Putting a wrap on a 23-year career in policing

By DICK MASON
EO Media Group

EO Media Group Photo/Dick Mason

Eric Madsen is looking forward to spending Sundays with his wife, Jeannie. The senior trooper with the Oregon State Police office in La Grande retired on Tuesday after a 23-year career.

LA GRANDE — Three decades ago, in far-from-ideal circumstances, Eric Madsen, then a National Guardsman, received a glimpse of his future.

Madsen was stuck in a ditch in a 5-ton unheated military vehicle that had $2 million worth of equipment. A careless truck driver had forced the rig off Interstate 84 near Meacham. Madsen and another Guardsman faced a seven-hour wait for a tow in frigid conditions. A generous Oregon State Police trooper made that wait bearable.

"He checked on us every hour and brought us hot coffee. If it were not for him, I would have had a miserable experience," Madsen said.

Fast forward, and Madsen is a retiring OSP senior trooper who wrapped up a 23-year career Tuesday, one in which he tried to touch the lives of others the way that trooper did his in the late 1980s.

Madsen succeeded in a big way in the eyes of people, such as Wade Foersterling of Baker City. Madsen helped Foersterling change a blown tire Dec. 21 on I-84.

"Not only did he get down in the dirt and rocks to help us change the tire. When the spare was (found to be flat), he offered to call the tire store to see if we could find a used tire and give me a ride to get it," Foersterling wrote in a letter sent to *The Observer*. "He tried to help us in any way he could. He didn't need to do as much as he did, and for that, we will always have his kindness in our hearts."

Madsen said the opportunity to help people often made his job a joy.

"I have been blessed to have a career I loved," he said.

Madsen's law enforcement career dates back to 1988 when he began serving as a reserve officer for both the Union County Sheriff's Office and the La Grande Police Department. He later worked for the Portland Police Bureau and the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office before joining OSP in 1997. Madsen has been in the state police La Grande office since 1999.

Sgt. Kyle Hove credits Madsen with being an outstanding trooper. Hove, who also works in the La Grande office, noted Madsen is a leader, an excellent teacher and willing to put in extra hours when the need arises.

JoLyn Scott, an administration specialist for the La Grande OSP office, describes Madsen as upbeat and positive.

"He is always kind and fun," Scott said.

Madsen became a drug recognition expert with state police. In this role, he has been responsible for determining if people are under the influence of drugs when driving. He has found many people do not realize they can remain impaired by drugs even after the hallucinogenic effects wear off.

"People are impaired much longer than they feel the effects," he said.

He noted people who use marijuana can be impaired at least a day after taking it. One reason is marijuana now is much more potent than it was when he joined the state police. He explained the levels of THC, the psychoactive chemical in marijuana that makes people high, averaged about 4% when he was a new trooper. That level has soared, he said, noting that he recently has seen some forms of marijuana with THC levels as high as 93.7%. He said contrasting marijuana of yesteryear to that of today is like comparing beer with 5% alcohol content to 150 proof whiskey.

Madsen has seen firsthand how drug addiction destroys lives, but he does not hold many caught in its throes completely responsible.

"Some didn't know any better. Their parents did this (took drugs)," he said.

By the same token, Madsen has seen young people with tremendous potential and family support who fell into the trap of drug addiction.

"They made bad choices," said Madsen, who made a number of presentations in schools during his career urging young people to stay clear of drugs.

Madsen has dealt with many impaired drivers and plenty of others who were simply driving too fast. When pulling over these drivers, Madsen has made a point of asking their reason for speeding.

"If there is a medical emergency I want to know right away so I can help them get to the hospital as soon as possible," Madsen said.

When counseling drivers about infractions, he said he aimed to get them to understand they are putting others at risk along with themselves. He pointed out, for example, that many of those injured in construction zone crashes are the workers who have no protection, along with the drivers of speeding vehicles.

Madsen said as a law enforcement officer he has long strived to treat everyone with respect. He follows a mantra from an OSP officer he worked under in John Day early in his career.

"Treat everyone like you would like to see your mother treated," Madsen recalled.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

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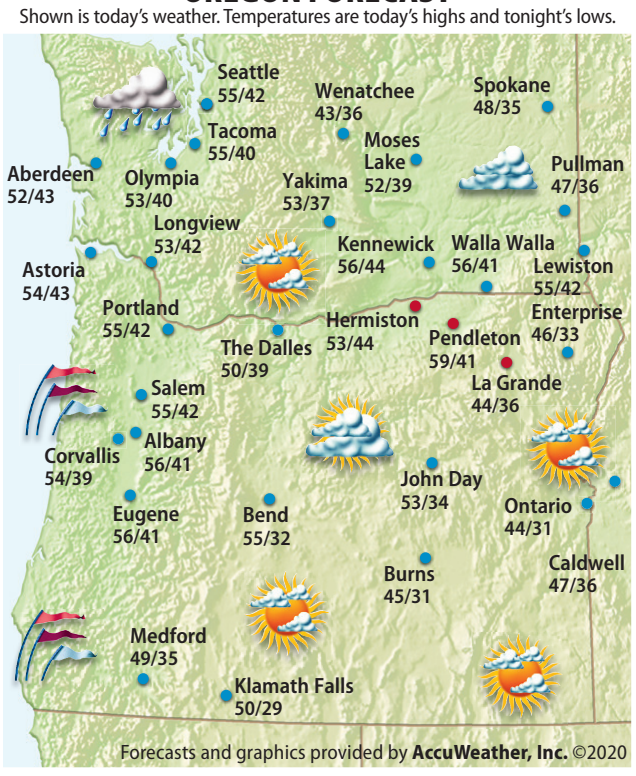
TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Cloudy	Cooler; a passing morning shower	A shower in the afternoon	Some sun, then turning cloudy	Cloudy
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
59° 41°	48° 35°	47° 36°	48° 36°	47° 33°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
53° 44°	52° 34°	48° 40°	52° 35°	47° 35°

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2020

ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	47°	42°
Normals	40°	26°
Records	63° (1913)	-9° (1924)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"
Month to date	0.02"
Normal month to date	0.12"
Year to date	0.02"
Last year to date	0.00"
Normal year to date	0.12"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	50°	45°
Normals	39°	27°
Records	62° (1939)	-7° (1979)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	Trace
Normal month to date	0.08"
Year to date	Trace
Last year to date	0.00"
Normal year to date	0.08"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Sat.
Boardman	SW 3-6	WSW 12-25
Pendleton	SSE 7-14	WSW 12-25

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:36 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:23 p.m.
Moonrise today	12:13 p.m.
Moonset today	12:07 a.m.

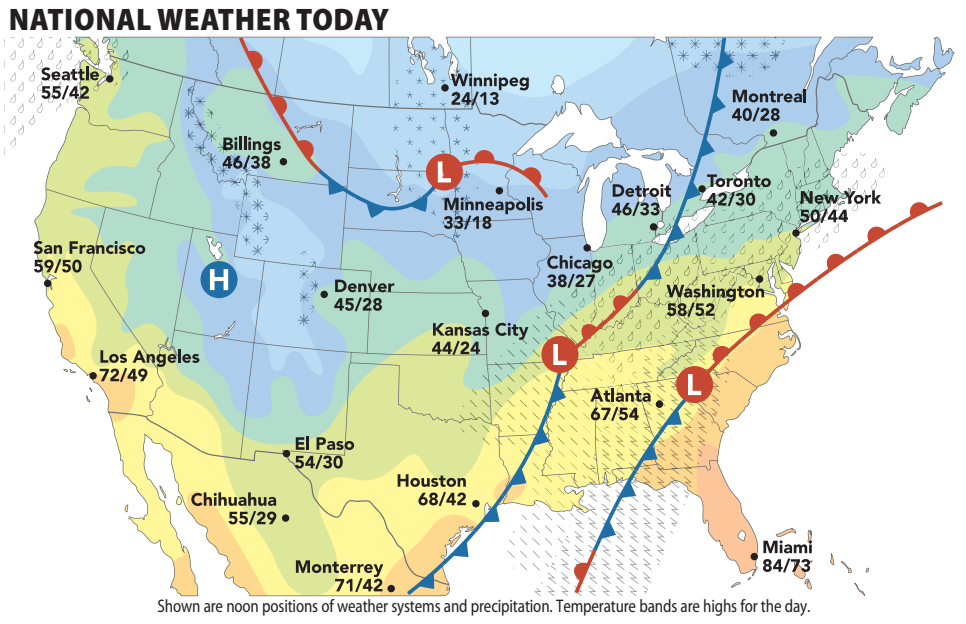
Full	Last	New	First
Jan 10	Jan 17	Jan 24	Feb 1

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 86° in Immokalee, Fla. **Low** -22° in Waverly, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s -0s 0s 10s 20s 30s 40s 50s 60s 70s 80s 90s 100s 110s

showers t-storms rain flurries snow ice cold front warm front stationary front high low

WSP Photo/Trooper Chris Thorson

A monster pile of tumbleweeds forced a 10-hour closure of State Route 240 in Eastern Washington, trapping several drivers before they could be freed by state Department of Transportation workers. Trooper Chris Thorson shared this photo from the scene on Twitter.

Cars trapped overnight by monster tumbleweed pile

By ANNETTE CARY
Tri-City Herald

RICHLAND, Wash. — Thousands of blowing tumbleweeds trapped cars driving on State Route 240 northwest of Richland on New Year's Eve.

The tumbleweeds were so deep and thick that the state Department of Transportation had to bring out plow trucks to clear the roadway, according to the Washington State Patrol.

The highway was closed for about 10 hours, from Tuesday evening through about 4:30 a.m. New Year's Day.

WSP Trooper Chris Thorson posted on Twitter about 8:30 p.m. that several cars had become trapped in tumbleweeds.

One driver called the state patrol to report she had abandoned her car in a ditch and gotten a ride with another driver, but the tumbleweeds were so deep the state patrol had not been able to find her car by 2:30 a.m.

The state Department of Transportation plow trucks were leaving piles of the weeds along the roadsides 20 to 30 feet high in places, Thorson said.

"No collisions. No injuries," Thorson posted about 2:30 a.m. "The plow truck drivers also did a great job of working around abandoned vehicles without hitting them, which was a daunting task as they were very hard to see in the thick brush."

After daylight, Department of Transportation workers found and unburied a car at the side of the highway that had been hidden from sight after plowing topped the roof of the car with several feet of tumbleweeds. No one was in it.

The road closure at its peak was about 20 miles long. Lanes in both directions were closed from State Route 225 about 10 miles northwest of Richland to State Route 24.

The National Weather Station reported wind gusts coming from the west at 30 to 40 mph throughout most of the night in the area.

To the west of the closed section of road is the open land of the Hanford Reach National Monument; to the east is the production portion of the Hanford nuclear reservation.

Hanford workers were alerted through the night to the road closure, with the limited number of workers on duty New Year's Eve and the early morning of New Year's Day advised to use alternate routes.

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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