

STANFIELD

Students enjoy a day of service

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Stanfield Secondary School freshman Lucas McCann and many of his classmates skipped school April 22.

But they had a reason. The students were involved in various service projects throughout Stanfield, from meeting with seniors to cleaning up trash along the highway to clearing weeds from the cemetery and more.

Meanwhile, elementary students were on a walking field trip through town, passing out “thank you” letters to businesses.

McCann said service to his community has a special meaning to him.

He is the grandson of Thomas McCann, Stanfield’s mayor until his death April 16 at the age of 84. He was a police officer, a firefighter and more. As such, public service is a family tradition, the student said.

“He was great,” the younger McCann said about his grandfather. “He contributed to so many things, he was amazing.”

McCann said he has “a start” in public service, following in the footsteps of his his grandfather.



Jaelynn Wright, Stanfield secondary school junior, poses for a photo April 22, 2022, at Bard Park in Stanfield. She and other students participated in community service projects to make up a snow day.

Blaine Braithwaite, Stanfield Secondary School principal, explained the day off for students came about because his school had a snow day earlier in the year for which it had to make up. Attendance on make up days, however, is poor.

“We thought we would do something different,” he said. “So we planned something that was engaging and fun.”

School administration came up with a day of service. School leadership spoke with

district leaders, who coordinated with city government.

In all, around 300 students were involved — roughly 250 from the secondary school and 50 from the elementary school.

Jaelynn Wright, secondary school junior, participated. She said she put together kits for a homeless shelter.

“It was really fun,” she said. “It’s good to give back.”

She said she had never been part of such a large group of people who were

serving the community, but she does volunteer on her own.

Students Jagot Singh and Bodie Braithwaite helped spruce up their schools track. They said the school had scheduled a track meet in the following week. As they were intending to participate in the meet, they would be able to enjoy their work then.

“It’s super nice to be doing this,” Singh said.

They both said they have served the community in other ways, and they look forward to doing more in the future.

“It was enriching to us and to everyone,” Bodie Braithwaite said about the event.

Ethan Robertson, freshman, also said he felt great about his work. He pulled weeds and collected them from a street.

In addition to doing something good for his community, he was able to enjoy time with his friends. Like others, he said he would be happy with more work.

Bodie Braithwaite said this was the first time his school has done this event, but “it won’t be the last.”

Principal Braithwaite said the service say would be an annual event from here on.

California man goes to federal prison for role in Eastern Oregon meth trade

East Oregonian

PORTLAND — A California man who was part of a methamphetamine trafficking ring in Eastern Oregon and beyond is going to federal prison.

The federal court in Portland on Wednesday, April 27, sentenced Noel Lomas Murillo, 34, to five years in prison and another three years of supervised release.

According to the press release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office of Oregon, the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, Oregon State Police and the FBI in November 2017 began investigating a drug trafficking organization led by Murillo’s brother, Abel Lomas Murillo, 28, of Weston.

The investigation revealed that, as early as July 2017, Noel Murillo transported drugs from Vacaville, California, to Klamath Falls where a

courier would deliver them to his brother. Abel Murillo also made multiple trips to Medford to pick up drugs and transport them to Morrow and Umatilla counties for distribution.

An OSP trooper in January 2018 stopped one of the Abel Murillo’s couriers, Luis Alberto Navarro, 33, of Boardman, in a vehicle near Klamath Falls en route to Umatilla County. A search of the vehicle revealed 11 concealed packages containing more than 8 kilograms of methamphetamine.

In early May 2018, as the investigation continued, Abel Murillo enlisted another courier, Noel Ponce Villegas, 28, also of Boardman, to drive meth from Medford to Boardman. Investigators surveilled Abel Murillo as he traveled from Umatilla County to a storage locker in Medford and loaded a trailer pulled by his pickup.

Abel Murillo paid Villegas to drive his truck and trailer while he followed him to minimize his own risk. In the early morning hours of May 6, 2018, investigators from BENT, state police and FBI stopped Abel Murillo and Villegas near mile marker 102 on Interstate 84.

Investigators seized 42 packages of methamphetamine, 36 of which were concealed in the false bottom of a propane tank, according to the press release. The packages contained approximately 17.6 kilograms of methamphetamine. Later the same day, investigators executed a search warrant at Abel Murillo’s residence, seizing 29 firearms and body armor. Pursuant to a separate search warrant, law enforcement seized another 10 pounds of meth and five firearms in a Medford storage locker Abel Murillo had visited earlier in the weekend.

A federal grand jury in Portland on Dec. 19, 2019, returned a two-count superseding indictment charging Noel Murillo with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute and distribute methamphetamine and possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. He pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge on Sept. 28, 2021.

Navarro in May 2018 pleaded guilty to possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. His sentencing is May 23.

Abel Murillo in April 2019 pleaded guilty to conspiring to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine. He is serving almost 20 years in federal prison for the crime.

Villegas in April 2019 pleaded guilty to possessing with intent to distribute methamphetamine. He received a sentence in December 2020 of time served and three years’ supervised release.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Morrow County deputy, K-9 earn praise

HEPPNER — Morrow County sheriff’s deputy Colleen Nuebert and her partner, K-9 deputy Telly, caught two suspects in consecutive days, earning the praise of District Attorney Justin Nelson.

Nuebert and Telly on Tuesday, April 26, caught Darwin David Smith, 34, as he tried to get away.

According to the press release from Nelson, Smith refused Nuebert’s commands to stop. The deputy then released Telly to assist in the capture of Smith.

“K-9 deputy Telly was able to grab onto Mr. Smith’s pants leg and allow deputy Nuebert to take him into custody,” the press release stated.

The next day, the sheriff office responded to a service call at the the Port of Morrow Laydown Yard for a possible theft in progress. Nuebert deployed Telly to search the area for any hidden suspects.

Telly found a scent and followed that scent to the location of an individual hiding in a field, Nelson reported. The individual stood up and bolted.

The man didn’t stop even after Nuebert warned him she would release Telly. So away the K-9 went and

prevented the man from escaping.

The sheriff’s office identified the fleeing suspect as Robert David Clark, 41.

Smith and Clark are in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton. Smith faces charges of felony fleeing and felon in possession of a weapon, while Clark is looking at charges of first-degree criminal trespass and unlawful entry into a motor vehicle, the press release stated.

“The Morrow County District Attorney Office

has always been a strong supporter of the Morrow County Sheriff Office K-9 program,” Nelson said in the release. “Without the help of K-9 deputy Telly and deputy Nuebert, I do not believe these subjects would have been arrested or these cases resolved.”

Nelson also thanked the duo for helping keep the community safe.

—EO Media Group

Helix voters consider \$1M bond for pool

By WYATT TEGGINS
East Oregonian

HELIX — Helix voters in the May election will decide on a \$1 million bond measure to help build a new public pool.

The Helix Park & Recreation District board held an open house Wednesday, April 27, at the Helix Fire Station to bring attention to Measure 30-151. Anderson Pools provided a \$1.5 million estimate for a new pool, covering the demolition of the old structure and pump house and the construction of the new facility.

According to Helix Parks Chairperson Emily Smith, the last time the Helix pool saw remodeling was 1976, when the city installed the current gunite pool.

The Helix Community Pool is the oldest public pool in Umatilla County, dating back to the early 20th century when locals hand-dug a dirt pool that would be plastered in several years later. Helix locals emphasized in the meeting how much this amenity means to them.

But Emily Smith, head of the Helix recreation board, said the pool has problems.

“Every year, we have to repair the old pool, and every year we just cross our fingers and hope it opens,” she said. Smith explained there

wasn’t a lot to do in Helix, and the pool is a major hotspot for the community throughout the summer. Fellow board member Tom Winn backed that assessment.

“There is nothing else for the youth in Helix, and roughly 75% of us use the pool every year,” he said.

Winn assured the public the cost of maintaining the new structure would be the same as the old.

“The pool runs on a \$40,000 yearly budget,” Winn emphasized, “covering maintenance, lifeguards and power to run the pool.”

Winn said he is hopeful the new structure will be more energy-efficient, which will help cut down yearly costs of maintaining the facility.

The bond would raise taxes in the district by 37 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value per year. For example, a family who has a home with an assessed value of \$175,000 would pay \$64.75 per year for the facility.

The recreation district will still need to find an additional \$500,000 if the bond passes, to complete the project. Winn, who is in charge of donations, said funds for the project already have surpassed \$40,000 and he is hopeful grants soon will come.

The election is May 17.

AWS Think Big Space coming to Hermiston

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston is the next local community in line for an Amazon Web Services Think Big Space.

The Hermiston School District in a press release Tuesday, April 26, announced plans for a collaboration between AWS and the district to “provide a dedicated space for students and educators to explore innovative and imaginative ideas through interactive hands-on technical education and cloud computing training.”

“This AWS Think Big Space will provide enhanced classrooms for students in grades 3-14, grounded in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics disciplines,” according to the district.

Tricia Mooney, school district superintendent said in the press release “the horizon is guaranteed to look different” for Hermiston students

entering the workforce in the years ahead.

“Our partnership with AWS for the Think Big Space will give Hermiston students a step ahead, as they learn to look at problems in more innovative and imaginative ways,” she said.

The district will oversee the space, partnering with Blue Mountain Community College and other private sponsors.

The AWS Think Big Space will be in the east annex of Columbia Hall across from the Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center. Construction is scheduled to begin soon, with the space expected to open by the start of the 2022-23 school year.

Think Big Spaces also are in operation at the Port of Morrow’s SAGE Center in Boardman and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation’s After School Center near Pendleton.