

**HEPPNER**

# Former dispatch director sues county

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The former director of Morrow County's dispatch center is suing the county for more than \$150,000.

Denise Williams filed in Morrow County Circuit Court at the end of 2014, claiming the county denied her a disability pension after she injured her back responding to an emergency call.

Williams began working for the county as an emergency dispatcher in 2001 and became the director of the county's dispatch center in 2006. She received a critical incident award in 2003 for how well she handled a riotous situation according to news reports at the time.

She claimed in the lawsuit she was an emergency medical technician-intermediate and volunteered for the county health department. The sheriff's office at the time had a policy allowing employees who were licensed EMTs to respond to emergencies while on duty.

The dispatch center on Jan. 12, 2011, received a call about a man on the ground at the Heppner High School parking lot, which is across the street from the sheriff's office. Williams rushed

to help, according to the lawsuit, and seriously injured her back.

She endured two back surgeries, neither of which helped, and could not go back to work. She applied for a disability pension, according to the lawsuit, but the county denied her, asserting she was not a public safety employee nor on duty when she was injured.

The denial amounts to a breach of contract, the lawsuit states, and discrimination in comparison to other public safety employees.

Williams claimed she is owed pension payments and a trial would determine how much. Williams wants \$150,000 to compensate for the county's "wrongful and discriminatory conduct" that caused her "mental, emotional and physical distress." She also is seeking reimbursement for attorney fees.

Alan N. Stewart of Bend is defending the county. He filed a motion on April 13 arguing Williams needs to be more specific in her claims or economic damages. He also countered she is not entitled to non-economic damages in a breach of contract case.

The attorneys will argue over the differences Thursday in court.

**BRIEFLY**

## Pets, senior center on council agenda

HERMISTON — Stray animals are back on the agenda for the Hermiston city council Monday.

The council will consider a resolution changing the fee for dog licenses and an ordinance updating the animal section of the city's code.

Under the new rules, a dog license would change from an annual fee to single payment in an attempt to make the process easier for owners and more enforceable for the city. A license for a spayed/neutered dog would remain at \$5 but a license for an unaltered dog would be raised from \$10 to \$25.

Most of the rest of the changes to the city's code are described by an accompanying memo as "purely updates to outdated language." The wording is changed to note that an impounded animal left unclaimed for more than five days "may" be euthanized instead of "shall." The ordinance also gives the city manager the power to inspect any humane society that collects animals picked up by law enforcement.

The council will also consider two resolutions regarding construction of the new senior center.

The first seeks approval from the city council for the senior center advisory committee's recommendation that the new senior center be built on property at the intersection of NE 4th Street and Aspen Drive behind Wal-Mart. The site would need to be purchased, and the committee estimates the property would cost approximately \$150,000.

The second would authorize the city to name the new senior center the Harkenrider Center. The night will begin at 6 p.m. at city hall, 180 NE 2nd St., with a work session on the planned new senior center, followed by the regular session at 7 p.m.

## Crash slows traffic on Highway 395

HERMISTON — Traffic was slowed down on North Highway 395 near Oldfield Street Friday morning for a three-vehicle crash.

Oregon State Police and Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services responded shortly after 11:30 a.m. and routed traffic through the outer lanes of the highway.

The turn lane was blocked by a silver Honda Accord with significant damage to its left rear passenger door and right front bumper. Two pickup trucks also sustained moderate damage to their front bumpers.

Names and information on

**HERMISTON**

# Bid picked for \$2.7M event center

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center authority reaffirmed its choice of G2 Construction Monday after the board decided to put construction of the event center out to bid a second time.

The board awarded the contract to G2 Construction of Kennewick in February but decided to re-issue the request for proposals in March after bidder Knerr Construction of Hermiston filed a formal complaint about how the bids were scored.

Gary Winsand of Frew Development, project manager, told the board that G2 Construction edged out Knerr Construction by three and a half points out of 100 under the new scoring matrix after the companies turned in "two good, solid proposals."

The event center is budgeted for \$2.7 million but many design details of the center were left up to the companies. Winsand said G2 Construction's bid included high-quality products such as a standing seam roof, ceramic tiles in the bathrooms and fiberglass-reinforced boards for internal walls.

Board member Dan Dorran said the committee scoring the bids was looking for the best scope for the best value

and liked what G2 had to offer for the price. Board chair Ed Brookshier said the higher-quality, longer-lasting roof in G2's proposal was "major."

"I feel we have an excellent proposal moving forward and we're going to have a good facility," he said.

The next step is to put out a request for proposals for the livestock barns, which Winsand said should be released before the board's May meeting. He said Barton Laser Leveling went back to work on April 16 after stopping for a mandatory comment period required by environmental regulations. The company has mostly cut access roads and the parking lot and will soon move on to leveling out the pad for the event center. Umatilla Electric Company and Eastern Oregon Telecom are scheduled to start putting in power on May 11.

Winsand asked the authority to approve construction of a perimeter fence around the property because as work progresses more and more people are wandering unannounced onto the construction site to check it out, posing "huge safety concerns."

Dorran also voiced the need to have a solid process in place for handling donations after he was approached by three different donors who wanted to contribute quietly to the project.

Business manager Heather Cannell

reported she has been busy in her new position. She said she has been calling and visiting similar facilities, working on finding the best scheduling software, pricing chairs and tables and creating a master list of every available event/meeting space in the city, which will be made available for use by other entities in the community.

"There are a lot for groups of 50 or less but nowhere to go if you're over 300," she said.

Cannell said the list, complete with pricing and availability, will be useful if an especially large convention or other event comes into town and needs more space than EOTEC by itself can provide. Cannell could then help them book rooms and possibly with transportation to the different venues.

During the public comment section Steve Williams said if room could be found in the budget he would like to see EOTEC consider offering to take over management of the Hermiston Conference Center as part of its operations, offering it as a second option to smaller groups looking to book at EOTEC or larger groups needing additional space.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

## Silver car conundrum stumps multiple police agencies

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office arrested two ex-cons in the wake of confusing police chases. But whether the duo and the car are connected to those pursuits remains unknown.

County undersheriff Jim Littlefield said a woman at about 6 a.m. Friday reported an abandoned white or silver car parked in the road on the 80700 block of Sunshine Lane, Hermiston. A deputy rolled up and found a silver Chevrolet Impala, Littlefield said, and two people sleeping inside.

And there in plain view was a handgun.

The deputy called for backup and a Hermiston officer answered. Littlefield said the car with Washington

plates turned out to be stolen from Portland. The sheriff's office arrested Bradley Ray Griffin, 27, no fixed address, and Jennifer Angelica Torres, 29, of Hermiston, for felon in possession of a gun and vehicle theft. Griffin also faces charges of property hit and run and he had a warrant for violating parole. Both are in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

The arrests followed after a night in which a silver-colored car outran police in separate chases.

The first involved a silver

Volkswagen Jetta with Idaho plates that got away from a Umatilla Tribal Police officer. That pursuit came into Pendleton on Highway 11 at about 9:30 p.m. Wednesday at about 100 mph, slowed to 78 mph on Court Avenue, turned north on Highway 37 and headed back out of the city. The tribal officer lost the car on Stage Gulch Road.

Then a Stanfield officer Thursday at about 12:30 a.m. chased a silver car he identified as a Cadillac in the area of Edwards and Feedville roads. The officer did

not catch the car, Littlefield said. But a Umatilla officer who responded to help came upon an unoccupied Jetta at Spearman and Progress roads, Pendleton. Littlefield said that car may have been stolen out of Idaho.

Whether the Impala fits into the Stanfield chase remains a question. Littlefield said the two cars are General Motors products and have similar body styles. But he said it seems there were different chases involving different silver cars, but that is not a certainty.

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