

**MILTON-FREEWATER**

# Walla Walla Police name homicide suspect

By **STEPHANIE TSHAPPAT**  
Union-Bulletin

Walla Walla police have named Robert Gage Sregzinski as the only suspect in the late April killing of a Milton-Freewater man.

Police spokesman Officer Tim Bennett said Sregzinski, 19, of College Place, is the suspect in the homicide of 34-year-old Gabriel Ledezma Rodriguez. Police said Tuesday the killing was believed to be drug-related.



Sregzinski

“Detectives are actively preparing their reports to be submitted to the prosecuting attorney’s office for consideration of charges against Sregzinski,” Bennett said.

First-degree murder with a firearm will likely be one of the charges, he said, and the reports should be submitted next week.

Ledezma Rodriguez is believed to have been killed in the basement apartment of 1589 E. Alder St. His body was found the evening of May 27 southeast of Milton-Freewater, about 10 miles northwest of Harris Park on Cache Hollow Road near where that road connects with Walla Walla River Road.

Bennett said Ledezma Rodriguez suffered at least one gunshot wound, but wouldn’t comment if there were other gunshot wounds or additional injuries.

“The identification of the firearm used in the homicide has not been confirmed at this time,” he said.

Toxicology tests for Ledezma Rodriguez will

take about two months to return, Walla Walla County Coroner Richard Greenwood said.

Ledezma Rodriguez had been missing since April 26.

Police ran down numerous rumors and information received about the location of Ledezma Rodriguez’s body, and police searched many areas in Umatilla and Walla Walla counties before discovering it, Bennett said.

Umatilla County Sheriff’s deputies assisted throughout the investigation and during the recovery of the body.

Sregzinski is currently in the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton, awaiting trial on numerous charges after a shooting involving Milton-Freewater police officers during a high-speed pursuit the evening of April 28, officials said.

Milton-Freewater officers stopped Sregzinski in a 2007 Ford Focus in the area of Turbyne and Grant roads. Sregzinski failed to obey the officers’ instructions and sped off, according to the Umatilla County District Attorney’s Office.

A search warrant obtained for Sregzinski’s vehicle located “guns, black ski masks, rubber gloves, a roll of duct tape and more.” “We’ve been unable to confirm if the weapons recovered after the pursuit were used in the homicide,” Bennett said.

In the Milton-Freewater case, bail was set at \$1.13 million for Sregzinski, who was wounded after the pursuit when officers returned fire.

**PENDLETON**

# Fireworks show returns to regular holiday date

By **WILL DENNER**  
East Oregonian

Pendleton’s annual Fourth of July fireworks show will return to its regular holiday slot this year.

In 2015, after no organization stepped up to put on the show, the Pendleton chapter of Fraternal Order of Eagles agreed to a contract with the fireworks company to host a show on July 3. The show was smaller than the usual budgeted amount of \$10,000.

This year, the show will take place on Fourth of July at dusk behind the Wal-Mart parking lot at 2203 S.W. Court Ave. Pendleton City Councilor Becky Marks said the Eagles again fell short of the \$10,000 goal. But as they learned in 2015, a smaller fireworks budget doesn’t necessarily deter the excitement from the event.

“We had a fantastic show last year,” Marks said.

The city of Pendleton and the Pendleton Round-Up Association offered to donate additional

funds, but the Eagles had already finalized the budget. Instead, Marks wants to save those donations for next year in hopes of meeting the desired \$10,000 goal.

Pendleton police and fire departments will cordon off areas near the fireworks during the show, including Southwest Court Avenue. Pendleton Parks and Recreation and Public Works employees will also assist with the event.

“We couldn’t put (the show) on without them,” Marks said.

Marks is also seeking at least six volunteers to provide security near the fireworks launch zone in two-hour stints between 1 and 9 p.m.

Those interested in volunteering can contact Marks at 541-276-9147. Volunteers cannot consume any alcohol prior to or during their shift, and also cannot have a felony on their record. Volunteers will meet at 12:45 p.m. near Oxford Suites on Southwest Court Avenue to fill out paperwork. Food and water will be provided.

# Puppet shows set for libraries

East Oregonian

An imaginative show that takes the audience on a magical, musical journey packed full of comedy, laughter and audience participation is planned at area libraries.

Penny’s Puppets blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality to create a fun, make-believe world where anything can happen and usually does. The performances are:

- Wednesday, June 29 at 7 p.m., Helix Public Library.
- Thursday, June 30 at 10:30 a.m., Milton-Freewater Public Library.
- Thursday, June 30 at 6 p.m., Adams Public Library.
- Friday, July 1 at 1 p.m.,

- Weston Public Library.
  - Tuesday, July 5 at 1 p.m., Pilot Rock Public Library.
  - Wednesday, July 6 at 10 a.m., Athena Public Library.
  - Wednesday, July 6 at 2 p.m., Ukiah Public Library.
  - Thursday, July 7 at 10 a.m., Heppner Branch Oregon Trail Library.
  - Friday, July 8 at 2 p.m., Echo Public Library.
  - Friday, July 8 at 6 p.m., Stanfield Public Library.
  - Monday, July 11 at 2 p.m., Umatilla Public Library.
  - Tuesday, July 26 at 11 a.m., Lone Public Library.
- The performances are free thanks to the Oregon College Savings Plan. For more information, call your local library.

**HERMISTON**

# Funfest adds Flying Dog Show

Will unveil ‘Life is Sweet’ brand

By **ALEXA LOUGEE**  
East Oregonian

Hermiston in July means blistering heat, ripening watermelons, Funfest, and the Cool Rides Car Show.

Debbie Pedro, Executive Director at the Hermiston Chamber, invites the community to come out for the latter two on Saturday, July 9.

At Funfest, there are activities and events that will appeal to every member of the family, all of which are free.

Pedro spotlighted the K9 Kings Flying Dog show as “world renowned,” having been featured on CBS, Animal Planet, NBC Sports and other national television channels and series. The show, featuring rescue dogs, will have three different showings on Saturday at Sunset Elementary School. The show lasts an hour and admission is free. Shows will start at 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

The National Guard is bringing in a rock wall and laser tag for kids, chainsaw carvers will be featured at two locations downtown and the lawn mower drag races will return this year as well.

At 10:45 a.m. the Chamber will be kicking off the city’s new “Where Life Is Sweet” branding.



EO file photo

Attendees check out the automobiles on display at Hermiston Classics Car Club’s 2015 Cool Rides Car Show at McKenzie Park in Hermiston.

Balloons and some T-shirts will be given away. Yo-Country will serve complimentary watermelon frozen yogurt from 11 a.m. to noon.

Pedro reassures the community there will be plenty of ways to beat the heat, including free bottled water from many vendors, Otter Pops, a beer garden and shade over the seating area in front of the entertainment stage.

This year’s entertainment features a mariachi band and other live acts.

Cool Rides Car Show Meanwhile at McKenzie Park, the community is invited to take a cruise

through automotive history, with a little help from the Hermiston Classics Car Club. More than 75 classic cars will be on exhibit from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Car club president Larry Stormont said, depending on the weather, he expects cars from Idaho, Washington, California and even Canada.

A few years ago the show was on Hermiston Main Street, and Stormont remembers how hot it could get on the asphalt. The move to McKenzie Park makes for a cooler event with grass and trees providing a more pleasant experience.

There will be car-related vendors selling goods as

well as food vendors and live music, and the Hermiston Saturday Market will be open nearby.

More than 20 awards will be handed out at 2:30 p.m. and Stormont says the awards are surprising, “very unique,” and worth coming to see.

The 21st annual car show officially kicks off Friday, July 8 with a poker run and potluck for show entrants starting at 6 p.m.

For additional information, contact Larry Stormont at 541-571-4960.

Contact *Alexa Lougee* at *alougee@eastoregonian.com*.

**HERMISTON**

# Council votes down taxi ticket price increase

City will pay subsidies to cab company

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council voted against a proposed 25 cent price increase Monday for the taxi program that helps seniors and people with disabilities.

The city will instead pay an estimated \$6,000 more per year in subsidies to the Umatilla Cab Company.

The one-way tickets, which qualified Hermiston residents can purchase from city hall for rides within city limits, have been \$2 each since 2010. The city passes that money, along with an additional \$4.35 per ticket, on to the taxi company contracted to run the program.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the city pays about \$100,000 per year to run the program, subsidizing an average of 30,000 one-way rides.

He told the city council Monday that in the past two decades Umatilla County’s contribution to the program has dropped from \$50,000 to \$27,000 per year, increasing the city’s burden. At the same time minimum wage will rise from \$8.40 to \$9.50 per hour starting Friday, raising the cost of business for the cab company.

“This is just a situation where the legislature was trying to help low-income workers but ended up hurting some low-income residents,” Morgan said.

Jeannette Byrnes, a Hermiston resident, asked the city council to find another way to keep the program going without raising the ticket price. For seniors living on Social Security checks, she said, every penny counts.

“When you’re nickel-and-diming, 25 cents is a lot,” she said.

She said some Hermiston residents only left their houses when they could afford a taxi ride, and if the community could be as generous as it is to its youth, it could surely come up with a few thousand dollars to keep the taxi program from raising its prices.

City councilors agreed with her. Doug Primmer and Manuel Gutierrez said they thought the city could find the money in its budget to help cover Umatilla Cab Company’s increased costs without raising rates.

“I think if the city can afford it, we should do it,”

Gutierrez said. Morgan said the city had budgeted to start a Dial-a-Ride program, which would run fewer hours and require 24 hour notice, but would also be a less costly option to make sure people could get to their doctor and other regularly scheduled appointments. He said the details were still being worked out but he believed they would be able to start offering the program in 2017 for one dollar per ride.

City Manager Byron Smith said in the meantime he didn’t think one 25 cent increase in six years was unreasonable. “The cost of this service keeps going up, and I feel like it’s a fair ask to ask our riders to share some of that,” he said.

City councilors disagreed, however, and voted unanimously to keep the price at \$2 per ride but increase the city’s subsidy from \$4.35 per ride to \$4.60.

As part of that resolution the council also adopted a set of written policies governing expectations for riders and drivers who are a part of

“When you’re nickel-and-diming, 25 cents is a lot.”

— **Jeannette Byrnes**, Hermiston resident

the senior and disabled ride program.

Morgan said he worked with a committee of people involved with the program, including two regular riders, to come up with rules to clear up confusion caused when Hermiston Transit Company went out of business and Umatilla Cab Company took over the program.

“A lot of times we had folks doing things that were really unacceptable, but we didn’t have a written policy in place to manage that,” he said.

The new policies make it clear that riders who are part of the program cannot bring people along to ride for free. A personal care attendant or child may ride for the price of an additional ticket, and all other guests must pay full fare.

Taxi drivers will not drive to a person’s place of residence for free to deliver a lost item, carry more than

25 pounds of groceries in one trip, wait outside a building for someone to complete an errand, go inside and search a facility for the passenger they are picking up, wait more than one minute for a passenger to show up, act as a moving company or serve as a personal care attendant for people not capable of completing their errands on their own.

Three no-shows over a 12-month period will result in a suspension from the program.

Morgan said the biggest complaint he hears about the taxi program is that it takes too long for a cab to arrive. He said the new policies will help drivers save time, allowing them to give more rides per day.

Rider Dale Orem, who helped craft the policies, said he thought the policies were fair and would be glad to see shorter wait times after sometimes waiting 30 minutes outside the grocery store to be picked up.

“I can’t buy ice cream, for one thing,” he said.

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

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