

PENDLETON

Man arrested after crashing into power pole

East Oregonian

An Adams man crashed his white minivan into a power pole Monday night, rolling the vehicle, blocking traffic and knocking out power to more than 2,000 Pendleton customers.

Jesse Evans Pugh, 70, was transported via ambulance about 6 p.m. from the intersection of Southeast Court Avenue and Southeast 14th Street to St. Anthony Hospital, where he was later arrested for driving under the influence of intoxicants and first-degree criminal mischief.

“Pugh was arrested for DUII before being transported to St. Anthony’s Hospital where he was treated and released,” Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts wrote in an email Tuesday. “Upon release, Pugh was lodged in the

Umatilla County Jail on the strength of a probable cause affidavit charging DUII and criminal mischief.”

Roberts added that the criminal mischief charge was a result of the damaged power pole.

Pacific Power spokesman Tom Gauntt said power poles have varying levels of influence, and in this case, affected a large swath of Pendleton.

While Pacific Power was able to reroute energy and restore power to a majority of customers by 7:17 p.m., others had to wait longer.

232 customers were still without power after 7:17 p.m., a number that was shaved to 88 after 9:55 p.m. Those customers had to wait until 3:14 a.m. to regain electricity while Pacific Power replaced the power pole.

HERMISTON

Council approves raise for bilingual staff

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council narrowly approved an update to the city’s employee handbook on Monday that includes a 2 percent raise for bilingual city staff and limits employees’ vacation hours.

Mayor David Drotzmann cast a rare tie-breaking vote in favor of the change after some city councilors objected to a provision in the handbook that would cap all future city employees’ vacation time at four weeks.

“I can’t support that,” Councilor Doug Primmer said.

Primmer was joined by Jackie Myers, Manuel Gutierrez and Doug Smith in voting against the change.

The handbook was previously discussed at the council’s Nov. 9 work session, where councilors asked City Manager Byron Smith to look into what other cities were offering in terms of benefits.

At the time Smith said the amount of vacation, holidays, sick leave and comp time employees were accumulating was making it difficult to get things done.

Smith told the council on Monday that he looked at Pendleton, The Dalles, Canby and Umatilla and discovered all of them capped their vacation time at four or four and a half weeks. Hermiston’s was previously five and a half.

Smith also said Hermiston was “toward the top” on the amount of sick leave and comp time employees were allowed to accrue.

Current city employees will still get the vacation time they earned above four weeks; the change will only apply to future employees. City staff currently considered bilingual will automatically get the two percent raise, while new staff will have to pass a language test to qualify.

On Monday the council also held a work session to hear an update on the municipal court.

In April 2014 the city voted to send all Class A misdemeanors to the circuit court. Municipal Judge Thomas Creasing told the council that the change may be working out on the revenue side, but it was having a negative impact on defendants who were left in limbo as they waited up to 18 months instead of a matter of weeks for the circuit court to even charge them.

“It hangs over your head for months and months,” Creasing said. “Is it fair? Is it just?”

Smith said the city was

trying to track individual cases that would have gone through municipal court to get a sense of how they were handled.

Creasing also shared a list of laws passed during this year’s legislative session that had some effect on the municipal court. He said the legislature passed a law allowing people to record in court after the municipal court in Pendleton refused to let someone record their court appearance.

“Quite frankly, I wouldn’t have cared,” Creasing said.

The legislature also passed a law requiring that the court provide translation services for victims if requested. Another law would fine people up to \$250 for parking a non-electric vehicle in front of an electric vehicle charging station. Creasing also reminded the council that the speed limit on Interstate 84 across Umatilla County was being raised to 70 miles per hour.

Creasing said lawsuits over sending people to jail for not paying traffic fines could eventually affect the court.

He said instead of immediately issuing a warrant when someone didn’t show up for a court date or didn’t pay their fine he issued a “show of cause” notice giving them a second chance to appear and explain why they didn’t show up the first time.

“A lot of people take that to heart and we get that taken care of and life is good,” Creasing said.

He said if people ignored further warnings, however, and didn’t participate in one of his “compliance days” where defendants had one last chance to come in and take care of their fines, he did occasionally send people to jail.

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

Bikers deliver Christmas cheer

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

A group of leather-clad bikers will help ensure a brighter Christmas for kids at Good Shepherd Medical Center this holiday season.

Motorcycles will rev up Saturday, Dec. 5 in downtown Echo. Bearing stuffed animals, children’s games and toys, the riders will depart at noon to ride the 12 miles to Good Shepherd Medical Center during the Echo Toy Run.

Donning a Santa hat, Al Sells, who organizes the event, will straddle his 2004 Harley Wide Glide as he leads the effort that started 12 years ago by owners of the Echo Saloon.

“It’s the one good thing I do every year,” Sells said with a laugh.

The event provides toys for young patients at the hospital, including those visiting the emergency room. In addition to distributing toys at the hospital, Nick Bejarano, marketing and communication director at Good Shepherd, said items are shared with the Hermiston Police Department and Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services.

Bejarano said the effort goes beyond merely giving children gifts.

“It’s a great way to boost



EO file photo
Al Sells gets ready to lead the way as motorcyclists participate in a past Echo Toy Run to deliver toys from downtown Echo to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston.

their spirits and make them a little happier and healthier, because that’s tied together,” he said.

Sells is committed to helping kids, regardless of what Mother Nature brings. He wants to ensure kids that are hospitalized during the holidays have a merry Christmas.

Rain, snow, sleet or hail, Sells will continue to lead the pack as long as bikers come out to support the toy run. Participants, Sells said, have come from as far away as John Day, the Tri-Cities and Yakima.

Upwards of 140 motorcyclists have participated when the weather is good. In 2007, 27 bikers braved freezing temperatures and two inches of snow to continue the tradition, Sells said.

In case of inclement weather or for those who don’t ride motorcycles, passenger vehicles are invited to join the end of the caravan between Echo and Hermiston.

Bejarano is impressed with the commitment of Sells and other area bikers.

“It’s a great opportunity for us because it helps us to support kids that might need

toys on Christmas,” Bejarano said. “I think it’s awesome to organize this for the kids in our community.”

Anyone wishing to donate a gift who can’t attend the Echo Toy Run can take them to the administrative offices at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St., Hermiston. For more information, call Sells at 541-571-1820 or Bejarano at 541-667-3460.

Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539

House fire displaces Pendleton family

PENDLETON — The cold season’s first day of snow also brought a fire to a Pendleton man’s home Tuesday afternoon.

Pendleton Fire Department Capt. John Richardson said the man arrived to his 1530 S.E. Alexander Place home to find smoke, charring and other evidence of a fire.

“He knew enough to know that it wasn’t right,” Richardson said.

Neither the resident nor firefighters witnessed active flames, and firefighters conducted a thorough search of the home. The search included cutting a hole in the roof to look for hot spots between the roof and the ceiling.

Deputy State Fire Marshal Scott Goff is conducting an investigation into the cause of the fire.

Richardson said the house is currently uninhabitable, forcing the man and his daughter to stay with his parents tonight and garner assistance from the Red Cross.

Helix school closed for snow

PENDLETON — The Helix School District will be closed Wednesday due to weather, a spokeswoman for the InterMountain Education Service District announced Tuesday afternoon.

Snow and ice have covered Eastern Oregon, with more expected to fall Tuesday night. There is a slight chance of snow Wednesday morning, before the weather becomes mostly sunny with temperatures rising to 34 degrees.

All the other school districts in Umatilla and Morrow counties are off Wednesday for the Thanksgiving

BRIEFLY

holiday, except Ukiah which has a half day planned.

In Union County, Cove, Elgin, Imbler, La Grande and Union school districts are in session Wednesday, but all have early release.

New lights put focus on crosswalks near HHS

HERMISTON — Flashing lights at two crosswalks near Hermiston High School have been installed to help drivers see students crossing the street.

The solar-powered lights, attached to the yellow crosswalk signs in two places along Highland Avenue, are meant to catch drivers’ attention and remind them to look for pedestrians waiting to cross the road.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the lights will turn on automatically on school days from 6:30-8:30 a.m. and 3-4 p.m. They also come with a remote control that will be used by the school resource officer to turn them on during evening events at the high school.

Edmiston said the school district contributed \$1,500 toward the lights and the city’s street department covered the remaining \$2,900.

“We would encourage everyone to slow down, especially while in school zones, regardless of the time of day because we know where there are schools, there are often kids,” he said. “The intent of the signs is to alert drivers of the possibility of pedestrians in the area.”

EOU to present avalanche safety clinic

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon

University’s Outdoor Adventure Program, in partnership with the Wallowa Avalanche Center, is presenting a free clinic on avalanche safety and awareness.

Michael Hatch, Outdoor Adventure Program coordinator, will lead the presentation from 6:30-8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 1 at Zabel Hall Auditorium on the EOU campus.

Hatch will teach people how to identify avalanche conditions and plan for travel in avalanche terrain, as well as cover the basic equipment and skills needed for a companion rescue.

“This presentation is packed with information aimed at anyone who is serious about winter recreation,” Hatch said.

For more information, contact Hatch at 541-962-3621, email mhatch@eou.edu or visit www.eou.edu/outdoor.

‘Hunger Games’ crowd helps feed the hungry

PENDLETON — Moviegoers contributed more than 600 pounds of canned food during the premier of “Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2.”

Customers at the Nov. 18 premier at the Wildhorse Cineplex were encouraged to bring canned food in exchange for popcorn and a soft drink. The 612 pounds of collected food went to St. Mary’s Outreach.

“With the holidays quickly approaching, Wildhorse felt it was a great time to be able to donate food to one of our local food banks while celebrating the release of the much-anticipated ‘Hunger Games’ movie,” said Tiah DeGroffit, who does community relations for Wildhorse.

FIRE: 70 percent of money raised would go toward hiring six more people

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year per firefighter was one of the highest in the state.

The new fire district would not raise taxes for Hermiston residents, who are already paying the maximum \$10 per \$1,000 allowed for city services, or for Stanfield residents who are already paying more than \$1.75 for their district. Instead, compression would cost the city of Hermiston’s general fund about \$136,000 and taxes would go up for residents of the district outside the city limits.

Stanton said about 70

percent of the money raised would go toward hiring six more people, allowing him to staff the Westland and Punkin Center stations 24/7. The move would decrease response times to those areas and keep more staff available at the main station.

The rest of the money would go toward capital costs like updated safety equipment and new rigs.

The new district would be called Umatilla County Fire District #1, but Stanton said the county would not be involved in running it.

“It will be the same people, same stations, same

equipment,” he said.

After the presentation the city council unanimously approved a resolution in support of putting the question before the voters. Mayor Dave Drotzmann thanked

Stanton and all of the fire district personnel present at the meeting for their service to the community.

“I know you work hard, and there’s not enough of you,” he said.



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