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ANTIQUE CAR SHOW
ECHO/3A



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GEARS UP FOR
SEMIFINALS
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EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, MAY 31, 2016

140th Year, No. 162

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HERMISTON AVENUE OF FLAGS

Last 48-star flag to be retired

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

As people flocked to the Hermiston Cemetery to pay their respects on Memorial Day, a sharp-eyed visitor noticed something interesting about one of the flags lining the gravesites: It only had 48 stars.

"You can see it in the

pattern of the stars, the way they're offset," Ken May said.

It wasn't easy to spot — the flag is one of approximately 600 that form the Avenue of Flags lining the cemetery each Memorial Day. The effort is spearheaded by Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4750, and they thought they had retired all of the old 48-star flags years ago.

The flags are all casket flags donated by veterans' families, standing as a stark visual reminder of the number of men and women with local ties who have fought to defend their country. May makes it a tradition to visit the cemetery every Memorial Day to find the flags of his father and grandmother, who both served in the Army.

He said he often chats with other people also looking for the flags of their family members, which isn't always easy in a large cemetery where the Avenue of Flags is never set up the same way twice.

"That flag next year might be all the way in the back corner," he said, pointing to

See FLAG/8A



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Ken May displays the 48-star flag he found on the Avenue of Flags at the Hermiston Cemetery on Monday.



Contributed photo

Jen Usinger and Jared Simpson will travel from South Africa to Morocco in their beefed up 2007 Wrangler Jeep Unlimited.

AND SNORT MAKES THREE

Couple quits jobs to explore Africa by Jeep

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Jared Simpson, Jen Usinger and Snort will soon head to Africa for the trek of their dreams.

Actually, Simpson and Usinger are the dreamers. Snort

is the highly modified Jeep that the couple will pilot more than 25,000 miles in a two- to three-year adventure to almost every corner of the continent.

Simpson, a 1993 Pendleton High School graduate, until recently was production super-

visor at the Safeway Dairy in Portland. Usinger, a child life specialist, worked at Randall Children's Hospital, where she helped young patients cope with being a patient.

"We were ready for a change in our lives," said Simpson, 41.

"We happened to be in a spot in life where we could quit our jobs and pack up and go."

"We wanted to go sooner than later — Africa is changing so much," said Usinger. "It can be

See AFRICA/8A

MILTON-FREEWATER



Photo contributed by Marco Alva-Diaz

Maria Villegas and her children pose for a photo in this undated contributed image.

Friends unite in wake of violent death

Charity car wash held to help children of Maria Villegas

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Friends and high school classmates of Maria Villegas banded together Friday night in Milton-Freewater in the wake of her murder.

They said they wanted to do something to help her two children, a son, 2, and a daughter, 4. Saturday morning, some 20 of them had a benefit car wash going by 9 a.m. in the parking lot of First Community Credit Union, 151 S. Columbia St., Milton-Freewater. The crew washed about 10 cars in the first hour, and with the sun breaking through, a steady stream of vehicles rolled in.

Villegas, 24, died Thursday. Oregon State Police reported her husband, Oscar Villegas Garcia, 26, inflicted serious cuts to himself that morning at their home at 362 N.E. 13th Ave., Milton-Freewater. He also cut and stabbed the two children, and stabbed Maria to death.

Villegas Garcia is in county jail in Walla Walla. Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said he intends to charge him with murder.

Norma Perez and her husband, Marco Alva-Diaz, were close friends of the Villegases and have known them since attending Milton-Freewater's McLoughlin High School. Perez said the children were out of hospitals and safe with family.

Maria's grandmother raised her in Milton-Freewater, Perez said, and no matter the circumstances Maria would greet you with an infectious smile.

Paulina Avila said she went to middle and high school with Maria. They were not close, she said, but she, too, admired Maria's attitude.

"She had that smile," Avila said. "If you had the (worst) day, that smile would make you smile."

Car wash organizers Andre Salinas and Randy Romero were members of the Mac-Hi class of 2010, like many of the volunteers at the car wash. They said the idea was to find ways to help Maria's children and family. The car wash could continue Sunday, and they are considering other fundraisers.

Alva-Diaz said his daughter and Maria's son have birthdays a week apart and play together. The families went out to dinner together, he said, visited each other's homes. He said Villegas Garcia was his friend, and the man he knew loved his wife and children.

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Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Brush fire roars near TRCI

A brush fire burns across the road from Two Rivers Correctional Institution outside Umatilla. It began in the early afternoon near the Columbia River and was reported to have burned more than 300 acres by 3 p.m.



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