

HERMISTON

Preventable auto thefts spike

Most unlocked with keys inside

By SEAN HART
East Oregonian

Vehicle thefts in Hermiston have significantly increased during the first half of the year, but many of the crimes could have been prevented.

Chief Jason Edmiston recently released Hermiston Police Department's crime statistics through the second quarter, and said he is particularly disappointed with auto thefts.

In the first six months of the year, 28 vehicles were reported stolen, compared to 10 from the same period last year.

The 180 percent increase in auto thefts contributed to a 9 percent increase in total crime — from 270 in 2014 to 295 this year — for the eight index categories reported to the FBI. While the total is still far below the 10-year average of 387, Edmiston said the number should be lower.

"I'm encouraged by the fact that total crime is still down 24 percent over the 10-year average, but I am honest enough to say that I don't like to see a 9 percent increase from 2014 to 2015 in total crime," he said. "Inasmuch as we have some categories that we're making extremely good headway — burglary being one of them — there are other categories that I get frustrated with. Auto theft, for instance, is driving our crime upward. I find it very, very frustrating that 62 percent of the time vehicles that are stolen are unlocked and 57 percent of the time the keys are in the vehicle."

Edmiston said the department has tried to educate the public during the last two years that vehicle thefts are crimes of opportunity. He said every crime consists of three aspects: the offender,



EO file photo

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— Jason Edmiston, Hermiston Police Chief

the victim and the location. While there will always be people who seek to exploit others, he said, people can easily reduce their chances of being victimized.

"There are offenders on the street looking for an easy opportunity to take advantage of someone else," he said. "Those victims could take very simple steps to keep themselves from being victimized, i.e. take valuables out of the vehicles, including the keys, and lock the vehicle."

Larceny incidents also increased 10 percent from 204 last year to 224, but burglaries decreased to a 10-year low of 29, 52 percent less than the 10-year average. Only one arson incident was reported, compared to two last year.

The same preventive principles for property crimes

also apply to violent crimes, Edmiston said. Through the second quarter, 13 were reported — one homicide, three rapes, two robberies and seven aggravated assaults. Although the number is 38 percent less than the 10-year average, only 12 were reported during the same period last year. Edmiston said some crimes will happen regardless of what people do to limit their exposure, but he encourages people to know their surroundings and be observant.

"If you've got a gut feeling that something doesn't feel right, go with your gut and remove yourself from whatever that situation is," he said.

During the first six months of the year, the department also experienced a 28 percent reduction in calls for service compared to the same period

last year. Edmiston said he was pleased to see the decrease accompanied by a 39 percent increase in officer-initiated activity.

"We don't have a bunch of officers being lazy and sitting around waiting for something to happen," he said. "They are staying on top of things out in the community."

The increased officer-initiated activity led to a 52 percent increase in traffic stops, a 21 percent increase in citations issued, a 22 percent increase in reports taken and a 15 percent increase in arrests.

Edmiston said statistics alone do not necessarily provide "a completely accurate picture of what's going on." He said he evaluates the department based on a variety of criteria, including usage of sick leave and communication within the department. He said, overall, the department is doing well, but he still sees room for improvement.

"We can always do better," he said. "I think it's important that every single one of us in this department understand that we may be doing a good job, but we could be doing better."

OTLD appoints fifth board member

Mary Jones, of Boardman, chosen for position

By GEORGE PLAGEN
East Oregonian

The Oregon Trail Library District appointed a fifth and final board member Tuesday night, rebounding from a flurry of resignations that left the group struggling to do business in recent months.

Mary Jones, of Boardman, was chosen to fill the seat vacated by Alice Ellis. Both Jones and Stephanie Loving-Harris, of Irrigon, applied for the position.

The district had gone months without a quorum and was forced to cancel board meetings after Ellis, Blaine Ganvoa and John Anderson all resigned in short order. Ellis left for personal reasons, while

Ganvoa and Anderson moved outside of the district.

It took some careful procedure, but the board started filling a few vacancies last month by appointing Bill Kuhn to Anderson's seat, and appointed Bart Prouty early to Ganvoa's seat, which Prouty already won in the last election.

Jones' appointment now fills out the five-member board, which is in charge of overseeing library branches in Boardman, Irrigon and Heppner.

Member Barb Huwe praised both applicants, but said she likes to see members represent each of the district's three communities. Huwe and Prouty live in Irrigon, while Kuhn and Sally Walker are from Heppner.

Jones now gives the board a voice from Boardman. She and her husband, Boardman City Councilor David Jones,

own Frontier Court mobile home park on South Main Street.

Huwe said she is mulling retirement soon and encouraged Loving-Harris — an associate planner with Morrow County — to remain involved in the district for when that time comes.

The board must also decide what to do about Kuhn, who made it clear he would only fill in temporarily while the district sorted out its resignations. Kuhn was kept on while the district worked quickly to approve its budget before deadline.

Board members will discuss Kuhn's seat at the next board meeting, Aug. 19 in Heppner.

Interim Director Kathy Street also introduced herself to the district on Tuesday. Street, who works as the school librarian in Arlington, was hired June 24 on a temporary basis after former

director Marsha Richmond left for the Umatilla County Special Library District.

At Street's suggestion, the board voted to increase her workload from 20 hours per week to 29 hours, which she said will allow her to get more work done while avoiding the threshold for requiring health insurance. Street's pay is \$25 per hour.

The board continues to seek a full-time director, and will hold a special work session July 22 to clarify duties and salary for the job. The session is open to the public, and will begin at 2 p.m. in the Boardman library.

In other business Tuesday, the board announced they have hired Columbia River CPA, of Hermiston, to a year-long contract handling the district's bills and payroll.

Contact George Plagen at gplagen@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BRIEFLY

M-F receives \$75K art grant

SALEM — Milton-Freewater has received a \$75,000 National Endowment of the Arts Our Town award.

Sixty-nine grants totaling \$5 million were awarded to cities across the country to encourage communities to create lively, beautiful and resilient places at their cores. The Milton-Freewater grant will support Talk Play Dream, a series of bilingual cultural programs to enliven the city and bridge the divide between the city's Anglo and Latino communities, fostering conversation through shared stories. The city's population of 7,060 is about 40 percent Hispanic, a demographic that has nearly doubled in the last 30 years.

The project will engage community members in cultural asset mapping, creative pop-up events, workshops, performances and festivals with the help of Shakespeare Walla Walla, PearlDamour and other partners.

"Milton-Freewater demonstrates the best in creative community development and whose work will have a valuable impact on its community," said NEA Chairman Jane Chu.

The NEA received 275 applications this year for the Our Town program and has awarded 325 grants worth almost \$26 million since 2011.

Trails association sets symposium, bus tour

PENDLETON — A two-day event that highlights the Oregon Trail and other overland emigrant trails features special speakers and a field trip to Frenchtown.

The Base O' Blue Mountains Oregon Trail Symposium Saturday, July 25 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Red Lion, 304 S.E. Nye Ave., Pendleton. The bus trip is Sunday, July 26 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Participants may sign up for either Saturday or Sunday or both days. The cost for all activities is \$100. Saturday only with lunch is \$75; without lunch \$50. Sunday's bus tour costs \$50 and includes a box lunch. Reservations are required to permit a meal count.

The event is sponsored by the Northwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association. For more information or a reservation form, contact Roger Blair at 541-966-8854 or rblair@oregontrail.net.

Conversation seeks input about volunteerism

HERMISTON — Have your voice be heard. Representatives of the Oregon Volunteers

Commission for Voluntary Action and Service are seeking input about volunteerism.

Organization leaders and volunteers and other interested community members are invited to the 2015 Community Conversation Thursday, July 30 from 9-11 a.m. at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St., Hermiston.

The purpose of the event is to hear from community members. Information gathering includes identifying what is working well and what issues need to be addressed in order to strengthen local volunteer engagement capacity. Also, to identify community needs that could be reduced or eliminated through service and engagement.

For more information or to register for the free event, visit www.ovconhermiston.eventbrite.com.

Paint pendulum to create art

PENDLETON — A project that is part painting and part science experiment is coming up at Pendleton Center for the Arts.

Open to ages 8-12, Process Art: Build a Paint Pendulum is Saturday, Aug. 1 from 2-4 p.m. at 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. The cost is \$15 for members and \$20 for non-members. There's also a \$5 materials fee.

Instructor Erica Edwards will work with students, who will build a hanging pendulum apparatus. Upon completion, they will load it with paint and let it go to work on making their own cool collection of spiral art designs.

For more information or to register, call 541-278-9201.

Two-hour workshop features hydroponics

PENDLETON — For those who don't have much space for a garden or who want to learn more about hydroponics, Pendleton Center for the Arts has just the class.

Hydroponics: A Better Way to Grow Your Food at Home is Saturday, Aug. 1 from 12:30-2:30 p.m. at 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. The cost is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members. The materials fee is \$15.

Richard Bertram will share the history and science behind hydroponics systems and how they work. Participants will build a simple Kratky hydroponics system and spend time transforming it into an art piece with paints and collage materials. Attendees will take home a self-contained basil or lettuce container that will produce all season, as well as the knowledge to start additional delicious and nutritious greens at home.

For more information or to register, call 541-278-9201.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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