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Staff photo by Kathy Aney

A Pilot Rock home burned Saturday morning after a stove burner ignited items on the stovetop.

IRRIGON

Sheriff's office handles deluge of complaints

One street in Irrigon area dominates Morrow County Sheriff's Office with more than 85 calls last month

By JESSICA POLLARD
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — The complaints from Southeast Utah Avenue just keep coming.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office received more than 85 complaints from the Irrigon neighborhood last month alone, and as mid-November approaches, the calls show no signs of stopping.

"We try to respond to those when we have people in the Irrigon area," said Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack.

For the most part, complaints to the sheriff's office are about speeding drivers. But occasionally, the complaints detail stories of dogs running around the neighborhood, loud music disrupting the peace and drivers who decide to use someone's driveway to turn around on the street.

"There are times when we are out of the way and won't be able to catch someone in the act, so to speak," he said.

Those times — when deputies couldn't locate the source of the complaints — totaled more than 40 in October, according to the daily activity bulletins from sheriff's office. Multiple times last month, the sheriff's office performed area checks on the street to check up on traffic.

There are two men standing behind most of these calls, according to public records. The *East Oregonian* was unable to get hold of either prior to publication.

Recently, the sheriff's office reorganized its staffing structure and added new hires, which, according to Matlack, allowed the agency to begin responding to calls on a near 24/7 basis.

But that doesn't mean deputies catch every driving violation.

When it comes to smaller complaints, such as speeding, the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, and other law enforcement agencies, can't issue a citation or take action over a matter an officer doesn't witness themselves, Matlack said. When called about a speeding violation, police have to witness the violation, and, according to Matlack, they aren't about to stake out cars that fit the vehicle descriptions of these or any other complaints.

"If we don't have the ability to determine who it is, does that mean we go to every car?" Matlack said. "Normally we don't do that."

Instead, Matlack said, when the deputies miss the action, they turn to community outreach. This involves knocking on doors and having discussions with the neighbors whose cars wind up in the

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FIRE ESCAPE

Newly installed smoke detector and neighbor banging on door alert sleeping residents

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — A newly installed smoke detector and a neighbor pounding on the front door likely saved three members of a Pilot Rock family when their home erupted in flames early Saturday morning.

Ashly Staggs said she and her husband, Michael, and 7-year-old daughter, Mya, are hard sleepers. The loud banging on the door and the wailing of the alarm wrenched her awake, however, and she immediately realized they were in trouble.

"The smoke in our house was so thick I couldn't see the furniture," said Ashly, who was so adrenalized she ran to the front door and ripped the chain from its bracket instead of sliding it free. Her neighbor, Dawn-Marie Davis, stood on the porch looking worried.

Ashly yelled to her husband to "Grab Mya — the house is on fire." Mike jolted awake, not immediately comprehending, then ran to rouse his daughter. The pair dashed for the front door, falling in the living room before escaping the smoky house. Outside, the family watched flames crawl onto their roof as firefighters started battling the blaze at about 5:30 a.m. Mike described his frame of mind at that

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Contributed photo

Mike, Mya and Ashly Staggs pose in front of Multnomah Falls during a happy summertime moment. The family lost their home to fire last weekend.

Aspen Springs almost ready to serve patients

New hospital to start taking patients in 2020

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — When Eastern Oregon residents experience a severe mental health crisis, they will soon be able to receive inpatient treatment at a local facility designed to keep them as safe as possible.

At the new Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston, even the landscaping in the courtyard

was given special thought.

"All of our plants out here are nontoxic and also edible, so if a patient were to try to eat them they would not be harmed," said Micaela Cathey, director of the mental health provider Lifeways, which built the facility.

The hospital will start taking patients sometime in the first quarter of 2020, after it is fully staffed, but for now Lifeways is offering up tours to the public.

During a tour Monday, Cathey pointed out how everything from chairs to door handles to railings present a unique shape, flowing smoothly together

with nowhere someone could tie a piece of clothing to try to injure themselves.

Patients will be searched and given special clothing when they enter the facility. Soft rubber hooks in the 16 private rooms can't hold more than a T-shirt's weight.

Each of the individual rooms — decorated with a mural of an aspen tree — has a small bathroom with sink and toilet, walled off with a flexible mat attached to the wall by velcro, providing visual privacy without allowing people to barricade themselves inside.

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Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Lifeways is preparing to open their newly constructed Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital at 1212 W. Linda Ave. in Hermiston. The facility will provide 16 private rooms available for residents experiencing a severe mental health crisis.