

BUILDINGS: Hermiston has no buildings on historic register

Continued from 1A

“tends to tear things down” to clear the way for new buildings. None of the schools Lowry attended are still standing. He was particularly sad to see the old Sandstone school building go, as he remembered hoping for a fire drill as a student so he could go down the giant slide that served as a fire escape.

“It was just a great old building and they tore it down,” he said. “There were some other great buildings torn down. Some just wore out, like the Old Oregon Hotel.”

He said Hermiston has some old homes around still, but they blend in, such as L.A. Moore’s old home on the corner of Highland Avenue and 11th Street.

“That’s nothing spectacular, and he was a millionaire,” he said.

Preservation projects

Hermiston does have a few historic buildings that residents are working to preserve. Mitch Myers has renovated a number of historic buildings over the years. He turned a 75-year-old car dealership building into Nookie’s Restaurant and more recently turned a railroad storage building from 1914 into the Maxwell Siding Event Center.

He is currently working on two other preservation projects. He is turning the “coal bin building” off of North First Place into a retail/restaurant space he plans to lease to businesses that will “pay honor to that building,” which he believes is the oldest in Hermiston.

Myers is also working on the building on the corner of Highway 395 and Main Street that housed Hermiston’s first bank in 1910. F.B. Swayze, the bank’s owner, was a powerful influence in Hermiston for decades and the first place people stopped when they arrived. While the main floor held the bank operations, Swayze used affordable rental space upstairs to entice a doctor, dentist, optometrist and other services to Hermiston over the years.

“He was a real driver in the area,” Myers said.

The main floor has been used for retail space in recent decades, but when Myers purchased it he was able to track down several original aspects of the bank, including the teller’s desk, and restore it to the building. What he couldn’t find original, he restored as close as he could get, including \$200,000 worth of mahogany. He is using the downstairs as offices for his company, Mitco Investments.

Now Myers has turned his attention to the upstairs, which had been stripped down to the floor joists and become a mess of rot and dead pigeons.

“If we hadn’t come in when we did, the way the roof was pulling it, I’d say within five years we would have lost the downstairs too,” he said.

Instead Myers poured resources into rescuing and rebuilding the upstairs, restoring it to a three-bedroom apartment he plans to rent out by the night. He is attempting to restore it to as close as possible



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

This building, which houses the offices of Mitco Investments downstairs and is being renovated by Mitch Myers upstairs, was Hermiston’s first bank. The building was finished in 1910.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

This building on Hermiston’s Main Street was built in 1907 and housed Hermiston’s first library. It is currently being renovated and returned to its mid-century use as the Union Club.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell.

This building on Hermiston Avenue was built in 1907 and is one of the oldest buildings in Hermiston.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

This building on Hurlburt Avenue houses the offices of the Hermiston Irrigation District. The building was completed in 1918.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Mitch Myers put a lot of effort into recreating a early twentieth century look to his apartment on top of the old bank building on Main Street in Hermiston.

to its original Victorian look, tracking down everything from furniture to floor tiles to stained glass windows from that era. He purchased the vividly patterned wallpapers from a specialist in New York that uses authentic old-time presses and techniques to replicate what the wallpaper of the day would look and feel like.

“You’ll be paying to get a glimpse of 1910,” Myers said.

He plans to have an open house for the public once the project is completed within the next few

weeks.

Down the street a renovation of another of Hermiston’s historic buildings is underway as a group of investors turns the old Roe-Mark’s building — built in 1907 and home to numerous businesses over the last century — back into the Union Club, a bar that existed during Hermiston’s mid-century boom.

Myers said a group of roughly 25 citizens have revived the Hermiston Heritage Association and are working on creating a list of build-

ings in Hermiston they will ask the city council to provide special protections for.

“It’s way too easy to tear something down and put up an ugly brick building,” he said, noting the environmental and structural challenges that come with renovating historic buildings.

Preserving artifacts

Hermiston only has one museum and most of its residents haven’t even been there.

“People say, ‘I’ve lived here all my life and never heard of that,’” Connie Maret said.

Maret runs the Maxwell Siding Train Museum next to Hodge Park with John Spinden, offering up tours for a few hours each Saturday of antique train cars “chock full” of historical artifacts from Hermiston and the railroad. A majority of the free museum’s visitors are from out of town.

Maret and Spinden would love to pass the museum on to some younger volunteers (at age 84, Maret said, he’s “no spring chicken”). But they have had trouble interesting the next generation of Hermiston residents in preserving the town’s history, of which the railroad is a major player.

“I know the stuff I’ve saved ever since I was a little bitty kid, my kids won’t want it,” he said. “Once it’s gone, it will never come

back.”

Preserving history isn’t just about buildings. Barbara Lund-Jones, executive director of the Umatilla County Historical Society, said the society’s museum in Pendleton does have a Hermiston exhibit, but the society would love to add to its small collection of artifacts from Hermiston’s history.

“That is one area in which we would like to expand,” she said. “... Hermiston’s story is very important, and we would certainly be encouraging people to share more of that.”

Items currently on display include information on the two rival companies that helped create Hermiston and the history of the Umatilla Army Depot. It also points out that the Shari’s restaurant chain began with its restaurant in Hermiston.

“We have the very first uniform worn by the very first waitress on the very first day,” she said.

Lund-Jones said it doesn’t matter if Umatilla County communities are preserving their own history through their own museums or donating items to the historical society, “as long as it is being preserved.”

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OFFICER: The family filed a formal complaint last week

Continued from 1A

said, but he yanked away. The scuffle escalated, and he said the cop put him in a choke hold and slammed him on the hood of the police car.

He dropped Apollo, which scratched the dog’s face. The teen pointed out the dog’s wound during an interview Tuesday.

The officer bent him over the hood of the police car and had control of his left arm, he said, but he kept his right arm in front his body. Then a second officer threatened to shock him with a stun gun if he did not stop resisting and stick out his right arm.

The teen said he did, but police still grabbed him by the police to shove him in the back of the car.

The fight didn’t end there, he said, as one officer jerked open the car door and he felt something strike him on the back of his head.

“I went black,” he said.

He came to several seconds later, he said, with his head in pain and strands of his hair all over his body.

He stayed in the police car about 30 minutes before officers took him to a holding cell at the station, then drove him late that night to the juvenile jail in Walla Walla. The teen faces charges of aggravated harassment, a felony, and misdemeanors of interfering with police, attempted

“We can’t even keep our cars running, let alone do something like that (implement body cameras) without a grant.”

— Stuart Roberts, Pendleton police chief

assault of a public safety officer and harassment.

He left the jail the next day and in the afternoon checked into St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, where a doctor examined him. The medical report the family provided noted the brain scan was negative but he suffered a contusion to his head and strain to the muscles of his neck.

The family filed a formal complaint last week with Pendleton police Lt. Chuck Byram. Police Chief Roberts said Byram began an internal investigation immediately to determine if the officers followed department procedures.

Several officers responded to the call for juveniles fighting or about to fight. Roberts said police ordered the parties to stop what they were doing, but one teen didn’t follow orders.

Instead, he threw an elbow at an officer, and that led to his arrest and putting the teen in the back of a police car, where he spit on an officer.

The teen said he did know in his struggle that he hit an officer, and he only spit to keep police

from assaulting him in the car.

Pendleton police requires officers to report when they have to use any force, and Roberts said the officers did just that. Administrators also brought up the use of force in an email to officers and during the morning briefing following the incident.

The department has yet to talk to all witnesses and see all the evidence. The family said it would provide a video of the incident, but Roberts said police have not received that.

One of the teen’s relatives sent a copy of one video to the *EO*. The footage is shaky and murky but shows a police car some distance away. Someone on the video yells “Let me go” and “Let go of my hair.” The teen claimed that was him from the back seat.

The video shows an officer open the back door of the car, duck inside for a couple of seconds, stand up and shut the door. The teen said that was when the officer struck him. Someone on the video claims the officer is strangling the teen, but the video only shows the car’s dark windows and is too poor to clearly

show any officer’s face.

The police involved are not on administrative leave. Roberts said the department takes that action when there’s obvious evidence of misconduct or wrongdoing, or an officer is suffering from trauma or an injury, but none of those apply here.

The police dash cam video was off, and Pendleton police don’t use body cams. Roberts said the departments is seeking a federal grant to cover the \$100,000 price tag for the cams.

“We can’t even keep our cars running, let alone do something like that without a grant,” he said.

The teen said he is serving two years probation for using marijuana, alcohol and other misconduct, but this was his first run-in with police in a long time. The teen said he wants the officer to lose his job. His mother said she wants Pendleton residents to know how police act.

Pendleton police since 2014 have received seven complaints: zero in 2014; one in 2015; four in 2016; zero last year; and two this year. If the internal investigation reveals the officer may have broken the law, Roberts said an outside agency would conduct a criminal investigation.

He called it “extremely rare” for one of the department’s internal administrative investigations to result in a criminal case.

SMOKE: Department focus remains on the source

Continued from 1A

Health Department issued its own advisory Tuesday afternoon where it rated Pendleton and Milton-Freewater’s air quality as unhealthy.

The department is urging the elderly, children, and people with heart conditions to stay indoors while advising all residents to limit their strenuous outdoor activities.

“Lay low a little bit,” Umatilla County Health Director Jim Setzer said in an interview.

Umatilla County Emergency Manager Tom Roberts said his department is treating the smoke like other adverse conditions like dust or high winds.

In such situations, aircraft like helicopters and drones could be grounded.

But despite the smoke, Roberts said his department focus remains at the source: wildfires.

Amidst the smoke, Life Flight Network wasn’t always able to send out helicopters out to some emergency scenes.

Whenever visibility was too poor, Life Flight Regional Director Mike Weimer said the company pulled their helicopters in favor of fixed-wing aircraft or a vehicle on the ground.

Weimer said smoke conditions can change quickly, but he said Life Flight should be able to respond to emergencies.