

State trooper comes to the rescue with pizza for hungry teens

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

PRAIRIE CITY — A broken-down school bus, hungry teenagers and a concerned Oregon State Police trooper all crossed paths on the night of Feb. 11, and the outcome was a win for all involved.

Trooper William Blood, working out of OSP's John Day outpost, was on patrol that Friday when he came across a disabled Union High School bus on the side of Highway 26 in Prairie City and approached to check on the occupants, who turned out to be the school's boys and girls basketball teams.

The engine was running, so the bus had heat, but Blood learned the basketball players would be stuck in the area for some time as their replacement bus made its way to their location from Union. He also learned the students riding the bus were hungry and no restaurants or convenience stores were open in the immediate area.

Blood drove the 13 miles to John Day and found lights on at The Outpost Pizza, Pub & Grill, but the establishment was closed. Then he saw a woman working inside and knocked on the door.

After he explained the situation, the woman agreed to turn the ovens back on and make five large pizzas for the stranded teens. Blood paid for the pizzas — two pepperonis, one Hawaiian, a meat lover's and a combo — out of his own pocket and delivered the food to the hungry youths back in Prairie City.

Blood has worked in law enforcement for 20 years. His first posting was as a police officer in Cornelius, southwest of Portland, in 2002. From there, he made his way to the Hillsboro Police Department in late 2009. Oregon State Police hired him in November 2018, and he's been stationed in John Day since early 2019.

A first for all involved

Blood has a son on the John Day basketball team, and on Feb. 11 he combined all of his breaks for the day into one to go watch him play against the Union team that evening. Following the game, Blood returned to work and spotted the broken-down bus while on patrol in Prairie City.



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Oregon State Police trooper William Blood stands beside his patrol car on Tuesday, April 5, 2022. OSP recognized Blood for helping a busload of stranded teenagers in Prairie City.

"I saw the bus at probably around 9:30 p.m., and the game was long over by then," Blood said.

The bus was parked beside the minimart, and Blood didn't think anything of it at first.

"I thought it was a Prairie City bus coming back into town dropping kids off," he said.

But after seeing it was a Union bus, he realized it likely was having mechanical trouble. He turned around and talked to the occupants to find out what was going on.

He learned it would be two-and-a-half hours before their replacement bus would arrive from Union. The Union girls team had played the Grant Union Lady Prospectors early that night and had gotten dinner at the Dairy Queen in John Day during the boys' game. The boys, however, hadn't had anything to eat yet. It was this information that pushed Blood into action and sent him to The Outpost.

Shirley Taylor was one of the people working at The Outpost that night. She said she and another employee were cleaning the restaurant after closing when Blood knocked on the door and asked if

there was anything they could do for the bus full of hungry student athletes in Prairie City.

"He explained what the dilemma was and that these kids were going to be there for a while," Taylor said.

Taylor and her co-worker swung into action, firing up the ovens and making five large pizzas for the stranded youths.

"We've helped out a lot of different people over the years," Taylor said, "but nothing like this."

Fortunately, Taylor added, Blood's timing was just right — if he'd shown up much later, nobody would've been at the restaurant to help the kids. "It was probably 15, 20 minutes before he missed us," she said.

Blood said it didn't take much convincing to get The Outpost crew to make the pizzas.

"They were happy to do this, and I give them all the thanks in the world for doing that because they certainly didn't have to," Blood said. "They had everything cleaned up and they got it all dirty again."

Union High School Athletic Director Chris Dunlap wasn't at the event, but he was notified the bus

was having issues. As an athletic director, he said, he was thinking of the students and their safety.

"When I hear that, the first thought is are the kids going to be OK?," he said. "Is the bus running and does it have heat?"

The team planned to stop in Baker City to get a bite to eat on their way home, but the bus breakdown derailed that. Dunlap called Blood's actions a "lifesaver" and said what he did "goes a long ways showing small town community and support. It reassured me that people do care about each other and take care of each other, especially in Eastern Oregon."

Like Taylor, Dunlap said he's never heard of anything like this happening.

"I've heard of maybe checking on somebody or running to make a phone call for somebody," he said. "Never somebody to turn around and say, 'Hey, those kids are hungry,' and then find a business that is open, get enough pizzas to feed everybody and then pay for that themselves. I've never heard of it, and I've been around athletics for a while."

Recognition for coming through

Dunlap said the students finally made it back to Union sometime around 1 a.m. Blood's actions were met with relief and gratitude from the coaches and went a long way toward making the mechanical issues the teams were suffering through manageable.

Dunlap said he never got to speak with Blood personally, but the trooper's actions speak to the nature of people in Eastern Oregon.

"We have rivalries and we want our teams to win, but we still take care of each other when the time comes," Dunlap said. "We separate those rivalries for the sake of humanity."

Blood said he felt like a "rock star" when the kids saw him pull the pizzas from the passenger seat of his patrol vehicle.

"I stepped onto the bus and I honestly couldn't tell you (how but) the pizzas were gone," he said.

Following the pizza delivery, Blood said, one of the Union basketball players told his teammates to get out of his way because he was "going to give that man a hug," adding "that started the long line of hugs from the kids."

Blood said his own experiences as a high school athlete aroused his sympathies for the stranded basketball team.

"I played sports in high school," he said, "and I know what it is like to be in a small town where nothing is open and you're hungry."

Blood's supervisors with the Oregon State Police also took notice of the act of kindness.

For his deeds that night, OSP awarded Blood a certificate of recognition and two challenge coins, one from OSP's John Day outpost and the other from the agency's Ontario, Burns and John Day area command.

Lt. Mark Duncan presented Blood with the challenge coins and certificate in a brief ceremony at the John Day OSP outpost on March 30, noting the challenge coins are not handed out often and should be held in high regard.

Blood "went above and beyond, showing compassion," Duncan said, and "represents the Oregon State Police and their core values well."



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