

# National Night Out sparks neighborhood safety talks

Top priority of the event is to strengthen bonds between neighbors

By ALEX CASTLE  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Lock your doors, turn off your porch lights, and get outside to spend time with your neighbors and local law enforcement.

That’s what the National Night Out campaign and Pendleton Police Department told the people of Pendleton and hundreds of them listened, joining each other and units from law enforcement and the fire department for an evening of food and fun at seven different locations around the city.

“It’s not usually the best day of someone’s life when we show up,” said Community Services Officer Shelly Studebaker. “So it’s nice to show up and people are happy to see us.”

Studebaker added that it can be beneficial for people to get to know the officers away from those stressful situations.

The top priority of the event though, Studebaker said, is to strengthen the



Neighbors socialize at the home of George and Donna Murdock during Tuesday’s National Night Out.

bonds between neighbors so that they can take their safety into their own hands.

“The more citizens look after themselves and each other, the more it helps us,” she said.

For the party hosted by Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock and his wife, Donna, on the city’s North Hill, National Night Out also serves as the community’s annual Neighborhood Watch meeting.

Their group, which includes about 80 families from the neighborhood, is the only one that’s been formally organized, according to Studebaker. The group formed in the past five years after a house was broken into in the area and earlier this year someone from the watch helped police locate a criminal after jotting down a suspicious vehicle’s license plate.

Cpl. Ryan Lehnert, who served as community ser-

vices officer when Pendleton joined the National Night Out campaign a decade ago, came to speak with the group.

He both praised them for the work they’ve done while highlighting some areas for improvement, such as making lists of valuable items with serial numbers and warning police when they may be leaving town for multiple days.

Studebaker said that there’s other neighborhoods

in the city that call in suspicious activity but none that have organized formal watches. But she’s hoping National Night Out has started more conversations about changing that.

“That’s the primary goal,” she said. “Of the places I was at, at almost every single one, somebody asked me about a Neighborhood Watch.”

For those interested, she said that organization and recruitment has to start with the neighborhoods and from there Pendleton police can provide the resources.

Jesselee Leachman was another host as he organized and led the party at Roy Raley Park for the second year in a row.

“Last year, I was really stressed out,” he said. “I didn’t really get to enjoy it.”

That’s because Roy Raley Park was the most attended party of the 10 hosted for National Night Out last year with more than 100 people coming out. Proud of what he did the first time around, Leachman returned as a host this year to outdo his debut.

New from last year was a DJ playing music in the park, a table setup for the U.S. Army, a free face painting table courtesy of the Pendleton Library and a dunk tank

featuring his friend Don Lien dressed as a zombie.

With scorching heat bearing down on attendees as the event opened at 6 p.m., the dunk tank ended up being one of the best seats in the park.

There were also parties hosted at the Kiwanis Park, Indian Village Apartments, and a South Hill neighborhood along with others.

In total from each location, Studebaker projected about 400 attendees before this year’s event. After making it out to all but one of the parties Tuesday night, Studebaker said on Wednesday that they were close to that estimate despite the heat keeping people inside.

While National Night Out partners with several sponsors around the country, Tuesday night’s parties were also supported by more than a dozen local sponsors in organizing and supplying the parties.

Next year, Studebaker said she hopes to get more civic groups involved to potentially have a party located downtown. But after her third year coordinating the program, Studebaker feels like it’s on the right track.

“I couldn’t be happier with where this is going,” she said.

## City council narrowly supports tobacco license

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council voted to support a Umatilla County-wide tobacco license program, but only narrowly.

According to city staff and multiple councilors, the council voted 4-3 to support the program, with councilors Becky Marks, McKennon McDonald and Dale Primmer voting against it. Councilor Jake Cambier was absent.

The Umatilla County Health Department aims to reduce youth smoking by having every tobacco retailer in the county obtain a county-issued license.

According to documents provided to the council, Umatilla County is the highest in the state for youth use of e-cigarettes and third highest for youth tobacco use of any kind.

Under the licensing program, the county could revoke the license if a retailer sold tobacco to anyone under 21.

In an interview Wednesday, Primmer said he voted against supporting the program because there were still too many unanswered questions regarding how the county would implement and enforce the program.

“If we do something, we need to make sure it’s effective,” he said.

He also pointed to research that showed that most youth get their tobacco from relatives or friends rather than illegally buying it from a store.

McDonald echoed many of Primmer’s points and added that only a few cities in Umatilla County have supported the license.

Less contentious was approval of a \$68,995 grant to install an electric car charging station

near the Heritage Station Museum in downtown Pendleton.

The grant covers the cost of installation and the city expects the charging fees will pay for the cost of operating the station.

Although McDonald recused herself because her husband worked on the grant application, the council unanimously approved the grant, according to City Manager Robb Corbett.

The council also unanimously approved the purchase of two computer numerical control machines using a state grant.

According to a staff report, the machines will be used in the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range’s rapid prototyping workshop, allowing the test range’s customers to manufacture part prototypes on-site rather than shipping them in from elsewhere.

## Man found dead in Hermiston identified

HERMISTON — The police have identified the man whose body was found on South Highway 395 last month as Guadalupe Avina, 34, of Hermiston.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said Avina had a gunshot wound and was found with a gun, but that the autopsy report has not yet been released.

Police responded shortly before 11 p.m. July 26 to a report of a body or injured person in the bushes near 1050 South Highway 395.

On July 27, police identified the body but did not release the name.

## Board of Trustees vacate board member’s seat

MISSION — The members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Board of Trustees won’t be up for election until November, but one seat is already open.

The CTUIR announced Wednesday that the Board of Trustees, the tribes’ top governing body, voted to vacate at-large board member Sally Kosey’s seat because she didn’t live within the boundar-

## BRIEFLY

ies of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Citing the tribal constitution, the press release states that Kosey’s off-reservation residence means she’s not qualified to hold the seat.

The board voted unanimously to vacate the seat, although Secretary Kat Brigham, Vice Chair Jeremy Wolf, and Kosey did not vote, according to the press release.

In an interview, CTUIR Executive Director Ted Wright said discussions over Kosey’s residency were happening for a long time, but the board only recently decided to take action.

Asked whether the board had engaged in an investigation or process before vacating Kosey’s seat, Wright said he didn’t know.

“As a sovereign government, they do what they do when they want to do it,” he said. “It’s the nature of it.”

Due to the seat opening within 180 days of the tribes’ Nov. 12 elections, the seat will remain vacant until the election.

Kosey was first elected to the board in 2017, emerging with the second-highest vote total out of a 13-candidate field seeking four at-large seats.

Kosey did not return requests for comment as of press time.

## Funland fence pickets to be available

Engraved slats will be available for pickup in September

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Families and businesses whose names were featured on the fence around Funland playground in Hermiston will be able to collect those fence pickets in September.

The approximately 900 engraved slats were taken down and stacked onto pallets by volunteers before demolition of the burned playground began last week. They will be available for pickup at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway 395, on Sept. 20-22 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. If anyone is not able to come in during those

dates, they can contact Larry Fetter at lfetter@hermiston.or.us or 541-667-5009 after Sept. 22 to make an appointment.

The city plans to rebuild Funland in early 2020, but the parks and recreation department determined that the wooden pickets from the playground that burned down earlier this year were too deteriorated to reuse. New opportunities for sponsorship of fence pickets, plaques and other items will be announced

in the coming months.

Fetter said the city has received seven proposals from playground design teams from across the country to rebuild Funland playground at Butte Park. The Funland Rebuild Committee will select a design firm on Thursday after interviewing each of the teams.

“I am impressed with the quality of the proposals and the local support to rebuild, so it is encouraging to get moving on this project,” he said.

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