

Team digs into decades-long Union County mystery

By PHIL WRIGHT
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Melinda Jederberg of La Grande has a mission — to find out the identity of a young woman who was found in a shallow grave near Elgin.

And if luck prevails, to find out who put her there.

Jederberg said she knows that’s a long shot. The case has been cold since hunters in late August 1978 found the human remains near a log on Finley Creek some 18 miles north of La Grande.

The woman was between 18 and 25 years old, according to the report at the time from state medical examiner Dr. William Bradley, stood 5-feet-2 to 5-feet-4 inches, weighed between 114 to 140 pounds. She had light brown or blond hair. She was pregnant and likely near delivery. And the remains may have been there for four years.

Jederberg, who earned a bachelor’s degree in criminology in 2007 from Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, has long kept her interest in crime. She came across The Doe Network last year, a website devoted to cold cases of missing and unidentified people. She said she wanted to find out whether there were cases in Union County. And at the top of the list was the Finley Creek case.

“I never heard of this,”



EO Media Group Photo/Phil Wright
Melinda Jederberg shows notes she has taken while working to identify the girl that hunters found in a shallow grave in 1978 near Elgin.

she said. “How is it possible I never heard of this?”

She started to dig and has not stopped. She took to Facebook and created the page Finley Creek Jane Doe — Elgin, OR to raise awareness and maybe bump into a clue. Others found the page, and now Jederberg is part of a five-person team with members throughout the West. In March, they obtained a copy of the Oregon State Police file on the case with details of the crime scene, such as what the young woman wore. The report also points out police found a 4-foot-long piece of nylon cord and an approximately 2-foot-long radio cord with the remains.

Dale Mammen of La Grande remembers the scene

well. He was the county’s district attorney then.

“I could probably go to the spot,” he said. “It’s one of those things that’s embedded in your mind.”

The grave was about 100 feet off a road, across the dry bed of Finley, up an small embankment and under a log.

Two hunters noticed bones, he said, which animals had savaged. The hunters realized the bones were human.

Nothing indicated the woman was local, he said, and no one could find any reports of missing people here. Mammen said he figured she was a loner or had her own network of relationships. He also said he and his office suspected she may have been a victim of one of the most prolific serial kill-



Photo contributed by Oregon State Police
Hunters in late August 1978 found these human remains in a shallow grave near a log on Finley Creek about 18 miles north of La Grande.

ers of the Pacific Northwest.

“My theory on that at the time,” he said, “and still is, it was about the time the Green River Killer was active.”

Gary Leon Ridgway is serving life in prison at Washington State Penitentiary, Walla Walla, for murdering 49 women, although he has confessed to almost twice that many.

But Jederberg and teammate Kether Senn of Pendleton have their own theories. They said there are similarities with the Lewis Clark Valley murders, a cluster of unsolved killings and disappearances that occurred in Northern Idaho between 1979-82.

“I feel like there might be a connection with that,”

Senn said.

She came across Jederberg’s work via the Facebook page in 2019. Senn said true crime already was an interest, and the local case caught her.

“I got really interested in it,” she said. “It kind of hit home to me, especially seeing she was pregnant. How could this happen?”

Between caring for three children, Senn said she has devoted a “lot of time on this late at night reading articles” to help crack the mystery. She and Jederberg also have their eyes on Harry Hantman as a suspect.

Harry Anthony Hantman was 44 when the law caught up to him in 1993 outside a motel in Lewiston, Idaho. He escaped on Christmas Day

1973 from St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in the District of Columbia, the same mental hospital where John W. Hinckley was incarcerated after he shot President Ronald Reagan in 1981.

Hantman was in the hospital’s ward for the criminally insane after being found not guilty by reason of insanity in 1969 of the brutal rape and murder of an 11-year-old girl in Washington, D.C., according to the *Lewiston Tribune*.

After escaping, Hantman made his way west, Jederberg said, and hid out near Joseph under the alias Andrew Dorian. He was even married and took classes at EOU.

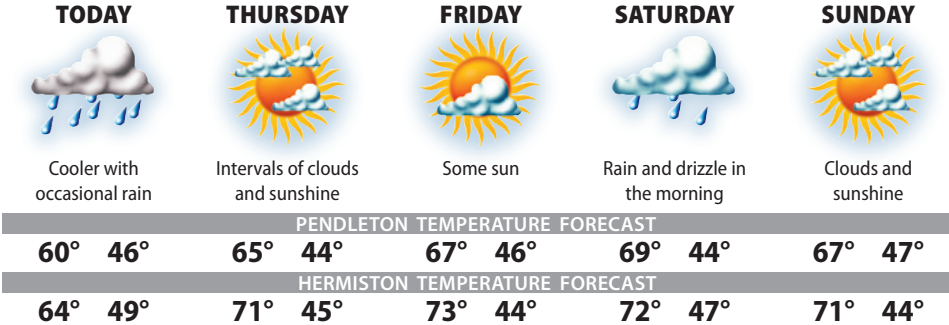
When federal marshals caught Hantman, he had a warrant in Oregon on charges of kidnapping, raping and sodomizing a Japanese exchange student.

Jederberg said Hantman checks a lot of boxes in this case. Senn said something in her gut “just keeps pointing to him.”

But for Jederberg, catching any killer would be the cherry on top. She said the real work is about identifying the young woman and finding her remains. State police shipped the remains to a crematorium in Walla Walla, she said, but after that no one has any paperwork.

“I want to find her final site. I’m just not quite there,” she said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



SATURDAY

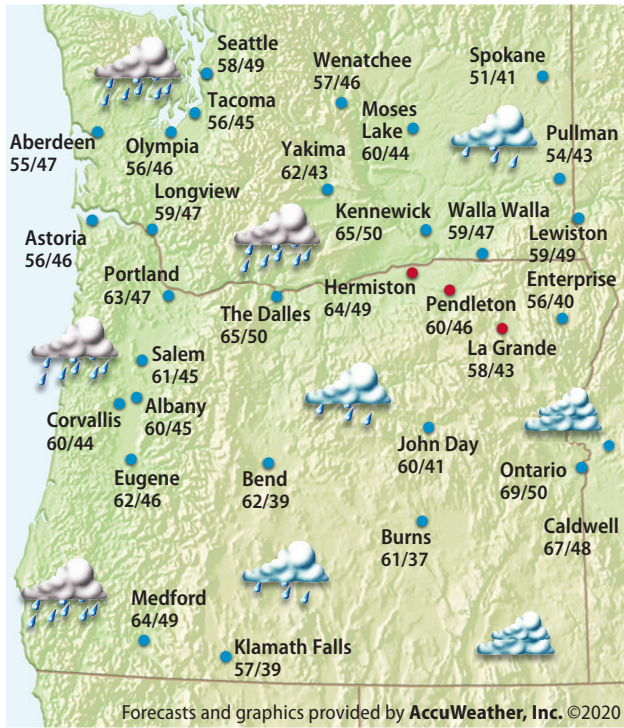
Rain and drizzle in the morning

SUNDAY

Clouds and sunshine

OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

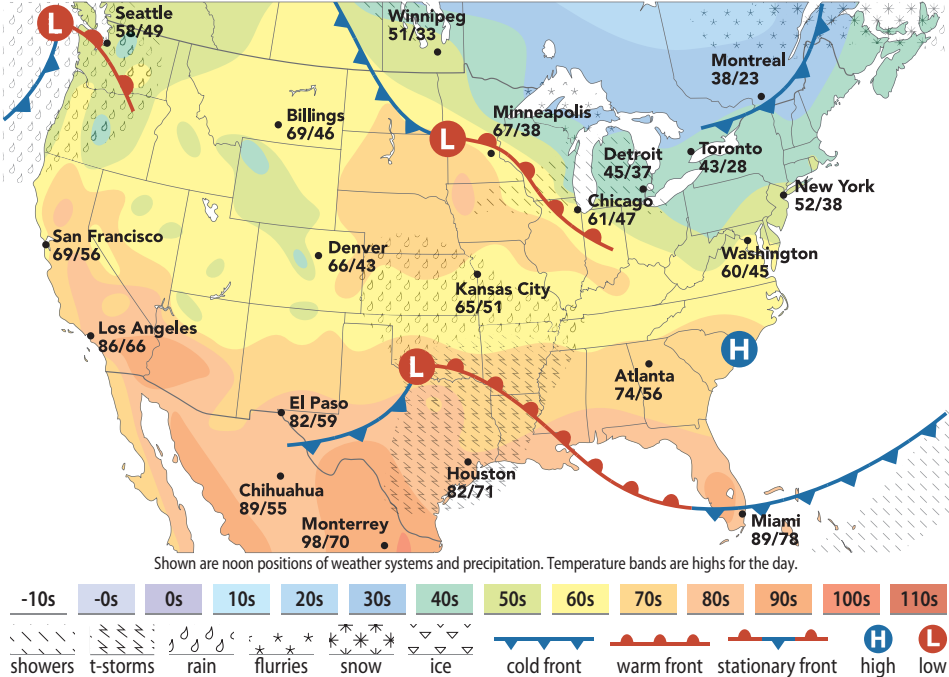
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	70°	51°	
Normals	64°	40°	
Records	92° (1934)	26° (1951)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.03"		
Normal month to date	0.83"		
Year to date	4.98"		
Last year to date	7.76"		
Normal year to date	4.83"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	72°	52°	
Normals	66°	40°	
Records	92° (1934)	20° (1951)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	Trace		
Normal month to date	0.57"		
Year to date	0.48"		
Last year to date	3.88"		
Normal year to date	3.71"		
WINDS (in mph)			
	Today	Thu.	
Boardman	SW 7-14	WSW 10-20	
Pendleton	WSW 6-12	W 10-20	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	5:57 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	7:51 p.m.		
Moonrise today	6:13 a.m.		
Moonset today	7:36 p.m.		
New	First	Full	Last
			
Apr 22	Apr 30	May 7	May 14

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 96° in Dryden, Texas Low 0° in Aspen Springs, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Deputizing commissioners doesn't appear to violate any state laws

By STEVEN MITCHELL
EO Media Group

JOHN DAY — Sheriff Glenn Palmer’s deputization of two county commissioners does not appear to violate state nepotism and conflict of interest laws.

Grant County Commissioners Sam Palmer, the sheriff’s brother, and Jim Hamsher said they have been deputized, though County Clerk Brenda Percy said no record has been filed with her for the appointments.

Glenn Palmer refused to answer questions about the deputies, but Hamsher and Sam Palmer addressed concerns about perceived con-

flicts of interest because the Grant County Court provides oversight of all county departments, including the sheriff’s office, and sets department budgets.

Sam Palmer said he volunteers as a nurse on a tactical team with Undersheriff Zach Mobley and is a search-and-rescue volunteer.

“I do both for free, and under Oregon law (that) presents no actual or perceived conflict of interest,” Sam Palmer said.

State nepotism laws prohibit public employees from directly supervising relatives, but the laws do not apply for someone supervising a volunteer.

Ronald A. Bersin, the executive director of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, said a conflict of interest only exists in the legal sense if there is a private monetary benefit for the party in question. In terms of a conflict on the sheriff’s part, Bersin said a benefit for the sheriff’s office budget would not amount to a private benefit for the sheriff.

“A conflict of interest only exists if there is a private pecuniary benefit to the sheriff,” Bersin said. “Any budget benefit to his office would not qualify as a statutory conflict of interest, because it contains no private pecuniary benefit to the sheriff.”

Washington sheriff won't enforce stay-at-home order

PASCO, Wash. — The sheriff of a county in Eastern Washington state is telling residents that he will not enforce Gov. Jay Inslee’s stay-at-home orders or any guidelines “that infringe on your constitutional rights.”

Franklin County Sheriff J.D. Raymond sent a letter to constituents on Monday in which he said he does believe the coronavirus pandemic is real and “needs to be dealt with appropriately.”

“I believe that social distancing and taking appropriate and proper steps to slow the spread of the virus and control its transmission is important,” Raymond said.

But Raymond, who has been sheriff for six years in the county of about 95,000 people whose biggest city is Pasco, also said he believes that adults are capable of policing themselves and “we have the capability of adjusting our habits to these trying times.”

Sheriffs in Michigan and Wisconsin have also said they won’t enforce social-distancing mandates.

KOMO-TV reported that Raymond thinks local businesses and houses of worship can reopen while adhering to strict social distancing standards, adding he believes residents have been “deprived of

their right to earn and to live.”

“This intrudes on our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and neither I nor my office will enforce any arrests or fines regarding the operation of privately owned businesses,” Raymond said.

Deputies: 1 killed, 1 injured near rooster fighting event

YAKIMA, Wash. — An investigation was launched in Washington state after a man was killed and another was injured in a shooting where authorities believe a rooster fighting event was held near Grandview, deputies said.

Yakima County deputies responded to a report of gunshots Sunday around midnight where up to 200 people were dispersing, leaving about 180 roosters behind, the *Yakima Herald-Republic* reported.

Deputies discovered a man’s body near the scene, and another man was transported to a local hospital, authorities said.

Deputies have not yet identified the body, but an autopsy has been scheduled.

No other information was released.

Anyone with information is urged to call the sheriff’s office.

— Associated Press

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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