

# Former attorney remembered for love of community

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pete Wells, a longtime Pendleton city attorney and municipal judge, died on Friday, Dec. 31. He was 78.

His wife of more than 52 years, ElRae Wells, said he died from complications from internal head injuries he received last spring. A hemophiliac, ElRae said Wells wasn't expected to live past 21.

ElRae and Wells grew up attending the same church together in Portland, and after the couple got married and Wells graduated from law school, the couple moved to Pendleton in 1977 to take a job at the Corey, Byler and Rew law firm. Wells held a number of positions over his years in Pendleton but one of his most prominent was city

attorney, a role he filled from 1992 to 2011.

Former Pendleton Mayor Phillip Houk remembered Wells as a studious and thorough legal counsel who made sure the city stayed in compliance with the law.

"His office was just not too far from mine, and he was always in there," Houk said. "Always working and trying to gather information. He was pretty good at doing research and background information."

Wells retired as city attorney in 2011 but was immediately appointed to fill the vacant role of judge of the Pendleton Municipal Court.

"I love municipal law and I love working with the city of Pendleton," he said at the time. "I hope I can do a good job doing it."

Wells left the city's employ for good in 2013, but



East Oregonian, File

**Cindy Webb, left, stands next to Pete Wells in this photo from 2017, and the quilt she made with his Relay for Life T-shirts as a raffie item to raise money for the American Cancer Society. Wells, longtime former city attorney for Pendleton and volunteer for Pendleton Relay for Life, died Friday, Dec. 31, 2021, at the age of 78.**

continued to stay active in the community as a volunteer. A survivor of both prostate cancer and squamous cell carcinoma, Wells was a long-

time volunteer at the Pendleton Relay for Life and also donated his time to Pendleton SMART, a children's reading program. And when the Chil-

dren's Museum of Eastern Oregon needed a Santa Claus for an event, Wells donned a red suit to match his already considerable white beard.

He also dabbled in local politics, running as the Democratic nominee for state House District 58. Running as a Democrat in conservative Northeastern Oregon already is an uphill battle, but Wells only jumped into the race after incumbent Republican Rep. Bob Jenson faced a spirited challenge from his right in his own primary. Jenson ended up hanging in the primary, but Wells stayed in the race and Jenson went on to safely win reelection.

Wells is survived by his wife in addition to four children and five grandchildren. While the Wellses may have moved to Pendleton for work, they stayed in Pendleton and made a family because of

what the community had to offer.

ElRae used the Round-Up as an example, saying local volunteers put their differences aside each year to put on the world-class rodeo.

"Overall, Pendleton is a caring community," she said. "If we could bottle up what Pendleton has, particularly now, and spread it to the country, our whole country would be a whole lot better."

She turned to an old quote from actor Jimmy Stewart about how she wanted Wells to be remembered: "As someone who believed in hard work, love of country, love of family and love of community."

ElRae would amend Stewart's statement to include "love of God" when talking about Wells, but otherwise, the best summary of Wells' life already had been said.

# Transgender woman who killed girlfriend sues Oregon for gender discrimination

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

PORTLAND — A former Echo man serving time for killing his girlfriend in 2014 is suing the state of Oregon for failing to provide protection in prison after he transitioned to female.

Zera Lola Zombie, 37, is a transgender woman serving time for manslaughter for the bludgeoning death of Samantha Brown. Zombie was Daniel Lee Smith at the time of the killing. She changed her name in July 2020 along with changing her gender to female, according to state court records. She filed the lawsuit Sept. 10, 2021, in the U.S. District Court of Oregon.

Zombie in the 18-page complaint alleged she "suffered ongoing harassment and verbal, mental, and psychological abuse by both prisoners and (Oregon Department of Corrections) staff as a result of her sex, gender and gender identity" while she was in custody at Oregon State Correctional Institution and then Oregon

State Penitentiary. The lawsuit also alleges other inmates physically and sexually assaulted her and staff did not protect her from the attacks.

The lawsuit names the state as the lead defendant, plus numerous correctional officers and other staff and Josh Highberger, superintendent of Oregon State Correctional Institution, and Brandon Kelly, superintendent of Oregon State Penitentiary.

The harassment and assaults began in November 2019, according to the pleading, when a male officer at Oregon State Correctional Institution strip-searched Zombie in front of a male inmate. The abuse escalated from there, and on Christmas Day 2019 staff denied she could have toilet paper for bathroom hygiene. The lawsuit claims she uses her socks to clean herself and had to dispose of them in a biohazard bag.

Sometime after that the Department of Corrections transferred Zombie to the state pen. There, she

claims, another inmate, Allen Howard, physically assaulted her on Oct. 9, 2020, and staff ignored the assault.

Zombie also claims OSP staff housed her from March 2020 until June 2021 with Mikal Shabazz. Court records show he is serving at least 40 years for convictions in 1997 in Multnomah County for a slew of crimes, including robbery, assault, sodomy and first-degree rape. Zombie claims Shabazz physically and sexually assaulted her, sometimes on a daily basis. She reported the assaults to prison staff at least twice, according to the lawsuit, and they did nothing to protect her.

Other inmates also assaulted and harassed Zombie, the pleading states, and she now suffers "psychological trauma, anxiety and mental anguish as a result of the physical, mental and sexual abuse she has experienced" while in the custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Zombie did not specify how much she is suing the state for. Rather, she wants

a jury trial and compensation for physical pain and suffering, emotional distress, economic losses and an award for punitive damages, plus court costs and attorney fees and "other and further relief as the court may deem just and equitable."

Oregon Department of Corrections online inmate information shows she is serving her sentence at Snake River Correctional Institution, Ontario. But in the lawsuit she claimed she was at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the only prison in Oregon that houses female inmates.

Attorneys John Burgess and Katharine Edwards with the Portland firm Law Offices of Daniel Snyder represent Zombie and filed the lawsuit on her behalf. Judge Ann L. Aiken is presiding over the case and set Tuesday, Jan. 11, as the day to complete discovery and Feb. 10 for other filings, including a Joint Alternate Dispute Resolution Report.

The state as of Jan. 4 has yet to file a response to the lawsuit.

# Pendleton spends \$500k on vehicle for drone range

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — One of the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range's latest purchases is a half-million dollar piece of equipment.

The Pendleton City Council in December gave the test range the green light to spend \$500,000 to purchase a mobile command center from Skyward, a subsidiary of telecom giant Verizon. According to a staff report, the command center was custom-built for Verizon but would have been much more expensive if bought new by the city. Drone range customers have used mobile command centers in the past to give them an operational base while working in remote areas.

During the city council's meeting Tuesday, Jan. 4, Darryl Abling, the range manager, said there was high demand for these types of vehicles on the range. The airport already rents out two command centers to Insitu, a subsidiary of Boeing that runs testing operations in Pendleton.

In the staff report, Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman wrote that Verizon's vehicle will enhance safety at the airport because it could use the company's cellular network to increase awareness of other aircraft in the sky.

While \$500,000 is a fairly big line item for many city budgets, Chrisman assured the council that it would pay for itself.

"This is not a CARES Act eligible purchase," he wrote, referring to a previous round of federal COVID-19 aid. "However, acquisition of the (mobile command center) will bring with it new range contracts that will generate new revenue in excess of the (vehicle's) purchase price within the next 12 months."

The (vehicle) will more than pay for itself in 12 months, and should continue to generate airport revenue for many years."

While the equipment was custom-built in Montana for use by Verizon in its own drone testing, Abling said the vehicle is easily adaptable and is a "turnkey" asset for the range to offer to its customers.

Even as previous tenants such as Airbus and PAE have moved on in years past, the drone range continues to attract high-profile customers. Chrisman wrote that range staff anticipate Verizon will be a long-term customer at the range and Amazon recently confirmed that it was doing some testing in Pendleton as well.

And while Airbus has long moved on from Project Vahana, its attempt to prototype an unmanned passenger vehicle, a memento of its time in Pendleton has remained. Abling said Airbus recently donated its model of Project Vahana to the UAS range and the vehicle will go on display at the range.

# Northeastern Oregon sees \$22 million in reimbursements for devastating 2020 floods

By ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — Oregon State Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced nearly \$22 million in grant money would be disbursed to Northeastern Oregon.

The funds will be used to help reimburse the costs associated with the historic flooding that occurred in February 2020, when nearly 400 homes were destroyed or damaged by the torrential rain, mostly in Umatilla County.

The total cost of the damage was estimated to be more than \$48 million, with well more than \$26 million in removing debris, emergency protective measures and repairing roads, bridges and public buildings, according to the Oregon Office of Emergency Management.

"We're prepared to take full advantage of the funding, and we've got projects

in the works for development," said Tom Strandberg, public information officer with the Oregon Department of Transportation for Eastern Oregon.

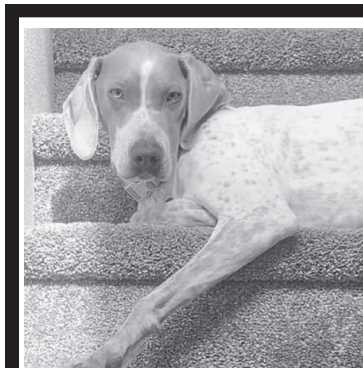
Exactly \$11 million was earmarked for Northeast Oregon specifically, citing the severe storms and increased snowmelt that caused flooding, landslides, sinks, downed trees and erosion that had resulted in damage to critical transportation infrastructure, according to the grants the Federal Highway Administration approved.

As well, \$9 million was approved for projects repairing damage to major highways across Oregon that experienced similar damage in January 2021. A final \$1.7 million was appropriated for the Umatilla National Forest to repair roads and trails that were damaged by floods in the winter 2020.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Nate Fuller, left, and Archie Morrow await rescue on the roof of a home in Thorn Hollow on Feb. 6, 2020. The pair was stranded when they attempted to rescue the elderly couple stuck in the house as waters from the Umatilla River began to rise. According to a family member of one of those stranded, all four people were rescued by 9:40 p.m. on Feb. 6, 2020. Northeastern Oregon is getting \$22 million in federal grants to help reimburse the costs associated with the historic flooding.**



**LOST DOG!**  
"OAKLEY"  
HERMISTON AREA  
\$500 REWARD

**HELP!! Our dog got away from the vet and is now lost. She has now traveled from Minnehaha & has now been spotted on E Highland & Loop Rd in Hermiston. She is scared and doesn't want to approach anyone. If seen please keep eyes on her and call immediately!**

Please call  
**541-561-5588 or 541-561-4860**

## CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT CLASS

SATURDAY JANUARY 15TH

Hermiston Ranch & Home

9AM CLASS

Multi-State \$80

Oregon Included No Fee

Oregon Only \$45

MULTI-STATE

Valid 35-States, including Washington

Shaun Curtain 360-921-2071

or email: ShaunCurtain@gmail.com | www.ShaunCurtain.com

Follow us on Facebook!

AT&T Internet

FEEL THE SPEED, EVEN AT PEAK TIMES.

\$45

- Get strong, fast Wi-Fi to work and play throughout your home.\*
- No annual contract.
- Power multiple devices at once—everyone can enjoy their own screen.
- Over 99% reliability.

Contact your local DIRECTV dealer  
888-486-0359

\*Internet speeds and availability subject to change. Actual speeds may vary based on network conditions. ©2021 DIRECTV. All rights reserved. DIRECTV, the logo and other marks are trademarks of DIRECTV, LLC. All other marks are trademarks of their respective owners.