

PENDLETON

Former CIA agent talks to Sunridge students about his time undercover

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Between discussions of espionage and spy recruitment at Sunridge Middle School, former CIA agent Bryan Wright had a lesson to impart.

In front of a few dozen students during Brice Gundlach's social studies and journalism classes, Wright told kids that youthful indiscretions could have repercussions later in life.

Wright said he was hit by one of those repercussions during the CIA hiring process, when he was forced to recall stealing some cash from a basketball concessions stand as a teenager.

Although he had to endure some additional grilling during the polygraph test, Wright went on to a career as an intelligence agent before making the decision to return to civilian life.

Wright, 39, was invited to speak in front of the class by his niece, eighth grader Macy Rosselle Wright who was already familiar with the area, having spent the first years of his life in Heppner.

Following his parents divorce, Wright's family lived in Pendleton and Medford before settling in Lewiston, Idaho when he was 12.

Despite growing up poor, Wright was able to secure a full-ride scholarship to Gonzaga University, where he graduated with a degree in international studies.

"I wanted to explore the world, I just didn't know how," he said.

Wright found his answer when he was accepted into the CIA's clandestine service just after 9/11.

Wright was sent to Africa as part of the agency's counterterrorism efforts.



Former CIA agent Bryan Wright talks to a Sunridge Middle School class Wednesday.

While he couldn't disclose the exact location or nature of his missions, Wright said that what he did wasn't too different than James Bond or Jason Bourne.

Wright regaled the class with slightly redacted stories of using a mysterious combination of numbers to locate a terrorist and unexpectedly recruiting a spy at a party he hosted.

Asked by a student whether used any "ninja stuff" during his time with the CIA, Wright said his primary job as an agent was to be quiet and inconspicuous.

"If I do my job well, I never have to use a gun," he said.

The work also "took a lot out of my heart and my soul," Wright said.

Besides the lies he told to cultivate sources and informants, Wright said a friend was killed by an al-Qaida double agent.

Wright took a sabbatical from 2006-2011 to do some background check work for a private equity group in New York and left the agency for good in 2015.

Wright returned home to Heppner and is interested in leveraging his experience in the agency to figure out ways to keep rural areas vibrant in an increasingly urban-centric country.

In the meantime, Wright is keeping himself busy by making media appearances on networks like Fox Business, consulting on Hollywood movies and writing articles about technology and international affairs.

Although he's happy to be back home in Eastern Oregon to spend more time with his family and has no plans to return to the agency, he has no regrets about his choice of career.

"I'd go back in a heartbeat," he said.

HERMISTON

Victims' parents make case for sex offender

Ramirez sentenced to 18 months in jail

By **JENNIFER COLTON**
East Oregonian

The victims' parents tearfully asked the judge for leniency Wednesday morning in the sentencing of a man convicted of sex abuse.

Luis Alberto Ramirez, 21, entered the Hermiston Circuit Court with eight counts of first-degree sexual abuse and two counts of first-degree sodomy involving two female relatives who were under the age of 14 at the time of the abuse. He left the courtroom with a plea deal of 18 months in jail, four years of probation and a lifetime record as a sex offender.

"We all do things, and we have to pay for it," the mother of the victims said through an interpreter. "My daughters love him. My son misses him as well. They say they forgive him."

The court did not identify the parents by full name to protect the identity of the victims. The age of the victims was not released, other than that both were younger than 14 at the time of the incidents. Through most of the hearing the parents, sitting in the back of the courtroom, wore headphones and listened to a translation of the proceedings in Spanish while Judge Eva Temple worked through the case.

Ramirez, born in Mexico, came to Hermiston via California to live with his aunt and uncle. Over a period of time in 2010 and 2011, while a student at Hermiston High School, Ramirez allegedly assaulted the victims, both his relatives.

In October, Ramirez was arrested on sexual abuse charges. He pleaded not guilty.

According to defense attorney Kara Davis, a psychological evaluation in February determined Ramirez

could participate in his own defense although his IQ was "significantly low." After the evaluation, Davis filed a motion for a change of plea. Davis said Ramirez is not "a predator" and is unlikely to re-offend with treatment.

Ramirez then pleaded guilty to two felony counts of first-degree attempted sexual abuse. There was one charge for each of the victims.

Each count is a deportable offense, but the family asked that Ramirez not be sent back to Mexico. Temple said that decision is out of her jurisdiction. The mother acknowledged Ramirez had a severe problem, but said he knows no one

in Mexico and comes from a family that has suffered. The father of the victims also spoke.

"I've known him as a child, and I know something happened to him. But he is a good boy and he always respected us," he said through a translator. "I've always taught everybody from childhood that when someone commits a crime, they have to pay for it. That's why he's here today — because we love him, not because we hate him. ... Lastly, I want him to know that he's not alone, that he can always count on us."

Ramirez was sentenced to 18 months in prison, eligible for early release for good behavior. He was also sentenced to 200 hours of community service work and 60 months of post-prison supervision.

Ramirez will be required to register as a sex offender within 10 days of his birthday every year.

Ramirez, clad in a yellow jumpsuit and handcuffs, spoke little during the hearing, providing yes and no answers to most questions.

"I just wanted to say that at the time I was going through a lot of things being a teenager," Ramirez told the court. "I just wanted to say I'm sorry."



Ramirez

Phelan withdraws Pendleton City Council candidacy

East Oregonian

Less than 24 hours into his first campaign for Pendleton City Council, Ward 3 candidate Tom Phelan withdrew from the race and pledged his support for Dale Primmer.

"I believe that Dale has the experience and knowledge to represent the people of Ward 3 and will do what

is best for the city of Pendleton," his withdrawal paperwork states.

According to Phelan's campaign Facebook page, which had amassed 192 likes since it was created Friday, Phelan is an insurance agent and a longtime Little League coach.

Despite Phelan's withdrawal, there are still three candidates in the Ward 3 races and 14 candidates

overall in the municipal election.

The remaining candidates in Ward 3 are Primmer, the Umatilla County director of community justice; Don Bennett, a retired Transportation Security Administration employee; and Cody Cimmiyotti, a bartender and customer service agent.

The withdrawal deadline is March 11.

Lack of financial numbers stymies Umatilla County dispatch committee

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County's Dispatch Advisory Committee made no progress Tuesday on how much agencies should pay for equipment upgrades and maintenance fees.

The committee met for an hour at the Stafford Hansell Government Center, Hermiston, to sort out equipment cost sharing. Committee members, including Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts and Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith, wanted to know each agency's share of the total cost. Sheriff's Lt. Kathy Lieuallen, commander of the dispatch, said she did not have those

figures.

Smith said those dollar amounts could affect how much Hermiston pays for dispatch services and perhaps trigger a new contract with the county for the upcoming fiscal year.

"We need to figure that out or there will be no new funds," he said.

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering, who heads up the committee, agreed with Smith and others.

"Everybody needs to know what they're looking at here," he said.

Sheriff Terry Rowan said his staff would be able to get those numbers in a day or two and email them to committee members. The group decided to meet again March 22.

Elfering and Rowan are both running for re-election this year and have challenges.

The sheriff's office also wants participating agencies to help hire a new dispatcher. Lieuallen explained four dispatchers work a shift, but sometimes there is not enough staff available so supervisors fill in on overtime. This year, she said, the dispatch center will spend almost \$142,000 on overtime.

Adding another position would cut down on that, she said, and allow supervisors to do their job and help dispatchers in the moment.

Elfering said he wanted to see the cost difference between overtime and a new position.

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