the program electronically with a laptop-sized firing system as he sits in a truck on the edge of the launch site. He looks at the board instead of the sky, watching the display later on video.

As he talked, the Jamie-son resident ignored the raindrops hitting his ball cap. The weather forecast called for rain that night, too. Mother Nature occasionally puts a damper on Lawson’s displays, but rarely causes cancellations.

“Rain won’t stop us. We’ve done it in terrible downpours and snow,” Lawson said. “Fog is the only thing that stops you.”



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Pyrotechnician Bruce Lawson, owner of Homeland Fireworks, helps put the finishing touches on last weekend’s fireworks display at Wildhorse Resort & Casino to celebrate the resort’s 20th anniversary. The pyrotechnic display included 2,300 devices and a mile of wire.

Of course, he knows the risks and the fact that things occasionally go very wrong. As Lawson said, “Bad things can happen.” However, so far, Homeland has never experienced an epic fail and no one has gotten hurt. Occasionally, he said, a device will malfunction inside its tube or “gun,” an experience just about every pyro has had. It’s a ballistics ballet of sorts with myriad details to oversee.

“There are 2,300 devices out here,” he said. “They each have to be handled with care.”

Fire presents another danger. Some crew members don turnouts and helmets and stand guard in case flames erupt. Last year, a fire ignited over a hill and was extinguished by Tribal Fire.

On Saturday, Lawson’s display started off with pizzazz and hundreds of on-

lookers gathered at the Wildhorse lifted their faces to the illuminated sky. Then, about halfway into the 19-minute display, came a fiery glitch. Burning fireworks debris dropped straight down from the windless sky and started several fires in the wheat stubble, melting trunk lines together. Lawson stopped the show until the lines could be replaced.

“A display operator’s biggest nightmare is burnt wires,” Lawson said. “It’s stressful, but something every operator has to deal with. I’m thankful I have a great crew.”

About 45 minutes later, the display boomed and sparkled back to life, continuing until its earsplitting conclusion.

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GUNS: Legislation could expand requirement for background checks to Internet, person-to-person sales

Continued from 1A

Oregonians already must pass background checks in order to purchase firearms at licensed dealers and gun shows. It is illegal for people in the state to have firearms if they are convicted felons, or were civilly committed to a psychiatric treatment facility or prohibited by a court from having firearms due to mental illness.

Although private individuals can request a state background check before transferring a gun to another person, such checks are not required.

“That loophole does allow people to buy guns, no questions asked, without a background check,” said Mark Prentice, press secretary for Americans for Responsible Solutions.

Nine other states and the District of Columbia already require people to pass background checks before purchasing guns online or directly from another person, although two of the states — Maryland and Pennsylvania — only extended that requirement to handgun sales.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, is drafting legislation that could be introduced by the end of this month to expand the requirement for background checks to Internet and person-to-person sales.

“That loophole does allow people to buy guns, no questions asked, without a background check.”

— **Mark Prentice**, press secretary for Americans for Responsible Solutions

After the November election, Democrats in the Legislature said the outlook to expand background checks was better in 2015 than it had been in years because of their expanded majorities in both chambers and voters’ approval of a similar expansion in Washington. Democrats attempted unsuccessfully to pass a handful of gun-related bills in 2013, after shootings in December of 2012 at Clackamas Town Center and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. In 2014, they tried again to pass a bill to expand background checks to include private gun transfers but the bill ran into opposition from Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose and Senate Republicans and ultimately died in committee.

At this point in the session, lawmakers have fewer options to introduce new legislation but Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said the proposal to expand background checks will be introduced as a priority bill.

“I’m optimistic about its chances,” Burdick said. Lawmakers do face some

deadlines, including that they must post notice of a work session on a bill by April 10.

Prozanski said he is drafting legislation based on the 2014 bill to expand background checks, with some amendments to provide even broader exemptions when guns are transferred among family members. He said background checks are effective at keeping guns out of the hands of people who should not have them, but state law currently contains a major loophole.

“So in the parking lot of a gun show, on the Internet, in your backyard, everywhere, those (sales), are currently not required to have a background check,” Prozanski said.

Prozanski is a former deputy district attorney who also experienced the impact of gun violence in the early 1970s, when his older sister was murdered by her boyfriend. The family lived in Texas, and Prozanski was in high school at the time. His sister was trying to leave her boyfriend, who was a drug dealer.

VOTERS: As of Feb. had almost 2.2M registered voters

Continued from 1A

The bill provides for electronic transfer of records from the Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division to the secretary of state, which maintains a statewide voter registration system, and the 36 counties where elections are conducted.

Under a 1993 federal law, people are asked whether they want to register to vote when they obtain or renew a driver’s license — but DMV now transfers those records via paper.

“Just moving addresses does not mean you should not get a ballot,” says House Majority Leader Val Hoyle, D-Eugene, the bill’s floor manager in the House.

Many of those transfers fail to make it in time for the 20-day registration cutoff before elections, so an estimated 29,000 Oregonians could not cast ballots in the 2012 and 2014 general elections.

“There is no excuse anymore for somebody not being able to vote,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum, D-Portland, co-floor manager for the bill in the Senate.

DMV will not transfer records for those under 18, those who can prove legal presence in the United States to obtain a license but are not citizens, and police officers, survivors of domestic violence and others whose records are already shielded.

“We have the tools to make voter registration more cost-effective, more secure and more convenient for Oregonians,” Brown said.

New voters will get 21 days to opt out of registration, and to choose a party affiliation. If they choose not to opt out, but do not indicate a party, they will be on the rolls as “nonaffiliated” with

any party.

As of February, Oregon had almost 2.2 million registered voters — 37.7 percent as Democrats, 29.8 percent Republicans, and 24.5 percent “nonaffiliated.” About 800,000 Oregonians are estimated to be eligible to vote but are not registered; officials estimate that voter rolls will go up by 300,000 to 400,000.

A similar bill failed in 2013, but Democrats gained one seat in the House and two in the Senate in 2014. The current bill passed 34-24 in the House, and 17-13 in the Senate, where Democrat Betsy Johnson of Scappoose joined the 12 Republicans

in opposition. Otherwise, all Democrats voted in favor.

Brown thanked a long list of individuals and groups, including Steve Druckenmiller, the current Linn County clerk, who succeeded Riley in 1987. At one point in House hearings, Druckenmiller rebutted one lawmaker’s opposition to the bill by saying that it was a matter of the right to vote, not a right to register to vote.

The Oregon Association of County Clerks supported the current version, although some clerks did not.

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