

State police to question Morrow County deputy who shot man

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said the sheriff’s deputy who shot a man early Friday is about to undergo two days of police interviews.

Nelson also said revealing the deputy’s identity would wait until the investigation is complete.

The shooting occurred after the deputy stopped Friday at about 1:50 a.m. for a disabled vehicle on the westbound side of Interstate 84 near exit 164 for Boardman, according to Oregon State Police, the lead agency investigating the shooting. The deputy encountered Efrén Hurtado Jr., 26, of Boardman, who had a firearm, according to police.

State police have not specified if the two exchanged gunfire or if the deputy was the only shooter.

Nelson said Oregon State Police detective Michael Wolf out of the Pendleton office is heading up the investigation.

“His next step is to interview the deputy,” Nelson said. “The plan for

the next two days is for him to be interviewed.”

Wolf reviewed the deputy’s body camera footage from the shooting, Nelson said, and he likely has to interview officers that responded to the shooting and watch their body cam footage as well. Police also obtained a warrant to search the suspect’s vehicle, and the state police crime lab is processing evidence from that scene,

Nelson said as far as he knows police have not interviewed Hurtado, who remains in a Portland hospital. Nelson said he did not know his condition.

While Hurtado made some statements in the ambulance, Nelson said, those might have been gibberish, and even now he may not be in a condition to talk about what happened.

Nelson added there’s no way to put on a deadline to complete the investigation, and state police have not provided an estimate. He also said he has not decided if he would release the body cam footage with the deputy’s name or make it available for public records requests.

BRIEFLY

Chainsaw theft leads to bigger arrest

HERMISTON — The report of a chainsaw theft led Hermiston police to arrest two suspects.

The victim at about 11:20 p.m. Sunday reported he was following the people who stole a \$1,700 chainsaw from his porch on the 900 block of Northwest Third Street, according to a written statement from Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston. The victim said the suspects were in a silver Nissan Altima pulling into Jack in the Box, 1350 N. First St., Hermiston.

Officers arrived and found the Nissan in the restaurant’s drive-through lane.

“As it turns out,” according to Edmiston, “the vehicle the subjects were driving was reported stolen out of Umatilla.”

Police arrested Edilberto Garcia Ramirez, 35, and Jesus Salvador Solorio Vidales, 33, both of Hermiston, for first-degree theft. Police also arrested Solorio Vidales for unauthorized use of a vehicle. Edmiston reported the pair did not resist during their arrests.

“The victim in this matter did the right thing by calling us and allowing our officers to engage the suspects,” Edmiston stated. “We encourage all citizens however, to ensure their valuable property is appropriately secured from opportunistic criminals such as this duo.”

EOCI inmate dies unexpectedly Sunday

PENDLETON — The Oregon Department of Corrections reported an inmate died unexpectedly Sunday evening at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton.

As with all unanticipated deaths of state prison inmates, the Oregon State Police is conducting an investigation, according to the department’s accoutrement about the death.

David Kirby, 38, was unresponsive Sunday at about 8:25 p.m. in his housing unit at the medium-security prison, the corrections department reported. Medical staff began life-saving efforts until outside medial services arrived and took over. Kirby died at 9:14 p.m.

Kirby entered the corrections department custody on Sept. 15, 2015, on two counts of first-degree sodomy out of Linn County. His release date was Nov. 13, 2031.

The corrections department also reported Kirby’s relatives know of his death, and no other details are available at this time.

Sheriff’s Department releases name of man who drowned at Warehouse Beach

The Umatilla County Sheriff’s Department has identified the man who drowned at Warehouse Beach earlier this month.

Luis Toro Aguilera, 21, drowned around 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 9 while swimming at the beach near the Columbia River.

According to Sgt. Adam Gregory, Aguilera, an Irrigon resident, was showing some work acquaintances how to swim when he was swept out into the water toward the river and began to struggle.

“They lost contact with him, and our deputies were notified,” Gregory said. “The police boat located him via sonar.”

A dive team from the Tri-Cities came down, and recovered Aguilera’s body around 8 p.m. No one else was in the water with Aguilera at the time of his drowning.

HERMISTON

Benches dedicated to Vietnam soldiers

Project part of HHS class reunion

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

Flags flew at half-staff Saturday afternoon at McKenzie Park where the Hermiston High School class of 1967 honored two of their classmates, Lance Cpl. Dick Miller and Staff Sgt. John Ware, who died fighting overseas in the Vietnam War.

The group, celebrating its 50th class reunion, dedicated two new park benches in memory of Miller and Ware, sharing heartfelt and tearful stories about both men and praising all veterans for their service to the country.

“I know thanks isn’t enough for what you went through, and what you carry with you,” said Ray Tracy, who helped to organize the event. “But you are appreciated, and you are loved.”

Miller was shot and killed on May 12, 1969 while serving in the Marine Corps in South Vietnam. Ware was lost in a helicopter crash later that same year in South Vietnam and was missing in action for nearly nine years before being officially declared killed in action on Aug. 21, 1978. His body was never recovered.

Tracy said he got to know Miller and Ware from their days together at Hermiston High. He described Ware as a funny guy, interested in cars and drove a nice



Staff photo by George Plaven

Ray Tracy led the dedication of two new benches at McKenzie Park in Hermiston, honoring classmates Dick Miller and John Ware who died in the Vietnam War.

Camaro. Tracy also worked summers with Miller loading watermelons from the field during harvest.

“If they’re looking down on us, I know they’re just taken in by the love we’re showing,” Tracy said.

The idea to install memorial benches at McKenzie Park came from previous HHS class reunions in honor of their fallen classmates. The class of 1964 dedicated one bench to Greg Gessel, who was killed in Vietnam on March 10, 1971, and the class of 1965 dedicated a bench to Gordon Spearman, who was killed on Sept. 14, 1967.

Tracy said the class of

1967 wanted to do something similar for Miller and Ware. Back in January, a committee formed to begin fundraising for the project, reaching out to fellow class members for support.

Tom Ditton, an attorney in Hermiston, also assisted on the committee. His original plan was to buy just one bench with both men’s names on it.

“I wasn’t sure how much money we could raise,” Ditton said.

Benches cost \$1,500 each, and the class of 1967 eventually came forward with \$2,300. After speaking with Hermiston Parks and Recreation Director Larry

Fetter, Ditton said the city volunteered to cover the cost of a second bench — one for Miller and one for Ware.

“I was just overwhelmed with the support that came to me,” Ditton said. “This is a great project.”

At the end of the day, Ditton said it doesn’t matter what your politics are, or what you thought about the war. What matters is Miller and Ware stood up and made the sacrifice.

“That’s really to be appreciated and honored,” Ditton said.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BOARDMAN

Police department gang database currently empty

Chief contends list is valuable tool in combating crime, worth keeping on table

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Earlier this month, the Portland Police Bureau announced that it will get rid of a database of gang-affiliated citizens, a 20-year practice city officials said was disproportionately targeting minorities.

Some claim the database was used to turn people away from jobs and apartments, and that parts of it were shared with immigration enforcement agencies.

Some local police departments still use a database to track gang activity, as Portland did. But similarities are few.

In Boardman, a town of about 3,000, the police department has a gang designation database, but it is currently empty. Boardman Police Chief Rick Stokoe said that since its creation in 2013, the database has had two people in it, but both have since been removed from the list. Stokoe said a person who lands on the list but has no other activity recorded in four years is purged from the database.

Stokoe said the purpose of the database is to give officers critical information when post-court issues come up.

“Let’s say someone goes to court and the judge says, ‘no contact with any known gang member,’” Stokoe said. “If we saw an individual on probation who was not supposed to be with gang members, with a person who we believed to be a gang member but we didn’t know, we couldn’t do anything.”

He said having specific criteria to determine what makes someone a gang member would make it easier to know whether someone was breaking the rules or not, rather than just looking at a person and guessing if they had gang ties.

“I don’t believe that’s fair,” he said. “I don’t like labeling someone without the criteria.”

It’s a fairly long process to be placed in the database, which is not available to the public. A person has to meet requirements from two

“I don’t like labeling someone without the criteria.”

— Richard Stokoe, Boardman Police Chief

lists, each of which contain examples of gang affiliation or activity. Examples on one list include participation in a criminal gang initiation or ceremony, or conspiring or committing a crime. Examples on the second list include wearing jewelry or clothing unique to a gang in a context that indicates affiliation with a gang, or using hand signs or language in context that indicates affiliation with a criminal gang.

If a person meets these criteria, they have to go through several rounds of hearings with the Boardman Police Department. They can then appeal the designation.

Stokoe said once the person is on the list, it will affect them if they are involved in another gang-related or criminal incident, but will not be a facto if they commit an offense such as getting pulled over for speeding.

Stokoe added that he didn’t know much about Portland’s decision to remove the database. But he said the perceived reason for doing so — racial profiling — wasn’t an issue with the Boardman program.

“Tell me where in this ordinance does it talk about profiling or look at specific gender or race,” he said. “It’s not applicable.”

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said he has concerns with designating a person as a “gang affiliate,” when officers will interpret the definition of “gangs” differently.

“I think it’s a slippery slope for police to label people,” he said. “If I’m going to label someone, I better have a pretty clear idea of what that is.”

He added that labeling someone as a gang member based on a perceived affiliation can make it more difficult for a person trying to escape gang activity.

“I’ve seen and experienced in my career, people involved in gang activity who are productive citizens today,” he said. “At what point does the label prevent someone from getting out of that lifestyle?”

Edmiston said a police officer’s job is to track and prevent criminal activity,

regardless of a label.

“There are other avenues to pursue gang activity,” he said.

The Eastern Oregon city of Nyssa has a gang database, but its police chief said he doesn’t feel it’s necessary to track gang activity that way.

“We don’t contribute to it,” said Chief Raymond Rau. “I’ve been a gang officer in Milton-Freewater, I’ve worked with Umatilla and Morrow counties. I know who the gang members are, and my guys do.”

Rau, who replaced Stokoe as Nyssa’s police chief, said the database was run by the Malheur County District Attorney’s Office, but he hadn’t seen many updates from them recently.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com



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