

Remembering Martin Luther King Jr.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Marchers gather in the Hermiston First United Methodist Church for speeches and food following the annual Martin Luther King Jr. March on Monday morning. The march, which celebrated its 20th year this year, drew dozens of marchers to downtown Hermiston in celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy.



McKell Wilson, left, and Izzy Soto, both members of the Blue Mountain Community College soccer team, wash windows at the Pendleton Center for the Arts. The team decided to help out as a part of the MLK Day of Service, which celebrates the legacy of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Suspect in custody connected to armed robbery in M-F

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

MILTON-FREEWATER — A suspect in custody for allegedly robbing the First Stop Mart at gunpoint in Milton-Freewater earlier this month had been released from jail less than 24 hours prior to the incident.

Documents filed with the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office reveal Michael James Metcalfe, 19, was arraigned on Thursday for four felony charges, including two counts of first-degree robbery, one count of second-degree kidnapping and one count of violating his probation.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan confirmed Saturday that Metcalfe was arrested on Jan. 6 and is suspected of being one of the two men who robbed the Milton-Freewater store on Highway 11 at about 6:30 a.m. on Jan. 3.

According to court documents, Metcalfe was previously lodged in the Umatilla County Jail until he was issued an "emergency release due to overpopulation" at 8:12 a.m. on Jan. 2.

Rowan said the jail can typically hold up to 230 inmates, though the capacity can fluctuate depending on whether there are prisoners who are going through a drug or mental health crisis.

When mattresses and temporary housing for inmates starts to run out, Rowan said the jail will evaluate the risk assessments that are performed on each inmate when they are brought in. The assessments, he said, include criminal history, current offenses and factors like whether the inmate has a job or residence to return to.

Inmates are deemed either a low, medium or high risk, Rowan said. Those in the low to medium category are selected for release when necessary.

"It's supposed to be a predictive tool," Rowan said of the risk assessment. "But we can't predict the future.

Sometimes the tool can be spot-on, and sometimes it can miss out on someone who is just hell-bent on wrecking our community."

Metcalfe was previously arrested Dec. 28, 2019, on four felony charges, including one count each of unlawful possession of methamphetamine and heroin, possession of a prohibited firearm and violation of probation.

Metcalfe was on probation for a prior felony conviction from when he pleaded guilty on Nov. 12, 2019, to first-degree theft of a firearm and unlawful possession of a firearm.

Metcalfe failed to appear for his scheduled court date the morning of Jan. 3, and Milton-Freewater police arrested him on Jan. 6 for a detention warrant. Metcalfe was listed as a "transient" on the department's media bulletin.

While Rowan said he'd need to pull files to know exactly what prompted the Jan. 2 release, he added it's likely Metcalfe was graded as a low or medium risk.

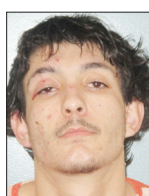
Metcalfe is being held at the Umatilla County Jail with a bail of \$300,000.

As Measure 11 crimes, first-degree robbery carries a mandatory minimum sentence of seven years and six months, while second-degree kidnapping carries a sentence of five years and 10 months.

The second suspect in the First Stop Mart armed robbery remains at large, Rowan said, and the investigation is ongoing.

In the initial release from the sheriff's office on Jan. 3, one suspect was identified 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 was identified as a male of unknown age and race



Metcalfe

who is 5-foot-6 to 5-foot-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.

Metcalfe is listed as a white male standing at 6-foot-1 and 150 pounds on the jail roster. Rowan said there are no additional details known about the second suspect at this time.

The robbery was the first of three armed robberies that occurred in the area in recent weeks.

On the early morning of Jan. 6, a paper carrier for the *Union-Bulletin* was struck in the face and robbed at gunpoint by a suspect covering their face with a blue bandana.

One week later on the morning of Jan. 13, a suspect who was armed and masked stole cash from Sam's Corner Market on Broadway Avenue in Milton-Freewater.

At a city council meeting later that night, the *Union-Bulletin* reported Milton-Freewater Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer said evidence was beginning to support the theory that the robberies are connected and people were working together to commit them.

In previous emails with the *East Oregonian*, Boedigheimer declined to comment on the connection between the robberies.

"These are open investigations with progress being made," he wrote. "When the cases have run their courses, I'll proactively send out appropriate information on my timeline."

Umatilla River north bank committee to meet Wednesday

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When the Pendleton City Council considered taking steps to sell property on the Umatilla River's north bank in 2017, some nearby residents opposed the move.

The city never sold the land and, three years later, is in the process of figuring out the best use for it.

The city formed the North Bank of the Umatilla Advisory Committee to help address the issue. The committee will be holding a community meeting at the Pendleton Recreation Center's Foundation Room on Wednesday at 7 p.m.

A committee press release lists many of the benefits of having the

Umatilla River run through town: The Pendleton River Parkway on the south side of the river connects several parks and landmarks and provides exercise opportunities, the river attracts wildlife, making it ideal for hobbyists like birdwatchers and fishers, and the river waters and trees make it a prime cool-off spot in the summers.

But the city also admits there are problems surrounding the river, some of it on the north side.

A recent increase in the outdoor homeless population means illicit camps are sprouting up in more secluded areas along the river, sometimes creating fire hazards.

With little in the way

of official paths that lead down to the north bank, people often trespass onto private property to access the north side of the river and leave behind trash that can create environmental hazards.

Debate also continues over how to best maintain the vegetation that grows along the river. While the herd of goats that graze along the river each year can prevent overgrowth from turning into a fire hazard, some residents say the lack of plants the goats leave behind hurts local wildlife.

The north bank committee hopes to solicit input and create "a shared vision" around how the city should utilize the area.

BRIEFLY

Man killed in Morrow County crash

MORROW COUNTY — A Wasco County man died Monday morning in a single-vehicle car accident on Bombing Range Road.

Mark Steven Willis, 44, of Wamic, was driving a logging truck northbound on Bombing Range Road towards Boardman early Monday morning. According to the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Willis pulled the truck over the road's narrow shoulder near milepost 18 and the truck tipped onto its side and rolled, spilling logs.

Willis was found deceased shortly before 6 a.m. Law enforcement officials said he was not secured in the vehicle by his seatbelt when found, and that he died from trauma to his head and body.

There was a fire which may have originated in the engine, but the vehicle was not fully engulfed.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office

is conducting a crash investigation. It is currently unclear what other agencies provided aid during the accident.

Milton-Freewater garage damaged by fire Friday

MILTON-FREEWATER — The garage on a home in Milton-Freewater was damaged by a small fire Friday night.

It took place at a residence near the U.S. Bank branch in central Milton-Freewater in the 100 block of South Elizabeth Street.

Milton-Freewater Fire Chief Shane Garner said his department received the call around 7:45 p.m. and his firefighters had the fire out within about 10 minutes.

Garner said about 30% of the garage was damaged. He said there were no signs of suspicious activity, and an investigation is pending.

There were no injuries.

— EO Media Group

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