



Easy
greens for
Spring/4C



9-year-old reporter
defends homicide
coverage/9C



Fort Stevens
always in
season/10C



Students react in disbelief Thursday afternoon as Sgt. Thoren Hearn describes ways inmates have tried to smuggle contraband such as drugs, blades and even cell phones into the Umatilla County Jail. The tour was part of Umatilla County Student Leadership Day. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

County education

Leadership students learn about local government, law enforcement

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

At the Umatilla County Jail, Sgt. Thoren Hearn showed students the cell where inmates get rid of contraband they try to smuggle in. The students' eyes grew a bit wider at the utter lack of privacy in the stark room.

Griswold High School senior Jenna Doherty asked how someone brings drugs into the jail. Hearn explained an inmate finds ways to place contraband "in his body." A slight upward hand gesture helped drive the point home.

"Oh. Whoa," Doherty replied. An inmate in a nearby holding tank smacked the glass wall and yelled an obscenity at Doherty. She and a few other students jumped.

Those were perhaps the most visceral moments for the 52 leadership students who came from eight high schools throughout Umatilla County on the annual pilgrimage to learn about local government and law enforcement.

Students began Thursday morning at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton, where they heard from Circuit Judge Ron Pahl, District Attorney Dan Primus and the heads of county departments including elections and taxation. Lunch was at the Umatilla County Justice Center, Pendleton, which is headquarters for the sheriff's office and home to the dispatch center and jail. Students also took in the county's Community Justice Department to learn about parole and probation.

County Commissioners Bill Elfering and George Murdock and county counsel Doug Olsen led the three groups of students and teachers. The students heard enough facts to hold a trivia contest about Umatilla County:

- The Oregon Legislature created the county on Sept. 27, 1862, three and a half years after Oregon became a state, carving it out of the much larger Wasco County.
- There are 31,705 registered voters in a population of about 80,000.
- The district attorney's office receives about 4,000 cases a year and files charges on roughly 2,600



Pilot Rock student Devon Hasher listens as jail employee Lu Morse explains the closed circuit video camera system in the jail's control room. The tour was part of Umatilla County Student Leadership Day. Staff photo by Kathy Aney



Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge Ron Pahl tells students about his job during Umatilla County Student Leadership Day at the Umatilla County Courthouse. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

of them.

- Possession of methamphetamine, a Class C felony in Oregon, is the most common crime the district attorney prosecutes.
- Felony convictions result in prison 25 percent of the time. But no one convicted of meth possession goes to prison.
- The county collects about \$86 million a year in property taxes, and 51 percent of every dollar goes to education.

Stanfield Secondary School social studies teacher Brad Rogers brought a trio of learners. He said the leadership day was a first for him and the students. Seniors Rosario Vargas and Bailey Watson and junior Brittin Braithwaite said they did not know what to expect and that the jail tour looked intriguing. Braithwaite said her mother is a nurse who works in the jail and comes home with some stories.



Weston-McEwen student Lila Holloway is wanded by court-house security officer Justin Howland after she set off the metal detector Thursday morning at the Umatilla County Courthouse. Holloway was participating in Umatilla County Student Leadership Day. Staff photo by Kathy Aney



Pendleton student Tanner Pearson sits in the jury box and listens to Circuit Court Judge Ron Pahl talk about his job during Umatilla County Student Leadership Day at the Umatilla County Courthouse. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

"So I hope to get one of my own," she said.

By the end of the jail tour, though, Braithwaite did not get her story. But she was not disappointed.

"It was awesome seeing how everything works, the organization it uses," she said.

Doherty, though, got a story. She said in spite of being startled, she learned the reality of the jail and county government in general.

Students also learned how

getting involved pays.

County tax assessor Paul Chalmers broke down how buyers, sellers and real estate agents set the housing market and what property tax revenue supports. Umatilla High School senior Stephen Groce asked how much goes to cities in the county. About 12 percent, Chalmers said.

Just before this group moved on to their next segment, Chalmers handed Groce a \$5 bill. The money, he said, was for asking a question — getting involved.