

PENDLETON

‘Little Street People’ rise downtown

By YASSER MARTE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The intersection of Southeast Court Avenue and First Street in downtown Pendleton on June 25 held a surprise for locals and passersby — rock sculptures.

Dozens of the figures were standing in the new decorative rock beds where the Oregon Department of Transportation has been improving curbs. One man is responsible for the creations — Neal Correa.

Correa in 2015 built large boulder sculptures in Hermiston. At the time, he was battling legal troubles for theft and burglary. His father died from kidney failure and as the issues accumulated, Correa sunk into financial hardship and became homeless.

Still, the rock work caught the attention of the East Oregonian. But that also led to some hardship for Correa when he missed a court date and violated his probation.

“I missed it because I was getting interviewed and I thought they would be OK with that,” he said. “They arrested me right away.”

State court records show Correa in 2019 pleaded guilty in Umatilla County circuit court to third-degree assault of a 10-year-old boy.



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Neal Correa poses for a photo June 28, 2022, near some of the rock sculptures he made in downtown Pendleton. He said he plans to return to the art world and build more structures.

His three years probation for the crime ends in September. State court records also show Correa completed group work on anger management, alcohol education and relapse prevention as part of his probation.

Correa said he worked to get his life together. His grandmother became a mentor and a shining light through his journey.

“She taught me how to paint to Bob Ross when I was a kid,” he said. “She passed away a couple of weeks ago at 102 years old.”

After his grandmother’s funeral, Correa wanted to honor her memory. He decided to get out and begin

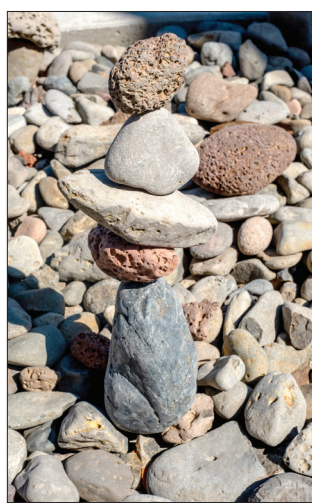
working on rock sculptures again.

“This is something that has helped me cope with that,” he said.

Correa manages to use different mediums with each sculpture, such as sticks and feathers, to help bring out different characteristics in his work. Correa studied architecture at the University of Oregon and has an understanding for balancing structures.

“If I had to put a name on this it would be ‘Little Street People and Their Families Downtown,’” Correa said as he sat outside of Hamley Cafe.

Correa claimed he spent



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

One of Neal Correa’s rock sculptures stands June 27, 2022, in downtown Pendleton.

about 20 hours building his sculptures, which has drawn the attention of some folks around town.

“This guy is very talented and I don’t think he knows he’s talented,” said Jerry Nicholson, Pendleton resident, who was pressure-cleaning the outside steps of the new Pendleton Hotel.

“A lot of people have been gathering for this. We have several a day and several at night,” he said. “It’s amazing because (Correa) just does it and then just disappears.”

Correa said he plans to return to the art world and wants to begin working on an art show.

Fire guts Pilot Rock home



Yellow caution tape on Sunday, July 3, 2022, stretches across the front access to what remains of the house at 531 S.W. Birch St., Pilot Rock, after a fire July 2 gutted the home. The fire erupted around 5 p.m. Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley reported his department and Umatilla Tribal Fire responded to assist Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District with the blaze. Pendleton fire received the call for help at 5:04 p.m. and arrived at 5:17 p.m. Firefighters contained the blaze at 5:33 p.m. Three occupants escaped and one dog was rescued and sent to a veterinarian. The damage to the house comes to \$100,000, according to Critchley, the cause of the fire remains under investigation, and the Red Cross is aiding the people who lived in the home.

Phil Wright/East Oregonian

Amazon Think Big Space to open in Umatilla

East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Umatilla High School is getting its own Amazon Think Big Space.

Umatilla School District on June 29 announced in a press release a collaboration between Amazon Web Services Inc. and the high school’s robotics program is resulting in a revamp of the space the program now uses.

The robotics program aims to spark student interest in STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics — and the new educational lab is going to support that effort with a “stimulating learning environment” that helps expand the “school’s interactive hands-on technical education, cloud computing training and advanced manufacturing technology offerings.”

This is the third AWS Think Big Space in Eastern Oregon and the second in Umatilla County. Amazon opened its first Think Big Space in the county in April at Nixyaawii Community School on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Umatilla School Board Chair Jon Lorence in the press release said it was “wonderful to see this investment from AWS in our school and community. We’re excited to get started on the design and construction work, which we expect to begin this summer so we can open in January 2023, just in time for the Umatilla Robotics season kick-off and game challenge reveal.”

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe explained this Think Big Space is unique because Umatilla robotics students took the lead in creating the initial concept, project design “and every step of the grant application process for the



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Darryl Joe McKay, 7, on April 6, 2022, inspects one of the drones he will learn to fly in the new Think Big Space, funded by Amazon Web Services and inside the former Nixyaawii Community School. Umatilla High School is next up for a Think Big Space in Umatilla County.

space.” The team ensured AWS understood the full spectrum of the K-12 robotics and STEAM offerings and articulated its vision for a revamped space, which is to have a strong focus on advanced manufacturing technologies.

This new training lab, she continued, “will provide industry grade opportunities for Umatilla students so they can take their robotics work to a new level.”

Sophomore Avery Guti-

errez was one of the students who assisted with the grant application process. She is the junior project manager for Team Confidential, the school’s robotics team. She said it was a thrill to help with the grant and honor to receive it.

“I’m excited to see what we can do as a team in this space,” she said in the press release, “and what opportunities we can hopefully offer to the community as we learn to use our equipment

and teach others.”

The AWS Think Big Space is an AWS InCommunities program. Cornelia Robinson, global lead of inclusion and outreach for AWS InCommunities, in the press release said Amazon is committed to making a positive impact in the communities where its employees live and work.

“We are proud of our presence in Eastern Oregon and to have the opportunity to support our neighbors who share our passion for STEM education,” according to Robinson. “I hope this AWS Think Big Space at Umatilla High School allows its students to not only ‘think big’ but to also dream big. I can’t wait to see what they will create.”

Umatilla County District Attorney’s Office charges kidnapping suspect

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Tillamook man Pendleton police arrested June 25 for kidnapping a woman and fleeing in a high-speed chase now faces official criminal charges.

The Umatilla County District Attorney’s Office on Friday, July 1, charged Charles Frederick Seeling, 34, with eight counts in all, including felonies for second-degree kidnapping, coercion and fleeing police and for misdemeanor assault. The charges stem from a June 28 grand jury indictment.

The district attorney’s office also notified the court it would seek to enhance any sentencing based on several factors, including the “crime involved deliberate cruelty to the victim” and Seeling already was on supervised release.

State court records show Seeling is serving three years of probation in Clatsop County on charges of unlawful use of a weapon and fleeing police, and he violated that probation in March and April when he checked himself out of a detoxification center and then did not check in with his probation officer. Seeling also has a felony theft case pending against him in Tillamook County.

According to Pendleton police, emergency dispatchers June 25 at 10:11 a.m. received several 911 calls from witnesses at Walmart, 2203 S.W. Court Ave., reporting a female screaming for help in a vehicle in the parking lot.

Witnesses reported about what appeared to be an abduction, as a male took a female by force and sped out of the parking lot.

Witnesses also provided a good vehicle description and location of travel, according to the press release. While officers were responding, the female in the vehicle called 911, screaming she had an emergency before the line was disconnected. The female called again screaming for help and stated her boyfriend was hitting her before the call was disconnected again. She called 911 a third time and said the suspect had a hammer and she was in fear he was going to use it against her.

During the calls, the victim was able to provide updates about their locations. During the last call, she said they were approaching the Interstate 84 eastbound milepost 213 on-ramp.

Officers tried to stop the vehicle on I-84 near Exit 216, but the suspect led police on a high-speed chase on South Market Road for about 10 minutes before abandoning the vehicle and victim at the end of Marsh Hawk Lane, where he then barricaded himself in a barn.

Police were able to arrest him at 10:59 a.m. and reported he was smoking fentanyl in the barn.

Medical personnel attended to the victim and did not take her to a hospital. Umatilla County Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer has set Seeling’s bail at \$380,000. He remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Pendleton launches communications survey

PENDLETON — The city of Pendleton is launching a survey to evaluate how the city communicates with residents and visitors. And participants can win one of four \$25 gift cards.

The city in a press release Friday, July 1, announced the Pendleton Communications Survey 2022 is to help gauge conditions and guide communication decisions, working toward Pendleton City Council Goal No. 4: Improve communication between the community and the city council/mayor’s office/city of Pendleton.

Now live, the 20-ques-

tion survey asks participants to provide feedback on city communication, including via the city website and social media pages. Participants will be able to share thoughts and give feedback, according to the press release, and the answers are confidential.

The survey is open through Aug. 15. Those who complete the survey on or before July 31 and choose to provide contact information will be entered into a drawing for one of four \$25 gift cards.

The city of Pendleton Communications Survey 2022 is available at www.surveymonkey.com/r/FQGXM6. Hard copies of the survey are available on request at Pendleton City Hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.

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