

Police investigating two armed robberies in M-F area

East Oregonian

MILTON-FREEWATER — Authorities are investigating a pair of armed robberies that took place in the Milton-Freewater area over the weekend, Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said on Monday.

A press release from the sheriff’s office on Friday detailed a robbery involving two male suspects at the First Stop Mart at 85712 Highway 11 Friday, while Milton-Freewater Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer released information on another armed robbery Monday, this time of a newspaper carrier that occurred

Sunday morning involving one male suspect.

It’s unknown whether the cases are connected, Rowan said, and added that “it’s really hard” for him to release any information in addition to the press releases at this time.

Boedigheimer did not respond to emails requesting further comment.

According to the UCSO release, two men entered the First Stop Mart at about 6:30 a.m. on Friday, when one suspect ordered the store employee to open the store’s safe at gunpoint.

The suspect then fired one round from a silver revolver at an electronic device used

for the store’s internet connection. The employee was unable to open the safe and a customer entered the store. The release states the second suspect was “representing that he had a weapon,” and then stole the customer’s wallet.

Both suspects then left the store and drove away in a black Honda that may be a Civic or similar model, according to the release.

Shortly after, and about 1 mile from the store, residents near Appleton and Tum a Lum roads reported a vehicle was on fire in an orchard. The vehicle matched the description of the suspects’ vehicle, which,

according to the release, was stolen from Milton-Freewater the day before.

Police later learned that one suspect stole a butane torch from the store.

The release identifies the first suspect as a possibly white male of an unknown age who is 6 feet tall. The employee reported he was wearing blue jeans and his face was covered.

The second suspect is identified as a male of unknown age and race who is 5-6 to 5-9 in height. The employee reported he was wearing blue jeans, tan work boots, a dark-colored ball cap and black backpack. The suspect’s face was covered

with a light blue bandana.

At approximately 5 a.m. on Sunday, MFPD responded to a reported armed robbery of a 24-year-old newspaper carrier along South Main Street near Southwest Eighth and Ninth Street, Boedigheimer said in an email.

According to Boedigheimer, a male approached the victim, struck him in the face and stole the victim’s cellphone and headphones. The suspect then fled on foot northbound.

Boedigheimer’s email said the suspect is unidentified and is described as being thin, about 6 feet tall,

and was dressed in dark clothing with a blue bandana covering his face. The suspect was carrying a firearm that was described as a pistol by the victim.

According to the email, the victim suffered an apparent nonlife-threatening injury to his face and nose. He was attended to by medics at the scene and later transported to St. Mary’s Medical Center in Walla Walla, Washington.

Those with information related to the robberies can contact the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office at 541-966-3600, or the Milton-Freewater Police Department at 541-938-5511.

Brett: ‘He will forever be part of my memory and my heart’

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“He wanted to set up a little dinner for her, even though she was like 10 years older,” Maddie said.

Friends, family and Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo remember Brett as someone who tried hard in school.

“He was one of our top students,” Spoo said.

Brett’s family said he had many interests, but he was drawn to video production and digital art. His sister described him as a video-game expert.

“We were wondering if he’d do something with that,” Shannon said. “But he also loved to argue.”

He loved to debate politics with Maddie.

At Hermiston High School, where Brett was a sophomore, a team of psychologists and other mental health professionals provided student support on Monday. It was the first day back from winter break, and five days after Brett’s untimely death.

Administrators said that substitute teachers were on call all day, in case any educators needed to step out of their classrooms to process tragedy. Kaitlyn Curtis, a 16-year-old junior at the high school, befriended Brett when he first moved to Hermiston from Heppner in elementary school. The pair loved participating in local community theater together. And although that was years ago, the friendship stuck.

“We were, in a way, each other’s rock,” she said.



Contributed photo

Brett Jewett, left, and his sister Maddie Jewett, third from left, pose for a picture with their cousins on Sept. 15, 2019. Brett Jewett, a sophomore at Hermiston High School, was killed in a two-vehicle car crash on Jan. 1 along Highway 207 outside of Echo.

Curtis said that Brett could make her laugh for hours and while he wasn’t a “touchy-feely” guy, she said that when they visited the corn maze in Walla Walla, Washington, this fall, he let her hold onto him when she was scared.

“He was more smart with anyone else that I knew. He would have accomplished so much,” she added. “He will forever be part of my memory and my heart.”

Harley Pennington, 18, is friends with Maddie, and said she considered Brett her best friend.

“Many nights, we would stay up until 4 a.m. just playing games and talking about life for hours,” she said. “I could tell him anything and he would accept me no matter what.”

Brett was a perfectionist, according to his family. He kept his clothes immaculately clean, and got his hair

cut every two weeks. He had strong moral convictions, and they came to light at a young age.

“If people were going to do something he felt wasn’t right, he just would not do it,” Shannon said. “It’s hard to be that way, and he stuck to it.”

One time in school, his classmates teased their substitute teacher, according to Shannon. Brett would have none of it. Of his own accord, he wrote an apology

to the teacher on behalf of the whole class.

“He struggled to find friends with as much conviction as him,” Maddie said. “His moral compass was dead-on.”

She said she was starting to see a change in his demeanor the last few months and that his perfectionism sometimes led to anxiety, but that she saw him gaining self-confidence this fall.

“He was just starting to

really reclaim himself,” Maddie said.

His grandmother, Jeanne Jewett, an account executive at the *Hermiston Herald*, said he often seemed beyond his years.

“He wanted the best for his mother and sister,” she said. “He was very much the man of the family.”

And — being as competitive as he was — his family was impressed when he at long last accepted defeat during the final Monopoly game he shared with his mother and sister.

On Monday, his father, Brian Jewett, a trooper with the Oregon State Police, said his son had a way of winning over people’s hearts easily.

“He was happy-go-lucky but set on his ways, too,” he said.

Brian added he was thankful he got to see Brett right before his passing. Maddie and her brother were returning from a visit with their father in Ione before the crash.

“Apparently, God needed him now. He was taken at such a young age,” he said. “I was looking forward to his future.”

People may remember Brett as a volunteer in his community, at the Cowboy Breakfast and with his church. His friends fondly recall his love for music, especially Lana Del Ray.

“He had an aptitude for everything,” Maddie said.

A celebration of life service will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday at New Hope Community Church in Hermiston.

Memorial: Committee hoping to grow its \$125,000 budget with fundraising

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will not release names until they notify the prospective artists of their selection.

“We have a process for narrowing them down, but we are trying to be flexible about how we do it,” Denight said. “We’re in the quarterfinal round.”

Once three finalists are selected, the Pendleton Arts Committee will invite the artists to Pendleton to see the town and meet with the committee and veterans to help inspire the design.

The project, a collaborative effort between the Pendleton Arts Committee, the city of Pendleton and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Let ‘er Buck Post 922, has been several years in the making. From its inception roughly 2-1/2 years ago, the project has received support in the form of a set of five service branch medallions purchased by the city in 2018, and a \$37,364 grant from



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Windblown artificial Christmas trees from the city of Pendleton’s Christmas display remained at the site of the future military service memorial Monday afternoon. In the spring, the Pendleton VFW will install medallions on the basalt columns in honor of the five military branches.

the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department in May 2019. The project’s basalt columns were donated to the Pendleton VFW by a business in Washington state.

Although the project has received support from various government entities, the committee is looking at ways to extend its roughly \$125,000 budget through

memorial brick sales or other community fundraising. In speaking with other cities about their projects, the committee found that artists often came back with costs

above what had initially been budgeted.

“A number of cities talked about how production costs exceeded the budget,” Denight said. “We’ll have to do some fundraising to get ahead of that.”

Johnny Blagg, an Air Force veteran and a member of Pendleton VFW, said that he hopes the memorial will serve as more than just a veterans memorial, but rather a place that can honor all facets of those affiliated with the military, even those not in uniform.

“It’s not uncommon to have service memorials for time periods or people,” he said. “I wanted something bigger that represents the whole of the military services.”

Sticking with the inclusive theme, the committee is looking at installing a more representative art piece rather than something such as a figurative statue, Denight said. The art piece

will serve as the centerpiece to the ring of basalt columns that are already in place.

“The most important audience will be the veterans,” Denight said.

In addition to honoring all who serve their country, Blagg wants to ensure the project is accessible to all by maintaining the current ramp access to the fountain and ensuring that plaques and artwork are accessible to those of all abilities.

“It will stay accessible to everyone. It’s for everyone to see and experience,” he said. “A quiet place to go and reflect.”

While the basalt columns are already in place, and the VFW aims to affix the service medallions in the spring, the art installation will not be completed until April 2021, according to Denight.

“This thing is going to be there for 100 years or more,” he said. “We want it to be something special for everyone.”

Re-election: ‘When your name is tied to goals, it’s a good idea to see them through’

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Chalmers, Ward 2 Councilor Scott Fairley, and Ward 3 Councilor Dale Primmer.

In confirming their plans to run for re-election, both Chalmers and Primmer echoed Turner’s reasons for running for a second term, lauding the council’s cohesiveness and stating their desire to continue to work on the council’s goals.

“When your name is tied to goals, it’s a good idea to see them through,” Chalmers said.

Chalmers, the Umatilla County director of assessment and taxation, was appointed to the council in 2016.

But when Chalmers ran for a full term later that year, he was forced into a runoff with business owner Jim Swearingen, who wasn’t actively campaigning for the seat. Swear-

ingen promptly dropped out and Chalmers was the only name on the November ballot.

Primmer, the director of Umatilla County Community Corrections, easily bested two opponents to win his first term without a runoff. Ward 3 covers the areas of McKay Creek, Southgate, and Tutuilla Road.

Fairley did not return a message left on his phone requesting comment.

A regional development officer for Business Oregon, Fairley won his North Hill ward over two opponents without a runoff.

The city confirmed that Primmer and Turner were the only people to file for election with the city as of Monday morning, although Chalmers said he intended to submit the filing forms.

The one councilor definitely declining a re-election bid is Ward 1 Councilor Becky Marks.

The three-term incumbent said 12 years on the council was enough, and that she wanted to pass her seat on to “new hearts and new minds.”

Marks faced at least one opponent in all three of her races for her Ward 1 seat, which encompasses downtown Pendleton, South Hill, and Riverside.

Marks’ impending retire-

ment means the entirety of the council will have turned over from 2014 to 2021. The most experienced member will become Councilor McKennon McDonald, who took office in 2015.

The filing deadline for all five city council seats is March 10. Should any candidates fail to take 50% of the vote in the May 19 primary, the top two candidates will go to a runoff on Nov. 3.