

Oregon News

Hammonds fly home to Burns via private jet

By Maxine Bernstein
The Oregonian

BURNS — Harney County ranchers Dwight Hammond Jr. and Steven Hammond, fresh from federal prison following a pardon by President Donald Trump, stepped off a private jet Wednesday morning at Burns Municipal Airport to a crush of well-wishers and family.

"There's no way we can thank everybody enough," Dwight Hammond said with his arm around his wife, Susie.

The crowd clapped and let out a chorus of "welcome home" and "we love you."

People started congregating at the airport several hours earlier with American flags, signs and stickers handed out and slapped on cars reading: "Trump freed the Hammonds! He is our president!"

"We supported them from the beginning and today's a big day," said resident Talia Ward, who joined the crowd with daughter Dakota, 9, and son Tyson, 6.

The father and son's return to Burns came two and a half years after protesters marched through the city in the middle of southeastern Oregon's high desert to denounce their impending court-ordered return to prison in January 2016. The Hammonds were leaving

then to serve out mandatory minimum sentences of five years for setting fires to public land.

The case incited right-wing militias and inspired the 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

"The whole world knows the name Hammond because of the refuge takeover," said Jason Patrick, who served time on a federal conspiracy charge in the occupation. He was among those waiting at the airport.

Dwight Hammond, 76, and Steven Hammond, 49, were convicted in 2012 of arson on Harney County land where they had grazing rights for their cattle. Both were convicted of setting a fire in 2001, and the son was convicted of setting a second fire in 2006.

The Hammonds accepted the Pendleton jury verdicts and agreed to waive their right to an appeal. A federal judge initially sentenced the father to three months in prison and the son to one year, ruling that the mandatory minimum set under an expansive federal law punishing terrorism was "grossly disproportionate to the severity of the offenses here."

They served the time and were out of prison when federal prosecutors challenged the shorter terms. Another federal judge in 2015 sent the

ranchers back to complete the sentences.

The nonprofit group Protect the Harvest, founded by oil executive Forrest Lucas to support American farmers, ranchers, outdoor enthusiasts and animal owners, worked behind the scenes with U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon, to get the ear of the White House in considering the clemency petitions filed by each Hammond.

"We brought it to the attention of the vice president," said David Duquette, a Hermiston resident who serves as national strategic planner for the advocacy group. "Mike Pence and Forrest Lucas are good friends."

Lucas, the multimillionaire oil magnate and backer of the Indianapolis Colts, and Pence, an Indiana native, have known each other for a long time. Lucas said he spoke to Pence after he was put into contact with Dwight Hammond Jr.

Duquette was so confident something was afoot that he got a hotel room Tuesday in Long Beach, California, near the Terminal Island federal prison where the Hammonds have been held. They walked out of the prison around 2 p.m. Tuesday, about 6 1/2 hours after Trump pardoned them.

Lucas flew to California early Wednesday to bring the

Hammonds to Burns in his eight-seater Cessna Citation Bravo. The plane circled the airport and landed about 10:35 a.m. Susie Hammond, with another son and grandson on either side of her, walked slowly to the plane.

When the door of the plane opened, there was a marked, sudden silence among the more than 50 people gathered and watching.

Dwight Hammond Jr. emerged first to his wife's embrace, followed by Steven Hammond.

After hugging their close family members, the two men briefly spoke to reporters and supporters.

As of this month, Dwight Hammond served two years and nine months in prison and 31 months of supervised release. His son served three years and four months in prison and two years of supervised release.

"We're doing a lot of decompressing," said Steven Hammond. With a Lucas Oil cap on his head, his hands in the front pockets of his blue

jeans and wearing a blue-and-gray plaid shirt, he said he just wanted to hug his family.

"We're still working through it," his father said, clasping his wife's hand as he spoke.

Both men thanked the Trump administration and those who lobbied on their behalf and sent thousands of letters they received in prison.

"There's a time when you get to that point where a letter means a lot," Steven Hammond said, his voice choking with emotion.

Asked how they did behind bars, Steven Hammond talked of his faith. "You go in survival mode," he said. "If God ... if he takes you to it, he'll bring you through it."

Steven Hammond said he believed those involved in the takeover of the federal wildlife refuge "had good intentions. I don't know how it was received. I was out of the picture at that point," noting he was preparing for his return to prison in early

2016.

Dwight Hammond said work still needs to be done to buttress ranchers -- "we're used up, burnt up, gived up." Someone in the crowd yelled, "We gotcha!" followed by applause.

"I hope we can work with the federal government. Maybe start here in Oregon. Without that we are off the trolley," the elder Hammond said. "It's not about us two guys standing up here. It's about America."

Steven's older brother, Lyle Hammond, 52, said his father and brother stayed the night with cousins in California before flying to Oregon.

It's "wonderful" to have them back in the fold, Lyle Hammond said.

The family ranch has been "going as good as normal, but we can use them home. ... We just want to get on with raising cows," he said.

With three horses leading the way, the family got into a caravan of cars and returned to the Hammond home in downtown Burns.

Umatilla Museum collecting memories

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

UMATILLA (AP) — Long after memories fade, there will be a record of Umatilla's formative years — thanks to efforts of a group of history buffs.

The Umatilla Museum is in the process of interviewing longtime residents of the town, focusing on people who grew up there during the 1940s and 1950s. They are filming interviews and plan to compile them onto a disc that people can reference to learn about the town's history.

The city was established in 1864, but museum members are trying to collect memories of those who were growing up around the time the McNary Dam was built and the town began to take the shape it is today.

Sam Nobles, president of the museum and a longtime resident, graduated from

Umatilla High School in 1954.

"There's a lot of history in Umatilla," he said, recalling the town's origins as a trade center and the importance of the railroad. Many of the residents being interviewed worked on McNary Dam as it was being constructed from 1947 to 1954, or remember a flood that devastated the town in 1948.

Previously, most of the town was built closer to the river, which is now referred to as "old town." It was moved to higher ground in 1968 due to projected flooding from the building of the John Day Dam.

Museum members hope to collect the memories of older residents, but don't have a

specific set of questions.

"We get them started, and then just let them talk," said Leslie Smith, vice president of the Umatilla Museum. "It's not really an interview so much as recalling and documenting those memories."

The project has become something of a bridge between older and younger generations. Nikolas Schuening, who graduated from Umatilla High School a few years ago, is filming and editing the interviews for the museum. He volunteered to film interviews after coming to the museum to help a few friends film a school project, and museum staff asked him if he'd help with their project.



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Deputies shoot suspect at marijuana facility

COTTAGE GROVE (AP) — Deputies shot and killed a man after responding to a dispute involving gunfire at a commercial marijuana facility in Cottage Grove.

Sgt. Carrie Carver of the Lane County Sheriff's Office said Thursday that deputies initially couldn't find the suspect on the large parcel of land. They eventually discovered a building where they believed the man was hiding, and used a loud speaker to

call inside.

She said the man left the building at 3:45 a.m. and "engaged deputies with a firearm." Two deputies fired rounds, striking the suspect who was then taken to a hospital where he died. Carver identified the man as 40-year-old Joey K. Loop.

No officers were hurt. The two deputies will remain on paid administrative leave during the investigation.

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