

La Grande man describes gunpoint encounter with Sprague

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Gary Hatch said he was just turning off his outside light on Wednesday, May 19, when he heard a tapping at the door.

He lives in the 1700 block of Claire Street, a neighborhood on La Grande's east side that he said tends to be quiet. What he said happened next shattered any solace.

Hatch opened the door, and a man with a sawed-off shotgun burst through.

"When he came here, he just busted the barrel against my forehead and then lowered the barrel to my chest," Hatch recalled. "He said he was going to kill me."

Hatch, 59, said he has a gun, but it was in his bedroom, and nothing prepared him for this encounter.

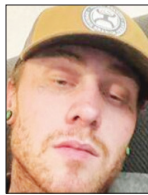
"It had to be one of the scariest moments of my life," Hatch said. "A sawed-off shotgun. And I still have the bruise on my forehead."

The purple semicircle on Hatch's forehead was evident on the late afternoon of May 20. Hatch also said the man at the trigger end of that shotgun was the same man



Phil Wright/The Observer

Gary Hatch, of La Grande, on Thursday, May 20, 2021, demonstrates where he said a man burst into his home and "busted" the end of a shotgun barrel against his forehead. Hatch said the man was Travis James Sprague, 24, of Baker County, who local law enforcement arrested early that day in connection with a shooting and break-in a block from where Hatch lives.



Sprague

police arrested on May 20 in connection with a May 19 shooting and break-in just a block over on East Glacier Street.

Police identified that suspect as Travis James Sprague, 24, of Baker County,

who is now in custody in the Baker County Jail. Sprague had a Baker County warrant for his arrest on numerous felonies, including burglary, attempted kidnapping and assaulting a police officer, the latter charge stemming from

the allegation that Sprague sprayed bear spray in the face of Baker City Police officer Koby Essex on May 14.

Hatch said Sprague wanted the keys to the car in his vehicle port. But that car belongs to a neighbor, Hatch

said, so he didn't have any keys to give.

"It was bad, yeah," he said. Hatch said he saw Sprague's hand tremble as he held the pistol grip of the shotgun, and he feared one shaky finger could end everything for him. So he talked to the man holding his life in the balance.

"I don't know how I did it," Hatch said, "but I talked him down."

Sprague took off, Hatch said, hustled to the house next door and dumped the shotgun in a trash container.

Local police began looking for Sprague in the wake of a 911 call on May 19 at 8:56 p.m., according to a press release from La Grande police, when a person in the 1700 block of East Glacier Street reported they had just been shot at while standing in front of their residence.

While officers were responding, an additional 911 call came from a separate residence in the same block on Glacier. The second caller reported the suspect entered their residence and held them at gunpoint while demanding keys to their vehicle.

La Grande police officers arrived within moments and contacted the callers. Police named Sprague as the suspect and said neither 911 caller knew him.

"A multi-agency, compre-

hensive search commenced immediately," the press release stated. "La Grande police officers and detectives received assistance from Union County sheriff's deputies and K-9 Molly and from Oregon State Police troopers."

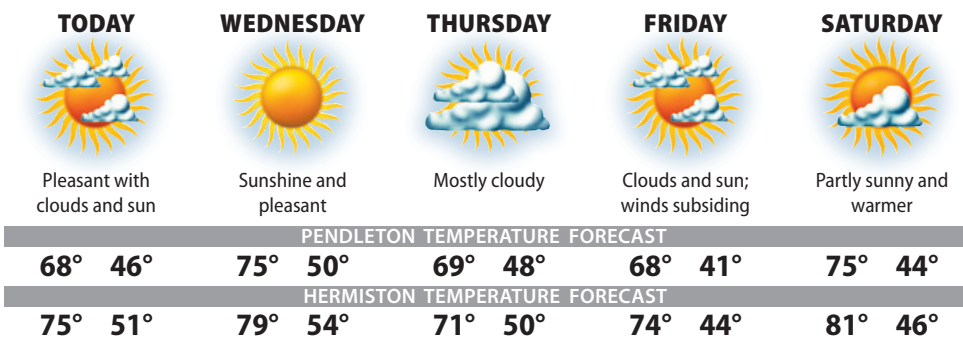
No one was injured at either residence on Glacier, according to police, and the suspect did not make off with the vehicle because it was inside a garage. Police found the keys to the vehicle and "the illegally altered shotgun that had been fired at the first caller" within a short distance, along with other items of evidence.

La Grande police then reported a Union County sheriff's deputy a little after noon on May 20 saw Sprague walking on 22nd Street near East L Avenue, contacted him and told him he was under arrest.

"He attempted to flee, but was quickly subdued and taken into custody without further incident," police reported.

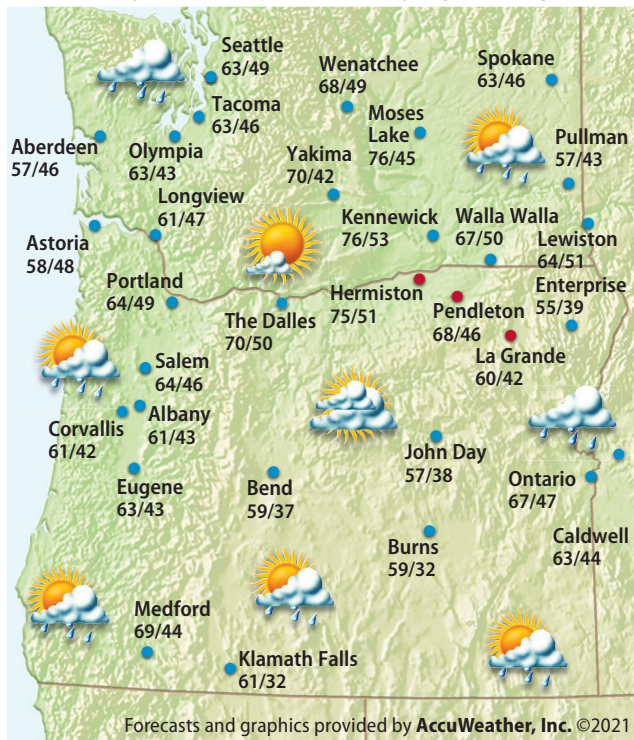
On Tuesday, May 18, the Baker City Police Department issued a public notice alerting residents that Sprague was wanted on multiple charges and was "armed and dangerous." He is accused of threatening someone in a Baker City home on May 14.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



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°	44°
Normals	73°	49°
Records	93° (1928)	34° (1920)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. Trace
Month to date 0.46"
Normal month to date 1.01"
Year to date 4.02"
Last year to date 7.48"
Normal year to date 6.12"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	71°	53°
Normals	75°	49°
Records	97° (1928)	35° (2010)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.13"
Month to date 0.42"
Normal month to date 0.87"
Year to date 1.70"
Last year to date 1.38"
Normal year to date 4.86"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Wed.
Boardman	WSW 8-16	SW 6-12
Pendleton	W 7-14	WSW 4-8

SUN AND MOON

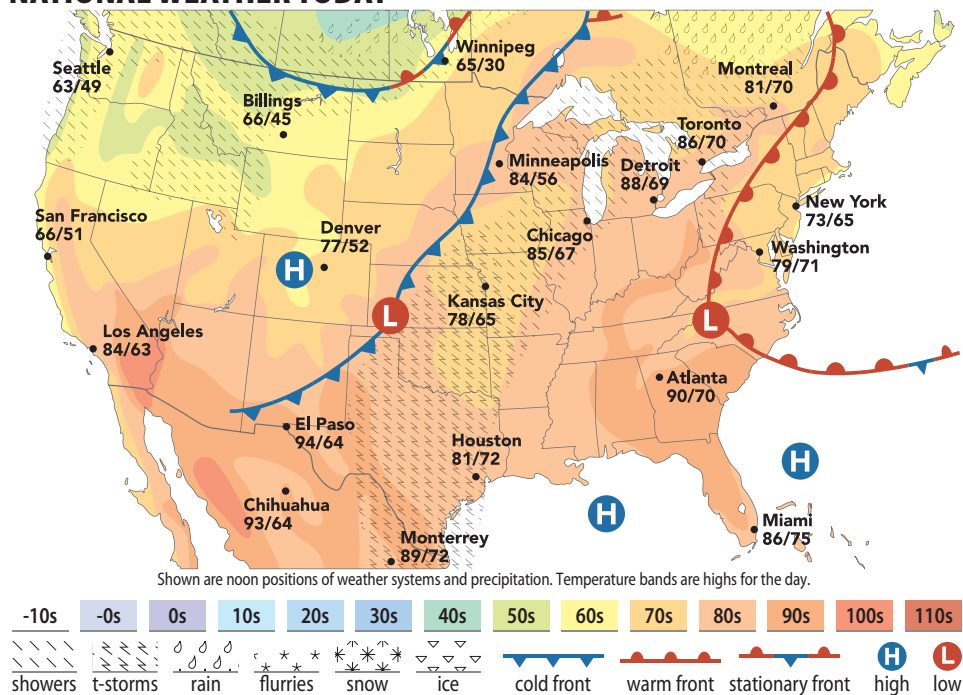
Sunrise today	5:14 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:31 p.m.
Moonrise today	7:58 p.m.
Moonset today	4:47 a.m.

Full Last New First
May 26 June 2 June 10 June 17

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 98° in Thermal, Calif. Low 18° in Bryce Canyon, Utah

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



New shelter now open at MERA

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Exhausted hikers and mountain bikers at the Mount Emily Recreation Area now can recharge in a new building at the edge of Caffeine Trail.

The structure is not a coffee shop but a large lean-to type of building that provides protection from the sun and rain. Forrest Warren of Summerville constructed the structure. He is a retired educator, a farmer and the Imbler Rural Fire Department's assistant chief.

"I thought this might be a nice addition; it seemed like something was needed, so I said, 'Let's give this a try,'" Warren said.

The wooden structure is 12 feet by 16 feet with a metal roof 10 feet high at its top point. Warren said it is designed so visitors will receive shade in the summer because of a hillside to the west and much sun exposure in the winter because it faces south.

"It will provide summer shade and winter sun," Warren said.

The shelter also is positioned so people looking south receive an excellent

view of La Grande.

Warren received funding help for the project from the Blue Mountain Singletrack Trails Club.

"Its support was great, it made it happen," Warren said.

The shelter is 2 miles by trail from the Owsley Canyon Trailhead and where the Caffeine and MERA Loop trails connect. Warren chose the location because it is in the middle of MERA's trail network for non-motorized uses.

"It is super centralized," Warren said.

Jeff Crews, who helped deposit bark chips in the shelter on Saturday, May 22, agreed.

"It is in the middle of everything," Crews said.

Warren said he spent "a long six days" constructing the shelter. He said the help from several volunteers — Bart Barlow, Dave Larman, Micha Anderson, Tom Guthrie, Steve Stanhope, Dusty Fitzgerald and Ed Mosiman — played a big role in the completion of the project.

The shelter has a first aid kit that includes splints and slings. Warren asks those who use the kit to call him so he can replace materials.

"I have been an EMT for 21 years," he said. "I am

an avid believer in being prepared, first aid is huge."

Warren used live edge siding so that it would look natural. Live edge boards are cut to leave one side with the natural curves of the tree. In addition to the shelter's boards, its wood slab seats, which Stanhope cut and provided, also have live edge siding.

Elijah Romer, a member of the Blue Mountain Singletrack Trails Club, said the shelter's live edge siding helps it blend in perfectly.

"Instead of looking like an eyesore it looks like it is meant to be there," Romer said.

Romer also said he is impressed with the structure's overall appearance.

"I told Forrest it is a work of art," Romer said.

Romer said the shelter will serve many functions. He said he plans to take his family there for picnics and may teach outdoor classes there. He also said it will be a great place for people to stay while they wait for help to arrive if they have a bicycle breakdown or such.

Bill Gerst, a member of the trails club network, said the shelter has a reassuring presence.

"It is comforting to know it is there," he said.

IN BRIEF

Amtrak restores service on routes after COVID cutbacks

SEATTLE — In another hopeful sign that the travel industry is bouncing back in Washington state after pandemic-induced lows last year, Amtrak says it will restore daily service on 12 long-distance routes across the country, including two that run through Seattle.

Starting Monday, May 24, the Empire Builder — Chicago to Seattle/Portland — and Coast Starlight — Seattle to Los Angeles — routes will resume daily service, giving passengers on the West Coast more travel options, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported.

The routes previously were operating three times a week due to low ridership

during the pandemic.

The Amtrak Cascades route also will add a second round trip between Seattle and Eugene starting on May 24 and a third round trip on the Seattle to Portland segment will also be added.

Service to stations north of Seattle — Everett, Mount Vernon and Bellingham — remains suspended. Trips to British Columbia on the Cascade line have also not been restored due to the ongoing border closure. Following COVID-19 health protocols set by the state as part of its reopening plan, capacity for train cars has been set to 50%.

The service restoration will also bring back 1,200 furloughed employees.

— 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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