



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Frozen on the river

A semitrailer crosses the Highway 730 bridge over a frozen Umatilla River on Thursday in Umatilla. Sub-zero temperatures have led to the freezing over of the entire river near the mouth of the Umatilla, but the ice is only a few inches thick and not safe to walk over.

HOUSE: Cameras were facing wrong way

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"She was very helpful, and asked me to pull the tiny house in front of the shop so she could see it," he said. "And because she said cameras were facing it."

The two exchanged information, and Thomas continued on to Las Vegas. Then, on New Year's Eve, he found out the house was gone — and the surveillance cameras he was told would be on his house were in fact facing another direction.

"The manager said they're going to try to find it," he said. "They found out the cameras were not

pointing that way. The house was locked down and dead-bolted, but someone used bolt cutters and took the house."

Thomas is now living in Las Vegas with a friend. He spent about 6 months building the house.

"I really like the idea of a tiny house," he said. "You save money, and you don't have a mortgage. My idea was to buy a plot of land and then make the tiny house as off-grid as possible. You can enjoy a higher quality of life without having to spend all your money on rent."

Thomas estimates the house's value at about

\$25,000.

"My house was small — even for a tiny house," he said. The 95 square-foot structure was 17 feet long by 7.5 feet wide. Thomas lived in it with his two dogs.

He said he's unsure of why the people at the truck stop assured him that the surveillance cameras would be on his house when they weren't — but doesn't really think anyone there was involved. He said he just hopes he can find the house.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said his office took a report of the theft soon after it was reported on Jan. 1 and is investigating.



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

Andy Hall, a new math teacher at Hermiston High School, looks on as a student works out a problem.

SCHOOL: Hermiston graduate Andy Hall returns to the high school as a math teacher

Continued from 1A

look up to her is another one of the job's rewards.

"It makes me feel like I have a positive impact," she said.

She has also enjoyed being able to work in Hermiston.

"It's nice to be outside of my hometown and make my own name," she said.

Madeline Laan is teaching her first-grade students about numbers — through coins, clocks and graphs.

"A quarter past one," she calls out, as students look at the blank clock face on their worksheets, and draw on hands on to show 1:45. Laan goes around to each student with a blue marker in hand, helping and steering them in the right direction. In the same lesson, the students go over the value of each coin, and learn how to draw a bar graph.

Laan is in her first year as a teacher, and has enjoyed finding new ways to help her students learn.

"I love to hear kids' thoughts," she said. Her favorite thing to teach is writing — especially creative writing.

"They improve so much in writing in the first grade," she said. "There's so many activities you can do."

Laan, a native of Middleton, Idaho, attended Eastern Oregon University before coming to Highland Hills Elementary. She has always wanted to be a teacher.

"I love learning new things," she said.

The new job can be overwhelming, but Laan praised the supportive coworkers and staff for helping her through the learning process.

Laan said one surprise was the amount of time teachers put in outside the classroom — something she finds herself wanting to do.

"It's hard as a teacher to keep work from going home," she said. "You carry it with you. I don't have any children, but they're like my kids."

Laan enjoys teaching the younger students.

"It's different every day," she said. "They're still learning all the rules, and they still need you — I love that. And their responses — they're so funny!"

Andy Hall is no stranger to the halls of Hermiston High School, but this year, he's seeing them from a new perspective.

The HHS graduate is a new math teacher at his alma mater, and is implementing some new teaching strategies from his prior experiences.

"I did all my schooling at Oregon State," he said. "And I spent six years teaching in Denver."

Hall recently came back to Hermiston and bought a house, and is glad to be back in his old stomping grounds. He is impressed with the students he's encountered so far.

"The student energy and attitude is way higher than what I saw in Denver," he said. "The instructional strategies I try here actually work."

One of those strategies Hall has introduced is Math 360, an instructional concept where whiteboards are placed all around the room, and students are up and moving around to solve problems.

"It gets them up moving, and allows me to see the work being done," Hall said. The district recently installed several whiteboards in Hall's class, and is starting to do so in other rooms.

"This is the first class to have that done," he said.

Hall has enjoyed collaborating with other teachers, and getting involved with the school outside of class — he's a coach for the football and wrestling teams.

As a new teacher at the school, Hall says the biggest challenge is balancing time in the classroom with other requirements.

"The district does a lot of professional development for new teachers, which is good," he said. "It's an opportunity to share ideas and pick up new ideas. But we're out of the classroom for a lot of training, so some of the challenges we face as new teachers are not being able to spend as much time as we'd like with students."

He added that as a coach, his work with athletes after school can limit the number of hours he has to support students outside of class.

Hall is excited to be teaching at Hermiston High School.

"I hope to be here for a long time," he said. "Maybe one day work my way up to administration and make changes that way."

WORLD BRIEFLY

No doubt Russia interfered in election, intel chief says

WASHINGTON (AP) — Brushing aside Donald Trump's dismissiveness, the nation's intelligence chief insisted Thursday that U.S. agencies are more confident than ever that Russia interfered in America's recent presidential election. And he called the former Cold War foe an "existential threat" to the nation.

Did Russian hacking sway the results? There's no way for U.S. agencies to know, said James Clapper, the director of national intelligence.

Asked about the possible effect of the disclosure of private information stolen by hackers, Clapper said, "The intelligence community can't gauge the impact it had on the choices the electorate made." But he did say Russian hacking "did not change any vote tallies."

Clapper's testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee was short on concrete evidence of Russian activities, but it raised the stakes in the intelligence community's standoff with Trump. Clapper indicated the agencies he leads would not back down in their assessment, even if that threatens a prolonged crisis of confidence with their next commander in chief.

That puts the pressure back on Trump, who has raised the possibility of more positive relations with Russia and has repeatedly disparaged the U.S. intelligence agencies. He will be briefed Friday on the classified evidence concerning Russian interference.

Trump selects former Sen. Coats for top intel post

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has selected former Indiana Sen. Dan Coats to lead the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, a role that would thrust him into the center of the intelligence community that Trump has publicly challenged, a person with knowledge of the decision said Thursday.

Coats served as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee before retiring from Congress last year. If confirmed by the Senate, he would oversee the umbrella office created after 9/11 to improve coordination of U.S. spy and law enforcement agencies.

The person with knowledge of Trump's decision, as well as others who spoke to The Associated Press about intelligence matters involving Trump, were not authorized to discuss the matters publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since winning the election, Trump has repeatedly challenged intelligence officials' assessments that Russia interfered with the election on his behalf, setting up an unusually public battle with the spy agencies. On Friday, senior intelligence officials will try to justify



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper listens to questions while testifying on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing: "Foreign Cyber Threats to the United States."

their claims when they brief Trump on the findings of a full report into the Russian hacking of Democratic groups. The report was ordered by President Barack Obama, who was informed of the conclusions Thursday.

On the eve of his briefing, Trump continued to challenge the intelligence community's assertion that Russia was behind the hacking of the Democratic National Committee. He questioned how officials could be "so sure" about the hacking if they had not examined DNC servers.

Judges decide to keep N.C. election law blocked

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A law North Carolina Republicans approved scaling back the new Democratic governor's control over election boards won't be enforced until his legal challenge to it is resolved, state judges decided Thursday.

A panel of trial court judges is granting the request by Gov. Roy Cooper to extend a temporary 10-day block on the law, which Cooper argues is unconstitutional because it shifts appointment powers from him to legislative leaders.

Cooper sued GOP legislative leaders just before his New Year's Day swearing-in, challenging a law the General Assembly approved in a surprise special session barely a week after Republican incumbent Pat McCrory conceded to Cooper in their close race.

Barring any appeals, the incremental victory for Cooper keeps separate the State Board of Elections and the State Ethics Commission and halts what his allies considered an illegal power grab by Republicans. But GOP legislators said the blocked law would promote bipartisanship in carrying out elections.

"We're pleased with the result," Cooper spokeswoman Noelle Talley said in an email.



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