

Hermiston man dies in head-on crash

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

A 25-year-old Hermiston man died Monday in Gilliam County when he smashed head-on into a semitrailer. Oregon State Police reported investigators do not know why Tyler D. Brown drove a 1999 Jeep Cherokee hauling a utility trailer the wrong way on Interstate 84 and the case remains under investigation.

Some people who claimed to know Brown commented on Facebook about the man. One described him as a "wonderful young man," another, as a "nice guy," and another posted Brown was

"a great man who leaves behind an infant daughter..."

State police troopers and emergency personnel responded to reports of a head-on crash Monday at about 11:15 p.m. on I-84 near milepost 114, about five miles east of Rufus. State police spokesman Lt. Bill Fugate said in the moments before the crash several callers reported the Jeep going east in the westbound lanes.

State police were responding to those calls when the Jeep crashed directly into a 1999 Peterbilt semitrailer. Fugate said it appears Brown died in that impact.

The vehicles stopped in the travel lanes and caught fire. State police reported the driver of the Peterbilt, Michael McCright, 61, of Redmond, escaped uninjured as fire fully engulfed both vehicles.

The semi was hauling a load of fresh salmon, Fugate said, and fire crews spent hours before fully extinguishing the blaze. State police and the Oregon Department of Transportation shut down I-84 in both directions for almost four hours until opening one lane in each direction. State police reported crews still on scene cleaning the highway. Brown in March 2011

crashed a gold 1994 Honda at the intersection of West Orchard Avenue and Southwest 23rd Street, Hermiston. A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy responded and found the crash totaled the car. The deputy cited Brown for driving under the influence of intoxicants, reckless driving, driving while suspended and possession of a controlled substance. Umatilla County Circuit Court records show Brown completed a diversion program and the state dismissed the charges.

Fugate said an autopsy and toxicology tests are in the works for the body, and those could reveal more information.

Speedy trial possibility for man accused of killing infant daughter

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

An Irrigon man facing charges for killing his 10-month-old daughter remains on track for a speedy trial. Travis Michael Martin, 21, has yet to waive his right to a trial within 60 days.

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said the speedy-trial clock starts ticking at the time of arrest. "The idea being that is when their personal liberties are taken away," Nelson explained.

Martin had a pre-trial hearing Thursday, and his attorney, Robert Klahn of Pendleton, discussed waiving his client's right to a speedy trial as well as requesting a release hearing, but as of Tuesday afternoon he had not filed the motions.

The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the right to a speedy trial, and Article I, Section 10, of the Oregon Constitution states a defendant has the right to a trial "without delay." Making that happen, though, can take some court docket juggling.

Roy Blaine coordinates trials for Oregon's Sixth Judicial District, which encompasses the circuit courts of Umatilla and Morrow counties. He said it comes down to finding which of the district's five circuit judges can fit a five-day trial into their schedule.

"... all five of the judges have long-standing schedules, and we have 60-day trials going in Umatilla County as well as Morrow County," Blaine said. "The biggest challenge is determining which case holds precedence and which does not."

Speedy trials have a high priority in Oregon, he said, but juvenile trials have even greater precedence, so it takes some combing through

to find a judge without mandatory cases that could conflict with a new trial.

Disqualifications of judges compound the difficulty. Oregon Revised Statute 14.260 specifies judges can not preside over cases involving their relatives, for example, or former law partners or clients, nor if they have other personal conflicts. The law also allows defendants to disqualify two judges per proceeding for "no specific grounds."

Beyond that, defendants have to make a case for disqualifying a judge.

"We've had cases where all five of the Umatilla County judges could not hear a matter," Blaine said. Blaine said in those circumstances the "folks in Salem" help find a visiting judge to handle the case.

Martin pleaded not guilty to three counts of first-degree criminal mistreatment, three counts of third-degree assault and two counts each of second- and first-degree manslaughter. The state accused Martin of slamming his daughter, Savannah, to the floor the night of May 27. The girl died the next day after an air ambulance rushed her to a Spokane children's hospital. Martin has been in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, since his arrest on May 29.

Nelson said his office is preparing for trial, but he suspected Klahn would file the waiver, which is a common action for defense attorneys. Pushing off a trial allows them more time to have investigators find witnesses and evidence while also looking for weaknesses in the state's case. The court has not set dates for Martin's trial, and it could be that judges are reluctant to commit to dates that will soon leave the docket.

Until then, Martin's next hearing is July 9.



Martin

HERMISTON Stop and smell the lavender

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Nearly a decade ago, Jim and Sheri Konningrud transformed part of their pasture land near their Victorian-style home into a sea of lavender.

Since then, the Hermiston couple found a way to share their soothing oasis with others — both as a venue for a fragrant festival and as a fundraiser for Martha's House, a homeless family shelter operated by Agape House.

The Purple Ridge Lavender Festival has grown each year since it began in 2009, providing additional support to people in need. The Konningruds were familiar with Agape House and its mission through their other business, Pea Ridge Embroidery & Signs. They felt the charitable organization would be a perfect fit.

"It's a great cause," said Sheri Konningrud. "The festival is) something we really like to do for the community."

Purple Ridge Lavender Festival is Saturday form



Contributed photo

The sixth annual Purple Ridge Lavender Festival benefits Martha's House, a family homeless shelter operated by Agape House.

Purple Ridge Lavender Festival

Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
29081 Bridge Road, Hermiston
Food, quilt expo, photos, vendors, art show, wine/beer tasting, lavender crafting
10 a.m. to 6 p.m., wine/beer tasting
2:30- 5:30 p.m.: Sno Road Winery tasting
5-6 p.m., Happy Hour lavender plant sales
Live music
10 a.m., BBPD Power Duo; 11 a.m., Cruise Control
2 p.m., Nancy & Bill; 4 p.m., Rock Blythe & Two Faced Johnny

9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 29081 Bridge Road, located west of Hermiston. General

admission is \$10 or \$12 for wine and beer tasting admission. All of the vendor

fees and gate admissions benefit Martha's House and Agape House.

The Martha's House shelter opened in 2013 and has capacity for eight to 10 families. Dave Hughes, Agape House executive director, said families can stay for three to six months to get back on their feet. About 75 families have used the shelter.

Hughes is pleased with the partnership with the Konningruds and the lavender festival.

"Donations to nonprofits are declining and we encourage people to come enjoy the festival and ensure we can continue to serve the community through this program," Hughes said.

The event allows people to pick lavender, buy lavender products and try lavender-infused food and beverages, while enjoying live music, an art show, a quilt expo and more. People can taste lavender beer from Hermiston Brewing Company and wine from Sno Road Winery.

Sean Hart of EO Media Group contributed to this story

Hermiston may use Newport as stormwater collector

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

A proposed redesign of Newport Park in Hermiston would be good for the neighbors but bad for softball teams that practice there.

City staff are proposing to lower the grade of the softball field at the park by about 18 inches and remove some improvements, including the fence, in order to divert excess stormwater into the field instead of neighboring yards.

"The current system as designed gets overwhelmed and neighboring properties become de facto storm swales," assistant city manager Mark Morgan told city councilors Monday.

He said the city has paid out five insurance claims since 2012, including two

in May, to nearby property owners whose homes were damaged by flooding after a nearby city pump system was overwhelmed by heavy rains.

The area has experienced significant flooding on a more frequent basis lately, he said, and there was a concern that eventually the city would be forced to buy out the properties.

"The problem is we're not compensating those property owners for using their property for storm drainage," Morgan said.

The plan to divert water to the field at Newport Park would help with the flooding, but the changes to the park and the flooding it would experience during rainstorms would make it less accommodating to the softball and baseball teams

that practice there.

Greg Jones of Hermiston Little League said he schedules six softball teams and one baseball team for regular practice at Newport Park. The high school's varsity softball team has batting practice there sometimes, he said, and he sees adult teams grab the field for some extra practice when it's available.

"Backstops are rare in town," he said.

Morgan said the backstop would remain in place.

Rich Devin, Hermiston Little League president, said the program is "busting at the seams" and growing. He said when he takes teams to tournaments in other towns he thinks of how much revenue Hermiston could bring to the community by adding enough fields to hold

tournaments locally.

City councilman Manuel Gutierrez said the city has a responsibility to the residents whose homes are being flooded, but it also has a responsibility to the youth of the city to provide recreational opportunities. Other councilors agreed, saying that if the city was going to make the playing field at Newport Park less conducive to softball practices it needed to come up with more playing space, whether through building new fields or expanding partnerships with the school district.

With the support of the city council, Morgan said city staff would move ahead with designing a plan for Newport Park, with construction expected in the fall at a cost of about \$40,000.

Suicide at Deadman Pass under investigation by OSP

PENDLETON — An Idaho truck driver apparently killed himself last week near Pendleton. Oregon State Police reported the state medical examiner's office is continuing the investigation into the death of Guy S. Kravitz, 51, of Twin Falls.

State police in a written statement reported its dispatch center in Central Point received information Friday at 9:48 a.m. that a commercial semi was stopped for about five hours at the eastbound Deadman Pass rest area, exit 228 on Interstate 84. Another driver checked the semi, according

to state police, and found a suicide note and called police.

Troopers from Pendleton responded to the rest area and talked to a person who was geocaching in the area and found the man's body in a wooded area approximately 100 yards from his vehicle.

"Evidence at the scene and evidence discovered during the death investigation were consistent with suicide as the cause of death," according to state police.

The toll free line for Oregon Partnership Lifeline/National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255.

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