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OUT OF THE FLAMES

Dozens of residents displaced by house fires over the year

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Fire, sparked by a heat lamp, erupted in the Pendleton-area home of Michael and Jackie Whitesell and their three children the morning of March 14.

"We lost 99 percent of our stuff," Jackie Whitesell said. "It was a total loss."

The lamp fell into the chicken pen, igniting the sawdust and seconds later much more at 45542 Mission Road. Flames spread and smoke poured out of the home. Umatilla Tribal Fire arrived within moments, and the Pendleton Fire Department arrived as well. Crews battled the blaze for more than an hour.

Whitesell said it took more than seven months — until late October — before they could move back into their home.

The family recovered a few "very precious things" from the charred remains, she said,



Photo contributed by Jackie Whitesell

Michael and Jackie Whitesell and their three children pose for this recent photograph of their home near Pendleton. The family, their relatives, and friends worked for months to repair the home after fire ravaged it the morning of March 14.

including some photographs of the children and family heirlooms of silverware and quilts.

Family members, their congregation at the Pendleton Baptist Church, the community and even strangers from around the country pitched in, she said, to provide the family with basics from clothes to bedding.

That help, especially the first

two months, "got us back on our feet," Jackie said.

They also had to improvise.

Whitesell home-schools her children, but the home was uninhabitable. So during the day they stayed in their shop, where they set up a camp kitchen, a small living area and a play area.

"I did the dishes in an outdoor shower all summer long

"My mantra has been we are victors, not victims."

— Jackie Whitesell

surrounded by sheep in their pasture," she said.

At night, they slept in a trailer. "We did that for eight months," she said.

The Whitesells began repairs and rebuilding in June. Michael did the electrical projects and together they did the finish work. Family and friends helped, and contractors aware of their situation moved them to the front of the line. All the effort meant the work never stalled.

"Our goal was to move in before the snow flew, and we did that by Halloween," she said.

They slept in real beds, had indoor plumbing and flowing hot water. She said that first shower was "amazing."

Pendleton fire reported it responded to 19 structure fires this year, most of those residential. Chief Mike Ciraulo

See FIRE/12A

Investigator alleges misconduct in Bundy standoff

Defense files motion to dismiss the case

PORTLAND (AP) — A lead investigator with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management who looked into how his agency handled an armed standoff with ranchers in Nevada is alleging misconduct in a whistleblower memo, a newspaper that obtained the document reported Friday.

The memo obtained by *The Oregonian/OregonLive* prompted the attorney for lead defendant Cliven Bundy to file a motion to dismiss the case.

It also comes as U.S. District Judge Gloria M. Navarro debates what to do about defense team assertions that federal prosecutors have not turned over complete evidence records about the conduct of FBI and other government agents during the standoff. She has dismissed the jury for a week — until Wednesday — while she considers the issue.

Bundy and sons Ammon and Ryan Bundy and Ryan Payne are accused of conspiring to block federal agents from enforcing court orders to confiscate family cattle on public land. Cliven Bundy had failed to pay grazing fees and fines for years. The men are also charged with firearms crimes, threatening a federal law enforcement officer, obstruction of justice and extortion in a trial that began last month in U.S. District Court in Las Vegas.

Larry Wooten, lead case agent and investigator for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, also testified before a federal grand jury that returned indictments against the Bundys for the standoff at Cliven Bundy's ranch in Bunkerville, Nevada.

He said he was removed from the investigation last February after he complained to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Nevada.

Last month, he sent a whistleblower email to the U.S. Department of Justice, alleging a "widespread pattern of bad judgment, lack of discipline, incredible bias, unprofessionalism and misconduct,

See STANDOFF/12A

A Pendleton firefighter works to extinguish a house fire back in March at 45542 Mission Road, east of Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



PENDLETON

Gap widens in street repairs despite new funds

Report measures quality of pavement condition

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

At the end of 2015, Pendleton City Council instituted a fee that increased the city's budget for repairing streets by 160 percent and dedicated nearly a third of its revenue toward the towns worst roads. Two years later, Pendleton's street system is in slightly worse shape than it was before the fee was put in place.

At a Tuesday workshop, Wayne Green, the city's associate engineer, presented a report on the pavement condition index, which measures the quality of street pavement on a 0-100 scale.

More inside

ODOT plans to request 153 new positions for upcoming projects REGION 3A

The report measured the street system's deterioration in a number of ways:

- Across 78 miles of road, the index for the city's road system was scored at 62, a two-point decrease from 2016 and a five-point decrease from 2013.
- Arterial streets — the city's busiest and most well-traveled roads — were rated at a 76, considered "very good" under the index's rating system. Collectors, the streets that connect arterials

See STREETS/12A



The asphalt is degrading and pitting out along a stretch of Bailey Avenue in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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