

Blaze erupts in hotel room



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A firefighter prepares to enter room 126 at the Knights Inn in Pendleton on Friday evening. Shortly after 5 p.m., the Pendleton Fire Department was dispatched to the building, located at 310 S.E. Dorion Ave., for a structure fire. Knights Inn owner Sam Lal said the room was unoccupied at the time and had just been painted. Lal suspects that a heater in the room had been unintentionally turned on, lighting a mattress that was propped against the heater. Lal said that he has owned the inn for 15 years and never had to deal with anything of this nature. Firefighters made quick work of the fire, knocking down the flames in less than 30 seconds after entering the room.

Prosecution rests in Mattila case

State rests after presenting blood alcohol data, recorded statements

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The prosecution rested its case in the manslaughter trial of John McKenzie Mattila on Friday after presenting blood alcohol data and recorded statements made by the defendant.

Mattila is charged with first- and second-degree manslaughter, DUII and failure to perform duties of a driver to injured persons for allegedly driving drunk, causing the death of Adelaida Solis Torres, and leaving the scene around 7 p.m. on Feb. 22, 2019.

The prosecution began Friday by calling Umatilla County Jail Cpt. Thoren Hearn to present a recording of a jail phone call between Mattila and his sister.

“She came into my lane,” he said on the call. “She hit me, the only thing I was guilty of was ... Oh (expletive), maybe the DUII.”

The prosecution then called Oregon State Police Sgt. Jeremy Gunter, who arrested Mattila that night, and presented his dashcam footage. Previously suppressed video evidence was readmitted and played after Judge Jon Lieuallen ruled on Wednesday the defense opened the door to it by explicitly mentioning its existence to the jury.



Staff photo by Alex Castle
John McKenzie Mattila looks down in front of him as Dr. Michael Jackson, a forensic toxicologist with the Oregon State Police, testified to his blood alcohol content the night of Feb. 22, 2019.

The few minutes of footage showed Gunter informing Mattila the night of the crash that Solis Torres was dead.

“She’s dead?” Mattila said in response before becoming emotional and falling to the ground, wailing and crying.

Later in the video, Mattila is heard using profanity and calling Solis Torres a slur.

The prosecution also presented a video taken at St. Anthony Hospital on Feb. 22, 2019, where Mattila was treated after being tased while trying to flee custody.

At one point, Mattila can be heard laughing as he says he would have been “getting laid” that night if it wasn’t for the victim.

The prosecution then

played portions of Gunter’s interview with Mattila on Feb. 24, 2019, at the jail. According to Mattila’s account of the crash that day, he saw headlights cross into his lane and there was black ice on the roads.

All testimony and evidence provided by crash reconstructionists said the crash occurred in the northbound lane, which Solis Torres was in that night on her way to Milton-Freewater, and that she was driving “straight or relatively straight” at the time.

During the interview, Mattila said he didn’t care about anything anymore and had given up. He remained adamant he didn’t drink and drive, and only drank alcohol after the crash occurred.

“I know I wasn’t drunk

until I got to my dad’s car,” Mattila said in the video, at which point he claims he then chugged whiskey from a bottle located under the car’s passenger seat. Both Mattila’s parents and his uncle testified that a whiskey bottle was regularly kept in the car.

The prosecution’s final witness was Dr. Michael Jackson with the Oregon State Police, who was offered as an expert witness on forensic toxicology.

Jackson testified that Mattila’s blood alcohol content was 0.115% when drawn at 10:42 p.m. that night, and then was 0.102% at 11:35 p.m. Using retrograde extrapolation, which is a scientific method to determine blood alcohol content at a particular time, Jackson said Mattila would have been driving with a blood alcohol content between 0.132% and 0.205% at the time of the crash.

During cross examination, Jackson confirmed retrograde extrapolation is based off of some assumptions, including that Mattila didn’t drink after the incident.

“At that point, it would be inappropriate to provide the court with the blood alcohol content range,” he said.

Following Jackson’s testimony, the defense began presenting its case on Friday afternoon and will continue with more witness testimony on Monday, which is scheduled as the final day of the trial.

Umatilla National Forest hires two new district rangers

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The U.S. Forest Service hired two new rangers to help manage its Walla Walla and Pomeroy ranger districts in the Umatilla National Forest.

In a Friday press release, Umatilla National Forest Supervisor Eric Watrud announced that Aaron Gagnon has been hired as the Walla Walla District ranger and Susan Piper was selected as the Pomeroy District ranger.

“I am pleased to have these two experienced and highly qualified individuals join the forest’s leadership staff,” Watrud said in a statement. “They bring with them a diverse mix of resource management skills and enthusiasm that will serve the (Umatilla National) Forest and our communities well.”

As a Forest Service employee, Gagnon has experience working with tribal governments, county commissioners, and the public in national forests in Oregon, Colorado and California. Most recently, Gagnon was on the Forest Vegetation Simulator staff in Fort Collins, Colorado, where he focused on tree growth.

Gagnon replaces the retiring Mike Rassbach at the Walla Walla Ranger



Gagnon
District, which includes Meacham, the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Elgin, the Grande Ronde River, and Dayton, Washington.

Gagnon will be based out of Walla Walla, Washington, with his wife and two daughters.

An Evergreen State native, Piper started her career as a firefighter in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in Central Washington before moving up the ranks. Piper has spent the past 18 years as the wildlife and botany program manager for the Olympic National Forest in Western Washington.

Piper will replace the retiring Monte Fujishin at the Pomeroy Ranger District, which spans the Blue Mountains in Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington.

Based out of Pomeroy, Washington, Piper said she remembers camping, hiking and fishing in Eastern Washington and is looking forward to returning to the area with her husband and being closer to her son, who is going to college in Walla Walla.

BRIEFLY

Comments sought on ODOT projects

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Transportation is taking public comments on planned highway projects around the state.

A March 10 meeting in John Day is scheduled for public comments, or participants can submit online feedback about the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

The program is considered ODOT’s to-do list for capital improvements for state and federal funded highway projects.

This is the first time the online open house system will accept comments.

Participants have three ways to participate in the Draft 2021-2024 review process for ODOT Region 5 in Eastern Oregon, which includes Umatilla County, the Confederated Tribes of

the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Morrow, Union, Wallowa, Baker, Grant, Harney and Malheur counties.

Participants can view the information online at ubne.ws/odotdraft0320. The public comment period runs through Friday, April 10.

Participants can also attend the public outreach meeting in John Day, March 10, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., at the Oregon Department of Forestry, 415 Patterson Bridge Road.

The final method is by connecting to the March 10 meeting remotely via web. Details on how to do so are expected to be live today at tinyurl.com/STIP-mtg.

— EO Media Group

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OREGON EAST SYMPHONY

Winter Moons

Bob Clapp Theatre

7:30pm, Saturday, March 14th, 2020

Hermiston High School Auditorium

2:00pm, Sunday, March 15th, 2020

Jerod Tate - Winter Moons

Aaron Copland - Appalachian Spring

Stewards of the Umatilla River Environment

BANNER BANK

Pacific Power Foundation

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Tickets on sale at Pendleton Art & Frame, Bellinger Farms Store, Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, the OES office, and www.OregonEastSymphony.org.

WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO

3/6-3/8

Cineplex Show Times

\$5 Classic Movie

Showing Wednesday @ 12p

The Man Who Would Be King

Onward (PG)

12:30p* 1:40p*

4:10p 6:40p 9:10p

The Invisible Man (R)

1:10p* 4:00p 6:50p 9:40p

The Call of the Wild (PG)

12:10p* 2:30p*

4:50p 7:10p 9:30p

Sonic the Hedgehog (PG)

12:00p* 2:20p*

4:40p 7:00p 9:20p

Fantasy Island (PG13) 6:30p

Bad Boys for Life (R)

3:50p* 9:50p

* Matinee Pricing

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