

HERMISTON

Theft suspect barked up wrong neighborhood

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

A Hermiston theft suspect’s escape attempt went to the dogs. Zachary T. Knaus, 26, of 1115 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston, faces charges of unlawful entry into a motor vehicle and second-degree theft. Reports from Hermiston police show an alert citizen and some dogs led to his capture.

A neighbor spotted a man getting out of a vehicle Friday around 4 p.m. on the 800 block of West Ridgeway Avenue, Police Chief Jason Edmiston reported. The car’s owner also saw the man, who bolted when

she went outside to confront him. Edmiston stated she told police she was missing \$105 in cash from a wallet that was in the car, which was unlocked.

Officers canvassed the area within minutes and set up a perimeter. Officer Mike Ellwood approached a residence when a teenage girl came out and said she heard a guy screaming in the back of her house just a few minutes



Knaus

before.

“She told me he was being chased by two big dogs as he ran through the yard of the house behind her,” Ellwood stated in a report. “When he jumped the fence, the dogs were biting at his legs, ripping his pants.”

He cleared that fence, then another and sprinted toward a pickup before she lost sight and the pickup left.

Ellwood continued his search and noticed a silver pickup matching the description from the girl. The occupants were also looking for the suspect — they were friends of the victim.

While talking to them, Ellwood

reported he saw a white male that looked like the suspect walking east on West Hartley Avenue toward Northwest Sixth Street. Ellwood drove toward the man and recognized him as Knaus. The officer also saw Knaus’ jeans were ripped and he was carrying a torn brown paper bag.

“I told Knaus to stop where he was,” Ellwood reported. “I told him he was being detained and grabbed him by his right wrist. Once I grabbed a hold of Knaus, he began to pull away from me, so I took him to the ground and detained him without incident.”

Edmiston stated Knaus denied stealing anything even before

Ellwood told him the reason for the stop, and he blamed the skinny jeans he was wearing for ripping apart when he ran. The chief also reported officers found Knaus had \$84 in a sock.

While in police custody, dispatchers told Ellwood there was a parole and probation detainer warrant for Knaus. Knaus declined medical attention and police booked him into the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, on the warrant.

Edmiston stated Knaus was on the streets looking for an opportunity to victimize someone and stressed citizens should remove valuables from vehicles and lock the doors.

PILOT ROCK

City to take on social media comments

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Pilot Rock residents expressing concerns on Facebook about the city’s police force have staff asking the city council how to respond.

The staff report from city recorder Teri Porter stated “a flurry of comments and concerns” appeared on Facebook. The report does not show or describe the comments. Porter in an email explained the comments were about police coverage and a misunderstanding that an officer was not scheduled on Friday and Saturday nights.

Porter in her report is asking the council to take one of three options in dealing with the comments: designate one or two people to “respond based on facts only”; allow the council and staff to respond as they see fit; or ignore the comments.

The council will meet at 7 p.m. at city hall following an hour-long work session on the wastewater system upgrade. Pilot Rock’s two police officers, Gary Thompson and Daniel Badal, will attend the council meeting, as will Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts, who has been working with the small city in its search for a new police chief.

“All I know is that some members of the PR community are concerned about safety issues stemming from a perceived lack of

law enforcement presence,” Roberts said in an email. “It is my understanding that there is a private movement afoot to encourage citizens to arm themselves. I am going to hear concerns, be responsive to questions.”

Mike McCauley, executive director of the League of Oregon Cities, said in general a city should review its use of social media, who it seeks to reach and why it uses various online forums. He also said the league advises cities to talk with their attorneys about the legal implications of using social media.

That conversation, McCauley explained, “would deal with compliance with public records laws (what has to be retained and for what period of time), what may be posted and by whom, removal of comments (has the city created a public forum, in which case it may have very limited/or no ability to remove public comments),” and making certain that the public meetings law is followed by insuring that a quorum of the governing body does not participate in a discussion on social media.”

Until now, according to Porter, social media has not been an issue. Staff will see if the council would like to develop a formal policy.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

Elk poacher gets 24 months probation

East Oregonian

After poaching a bull elk last September, an Enterprise man has been sentenced to 24 months of supervised probation, during which time he is not allowed to possess neither firearms nor archery equipment. Skyler Willis, 23, is also not allowed to accompany anyone who is hunting.

Last year, Willis shot a trophy 6-point bull elk with his bow on the Zumwalt Prairie, located in the Chesnimnus Wildlife Management Unit. The poacher did not have a valid Chesnimnus Unit Tag and was also trespassing on Nature Conservancy property when he retrieved his bull elk, according to a news release from Oregon State Police.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division Troopers from Enterprise soon became aware that Willis

had unlawfully killed the bull elk and began a three month long investigation.

As a result of the investigation, the antlers, meat and the bow used to kill the bull elk were seized. At the conclusion of the lengthy investigation that included the use of DNA evidence, Willis was cited in February for taking an elk without a valid tag and criminal trespass second degree.

Willis has also had his hunting privileges suspended for three years by the Wallowa County Circuit Court. He will write a letter of apology to the hunters of Oregon and the letter is to be published in the Oregon Hunters Association magazine. He is also to write a letter of apology addressed to the Nature Conservancy, and was further ordered to pay \$5,000 in restitution for the trophy bull elk, plus \$200 in fines.

County fair parade attracts thousands

By JONATHAN BACH
East Oregonian

Thousands flocked to the streets of Hermiston on Saturday for the Umatilla County Fair parade. Some attendees situated themselves in camping chairs along a route that ran from Highland Avenue, down Southwest 7th Street, through Hermiston Avenue and onward to Main Street.

Participants in the yearly spectacle saddled up, drove, walked and danced the length of the route, while kids jockeyed for the candy they tossed into the streets.

The Round-Up and Umatilla county fair courts, Representatives Greg Smith and Greg Barreto and Senator Bill Hansell, the Main Street Cowboys and Side Saddlers, the marching band from Hermiston High School and many more paraded through the streets.

On Hermiston Avenue, Hilario Avila decided now was the time to barbecue tacos for family members. He looked on as floats passed his front yard set-up.

His favorite part of the parade? “The cowgirls,” he said, and someone around



Staff photo by Jonathan Bach

A car bounds up and down Main Street with hydraulic assistance during Saturday’s Umatilla County Fair parade.

his front yard let out a hearty “Let ‘er buck!”

Down on Main Street, parade announcer Joe Thompson traded quips with floats while they passed. He said via microphone he would give a New Holland trucker \$10 to stop blowing the rig’s horn — to which one of the operators responded by honking even more.

A hydraulics-boosted classic car bounded up and down on the street, and dancers with a Fli-

pino-themed float danced while waving wreaths around their bodies.

Joe Rodriguez, 52, said he did not have a favorite float. He said he has lived in Hermiston since the 1970s and has been to most every county fair parade.

“It’s a lot bigger, (with) more advertising. The kids seem to like it,” he said of this year’s event. He also said the weather during this year’s parade was cooler than most years.

Julie Errend, 62, is the

president of Oregon Equestrian Trails. She noted how many horses were present in the parade, but said her favorite part was the Filipino cultural float. She said the parade was “bigger than ever.”

As the evening wound to a close, plastic bags swelled with treats as young ones took inventory of their treasures. The sun began to melt below the horizon, horses were led back into their trailers and headlamps replaced the sight of floats.

HERMISTON

Comfort Inn & Suites expanding, adding 35 rooms

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

An expansion underway at Comfort Inn & Suites will increase Hermiston’s hotel capacity by 35 rooms.

The hotel, located by the Space Age fuel station near Interstate 84 exit 182, is also planning to update its existing 65 rooms by adding new carpet, furniture and wall coverings.

“We basically want it to match up to the new section,” co-owner Jim Pliska said.

The 35 new rooms will include six suites and three or four handicap-accessible rooms. Pliska said construction is expected to wrap up in November. A few of the hotel’s current rooms will be closed for a time while they are re-carpeted, but the hotel will remain open throughout the construction phase.

Pliska said the hotel will hire between five and 10 new employees when the



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

A 35-room expansion is underway at the Hermiston Comfort Inn & Suites.

project is complete.

Pliska owns the Hermiston Comfort Inn & Suites, franchised by lodging company Choice Hotels, with his father Harold Pliska. He described the hotel as an affordable “mid-level” lodging option.

“It should be nicer once we get done,” he said.

He said the hotel should not have trouble utilizing

the new rooms, since it is often “running up against capacity” now.

The anecdotal evidence is backed up by hard numbers: In 2014 the 434 hotel rooms in Hermiston averaged 69.6 percent occupancy, with some hotels filling up completely during large sporting tournaments in town. According to information presented by the

city in 2013, Hermiston’s occupancy rate tends to be about 8 percent higher than the state average and 19 percent higher than the rest of Eastern Oregon.

Hermiston will get another boost in hotel capacity in July 2016, when a recently announced four-story Holiday Inn Express is expected to open on the corner of Hermiston Avenue and Highway 395.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

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