



Contributed photo by Ricardo Lara
Extensive damage to a house on West Crockett Lane in Milton-Freewater can be seen after the home caught fire Monday night. An official cause is yet to be determined but residents suspect fireworks.

FIRE: District 1 responded to four fires cause by fireworks

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never burned during a fireworks show before.

“Usually with the prevailing winds and the way they shoot, we’re good,” he said.

Stanton said there was only one truck on scene at the bottom of the butte when the fire started because District 1 was also standing by for the Stanfield show, in addition to responding to a dumpster fire and a separate brush fire at the same time.

In total the department responded to six fires, four of which were caused by fireworks. One not related to fireworks was a structure fire on Southwest 23rd Street early Monday morning, which caused significant damage to the attic of a home.

Stanton said it seemed like a fairly average Fourth of July weekend.

“We’ve seen busier,” he said.

In Milton-Freewater, the cause of a house fire on West Crockett Road late Monday night is still under investigation by the Milton-Freewater Fire Department, but one of the home’s residents, Ricardo Lara, believes it was caused by neighbors’ fireworks.

He lived in the home — which is a total loss — with his mother and brothers, as well as two of his brother’s children that spend 50 percent of their time there. He said the family shot off some of their own small, legal fireworks before bed but heard other, louder fireworks late into the night.

“We kept hearing them closer and closer,” he said. “I was dozing off and the next thing I know my brother is telling me the house is on fire.”

They tried to hose down the house and pull out what possessions they could, he said, but “we didn’t get much.”

The Red Cross assisted the family with temporary shelter, and Lara said family friend Lucy Munoz has set up a GoFundMe account for them and is taking donations while they work with the insurance company.

Pendleton Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo said his department responded to a total of 11 fireworks-related fires over the holiday weekend.

He said there was one “amazing” house fire save where a quick-thinking neighbor managed to put a fire out themselves before the fire trucks arrived, preventing what could have easily been a multi-structure fire.

Ciraulo said only using legal fireworks, reading instructions carefully and keeping them well away from brush can help prevent most fires.

“I would say that the majority (of fireworks-related fires) are caused by illegal use,” he said. “The second leading cause would be misuse of legal fireworks, or a misunderstanding of how

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— Ricardo Lara, resident of Milton-Freewater house destroyed by fire

they work.”

He said the ground bloom flowers, which emit sparks as they spin around on the ground, are some of the worst offenders because they have a tendency to go spinning out of control and into nearby shrubbery that is often highly flammable in spite of its green appearance.

Ciraulo said firefighters would much rather see people head to the nearest community fireworks show instead of lighting off their own.

Those shows tend to cause fires, too — Pendleton Fire Department put out eight different spots of fire caused by the city show — but at least the fire department is standing by ready to intervene the moment a flame is visible.

In Ione, the fireworks show was actually cut off due to a fire sparked by falling embers. The all-volunteer fire department couldn’t be reached Tuesday, but a post on the Ione 4th of July Facebook page noted that the show was cut short due to a brush fire that started shortly after the show began, but “our volunteer firemen were on it quick and have it out.”

Despite the fires, Nick Bejarano, spokesman for Good Shepherd Health Care System, said the Hermiston hospital didn’t see any fireworks-related injuries in the emergency room over the weekend this year, including smoke inhalation caused by fires.

He said the hospital, too, urged people to carefully read the directions if they were going to set off their own fireworks.

Less than an hour after the Fourth of July weekend officially ended at midnight, firefighters from Hermiston and Pendleton were called out to a large brush fire on Highway 37 near Pendleton. Ciraulo said it grew to about 500 acres, and there was a flare-up again later in the day, but so far there was no indication that it was caused by fireworks.

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KOVACH: Wants to focus attendance efforts on younger students

Continued from 1A
 student performance.

At his previous job as the principal of Ontario High School, Kovach helped raise graduation rates from the low 50s to a shade under 70 percent.

Kovach said his transition to Pendleton will be made easier by the groundwork the district has already started.

Answering questions during an interview at Lincoln Primary School earlier in the day, the evidence of this groundwork surrounded Kovach as workers from Kirby Nagelhout Construction busied themselves converting the former elementary school into the district’s new central office.

Thanks to a \$55 million bond, Kovach is entering the district with two new elementary schools, an early learning center, a career technical education center and improved facilities across the district.

Kovach said the district’s continuing focus on career technical education is important in making sure every child’s aspiration is addressed, whether that be a four-year university, a community college or entering the workforce straight out of high school.

“We need to meet the children where they are,” he said.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Incoming Pendleton Schools Superintendent Andy Kovach chats Tuesday with Jason Terry, of Kirby Nagelhout Construction, about the renovation of Lincoln School into administrative offices.

Kovach also said the district needs to focus its attendance efforts on younger students who hadn’t been ingrained with absentee habits.

“In short, it’s too late by the time they reach high school,” he said.

At the meeting, Kovach also presented a plan for his first 100 days as superintendent.

The plan acted as a guide to the leader he wanted to mold himself into, opening lines of communication with the district’s various constituencies and identifying the

best improvement methods for the district.

“I have three promises,” Kovach told the board. “I want to tell the truth, I want to make decisions based on what’s best for kids and I want to keep an eye on the budget. My experience has been if you can do those three things as superintendent, you can go a long way towards running a successful program.”

Having officially started the job July 1, Kovach was only into his second workday of his first 100 days as superintendent and

is just starting to settle into his McKay Creek home.

Kovach grew up in Salem but made a career in Eastern Oregon, having served as a teacher and administrator in Ontario, Nyssa, Harney County and Crane.

“I’m not allergic to sage brush,” he joked.

Kovach, 51, brings his wife Becki, his son Jeff, a high school senior and his 22-year-old daughter Gabrielle.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

BRIEFLY

ISIS tightens grip on captives held as sex slaves

KHANKE, Iraq (AP) — The advertisement on the Telegram app is as chilling as it is incongruous: A girl for sale is “Virgin. Beautiful. 12 years old.... Her price has reached \$12,500 and she will be sold soon.”

The posting in Arabic appeared on an encrypted conversation along with ads for kittens, weapons and tactical gear. It was shared with The Associated Press by an activist with the minority Yazidi community, whose women and children are being held as sex slaves by the extremists.

While the Islamic State group is losing territory in its self-styled caliphate, it is tightening its grip on the estimated 3,000 women and girls held as sex slaves. In a fusion of

ancient barbaric practices and modern technology, IS sells the women like chattel on smart phone apps and shares databases that contain their photographs and the names of their “owners” to prevent their escape through IS checkpoints. The fighters are assassinating smugglers who rescue the captives, just as funds to buy the women out of slavery are drying up.

UK’s Iraq War report could make grim reading for Tony Blair

LONDON (AP) — Thirteen years after British troops marched into Iraq and seven years after they left a country that’s still mired in violence, a mammoth official report is about to

address the lingering question: What went wrong?

On Wednesday, retired civil servant John Chilcot will publish his long-delayed, 2.6 million-word report on the divisive war and its chaotic aftermath. The U.S.-led conflict killed 179 British troops and some 4,500 American personnel. It also helped trigger violence that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and still rocks the Middle East.

And it overshadows the legacy of former Prime Minister Tony Blair.

“Despite all the many other things he did — and many people would argue lots of positive achievements — he will always be remembered for this fateful decision in 2003,” said Malcolm Chalmers, deputy director-general of defense think tank the Royal United Services Institute.

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TUESDAY	1:30pm	Bucking Horse Stampede — Main Street
WEDNESDAY	9:00am 7:00pm 9:00pm	Little Buckaroo Rodeo for special needs children — Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena Family Fun at the Thunder Room
THURSDAY	9:00am 2:00pm 7:00pm	Tough Enough to Wear Pink Walk Slack — Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena Tough Enough to Wear Pink Barrel Racing Slack — After the Rodeo Music and Dancing at Thunder Room
FRIDAY	9:00pm	Chief Joseph Junior Parade — Main Street
	10:00am 2:00pm 7:00pm 9:00pm 9:00pm	Slack — Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center Music and Dancing at Thunder Room
SATURDAY	6:00am 10:00am 12:00pm 2:30pm 3:00pm	Shrine Breakfast begins Grand Parade — Main Street Nez Perce Friendship Feast — Encampment Pavilion Slack — Arena Traditional Indian Dance Contest — Encampment Pavilion
	7:00pm 9:00pm 9:00pm 11:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center Music and Dancing at Thunder Room Cowboy Breakfast — Rodeo Grounds — Until 3am
SUNDAY	6:00am 9:00am	Cowboy Breakfast Continues Cowboy Church Service — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena

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