

Local & State

RAILROAD

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Masks are required for passengers while walking through closed cars, but are not mandated for people sitting in the open cars.

Reservations must be made in advance through the SVRR website, www.sumptervalleyrailroad.org. This enables the railroad to track riders in case contact tracing is necessary.

“We have a way to notify people by the train,” Svaty said.

Riders need to print their ticket, then show it at the McEwen Depot’s window (the depot is closed to visitors).

The train leaves McEwen at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. most weekends. At times, a short train will be added that runs from Sumpter to the river and back. Updates are posted on the SVRR website and Facebook page.

Round-trip fares are \$24 adults, \$20 seniors, \$14 children, or \$70 for a family (two adults, two children).

The short trains have reduced ticket prices.

The SVRR next runs Sunday, July 12, from McEwen.



Photo courtesy of Sumpter Valley Railroad

This rail car, known as the Leviathan, was recently restored.

Staged train robberies are set for July 25 and 26 when bandits ride up and pretend	to rob the train.	“We have a bunch of new bandits — and they don’t	complain about wearing masks,” Svaty said with a laugh.
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Suspect charged in July 2018 murder of couple near John Day

■ Isaac Connery, 23, is accused of killing Terry and Sharon Smith at their home

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Almost two years after a fire destroyed a home east of Mt. Vernon, a suspect has been arrested on two counts of first-degree murder and arson.

Isaac Connery, 23, was arrested in Bernalillo County, New Mexico, June 26, according to a July 8 press release from the Grant County sheriff and district attorney.

Connery is accused of shooting Terry and Sharon Smith July 17, 2018, and setting fire to their home on Nans Rock Road in the Laycock Creek area between Mt. Vernon and John Day, according to the release.

“The Grant County Sheriff’s Office has worked for the past two years in solving this crime where we have taken the lead in this case, and our due diligence and hard work never ceased,” Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said in the release. “With what we have in a case like this, and as traumatic (as) it has been for the families of Terry and Sharon Smith, hopefully this will be a step toward understanding what took place the night of July 17, 2018.”

The fire destroyed the home, but Palmer later discovered partial human remains at the site, which were identified through DNA as belonging to Terry Smith, the release states.

Palmer also discovered other partial remains that could not be identified but have been accepted as belonging to Sharon Smith, according to the release.

Evidence was found, including witness testimony and suspect cellphone locations, that place Connery and his mother, Gabrielle Connery, 46, at the Smith home at the time of the fire, the release states. The Connerys had been associated with the Smiths, both in Hawaii and Oregon, prior to the incident.

The Smiths’ pickup was later discovered abandoned in the Boise area after the fire, and follow-up interviews with witnesses indicated that Isaac Connery took the pickup the night of the fire, the release states. He was indicted June 23 for unlawful use of a motor



Submitted photo

Terry and Sharon Smith.

vehicle, and a nationwide warrant was issued for his arrest.

Grant County Undersheriff Zach Mobley and Sgt. Danny Komning, along with FBI Special Agent Ben Jones, traveled to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to interview Isaac Connery.

Mobley learned that he and his mother had dropped off two Connery minor children at a local campground, likely Clyde Holliday State Park, on the afternoon or evening of July 17, 2018, and then Gabrielle Connery drove Isaac Connery to the Smith home and dropped him off, before returning alone to the campground to pick up the children, according to the release.

“Isaac Connery went to the Smith home and shot Terry, then Sharon Smith, and set fire to their home,” the release states. “Then Isaac Connery took their pickup and drove to meet Gabrielle Connery” in the Boise, Idaho, area.

The process to extradite Isaac Connery to Grant County has begun, and the matter will soon be presented to a grand jury for more formal charges, including possible charges against Gabrielle Connery for the role she played in the deaths of the Smiths, the release states.

Cathy Hinshaw, Sharon Smith’s sister, told the Eagle that the Smiths met the Connerys about 10 years ago when

Sharon Smith did not “feel right” with the Connerys staying with them, Hinshaw said.

“She did not tell me why. She just said she did not feel right with them there,” Hinshaw said. “She wanted them to go.”

When she got news of the fire and heard the Smiths were missing, Hinshaw said she knew they were not away on a fishing trip as some suggested because she had spoken to Sharon Smith hours before the fire.

Hinshaw said she would have never suspected Isaac Connery would have been capable of a crime of this caliber.

“(The Connerys) were all just the nicest kids,” Hinshaw said. “(The Smiths) bought them things and took care of them like they were their own kids. They were wonderful people just trying to help.”

Palmer said in the release the sheriff’s office worked with Jones, arson and crime lab personnel from the Oregon State Police, the Oregon State Medical Examiner’s Office, the Oregon State Fire Marshal, Boise (Idaho) Police Department and various agencies in Arizona, New Mexico and Hawaii.

the Smiths sold them property in Hawaii. She said Isaac Connery was 10 or 11 years old at the time.

Hinshaw said the Smiths helped the Connerys start a business and buy property, and gave the family a free place to live. Hinshaw said the Smiths owned about 60 properties, and they would sell property to young families who were just starting out for little to no money down.

“They would buy properties, and pay a little bit and move on and build themselves a life,” she said. “And so that’s what they did with the Connerys.”

Hinshaw said Gabrielle Connery moved into one of the Smiths’ properties with her children, but defaulted on the payments, and gave it back. She said the Connerys moved between the mainland and Hawaii, and during that time, Terry Smith built the Connerys a fruit stand business, with air-conditioned containers to store the fruit, and the Smiths put them up in a home they owned nearby at no cost.

“They were just part of the family,” Hinshaw said.

Weeks before the fire, Hinshaw said her sister told her on a phone call that Isaac and Gabrielle Connery showed up at their cabin in Grant County after their car had broken down.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Local students on OSU honor roll

CORVALLIS — Five Baker City students were among those who earned a GPA of 3.5 or higher to make the honor roll for the spring 2020 term at Oregon State University.

Local students who earned the academic honor:

- Hannah J. Boruch, a senior studying human development and family science
- Josephine E. Bryan, a junior studying design and innovation management
- River J. Colton, a senior studying agricultural sciences
- Calli N. Ward, a junior studying sociology
- Reno R. Hammond, a sophomore studying chemistry

HEART TO HEART

Response to burglary makes me grateful for local law enforcement

Having lived on a farm in rural Baker County Oregon my whole life, I have never worried about burglary. We probably live in one of the safest places on earth. Sure, every so often we see suspicious looking people driving through that look to be up to no good. But never have we ever, worried about “real” thieves. It would never happen to us. But then, it did!

After returning from a business trip out of town, my wife and I walked into our home to discover that we had been robbed. Whoever had done it had completely cleaned our clocks! They had stolen everything from cash, debit cards, computers, and clothes, to all our important documents including passports, Social Security cards, and birth certificates. Our whole house had been turned upside down.

Sheriff Travis Ash was the first on the scene, followed by Deputy Talon Colton. As gut wrenching and full of anger as we were, we felt like we were in very good hands. Their investigation included a full home inspection with hundreds of pictures inside and out. Footprints and tire tracks were studied, measured and photographed. The search for the suspect led the team to Moses Lake, Washington, where Travis and Talon actually traveled. Thanks to their many long hours of hard work, the suspect was found and subsequently arrested.

We were very impressed with how thorough and professional both Travis and Talon were throughout the process. They were very personable and approachable. They were cool and collected, positive and upbeat. We are grateful to them and everyone else who assisted in bringing the man to justice. These are two of the thousands of honorable men and women of law enforcement that we are proud to call our own! Our community is in great hands.

Bryson Allen
Baker County

Mourning the death of former Baker County Assessor Allen Phillips

It is with a heavy heart that I am informing the residents of Baker County of the passing of Allen Phillips, former Baker County Assessor, in Ontario after a long battle with cancer.

Allen was a person you could count on to help you out in his role as Assessor and as a friend and community member. He was great to work with, and as Baker County Assessor he allowed me to learn and grow into a job that I enjoy each day. Allen was the Baker County Assessor from 1989 until his retirement in November of 2008. Allen started working for Baker County as an appraiser in June of 1986. Allen Phillips had been with the Baker City Fire Department for several years, sold real estate as a Century 21 Broker, shoed horses, bought and sold cattle, and was a good friend that supported all activities in Baker County. Allen Phillips will be missed by all of those who knew and worked with him over the many years. I will miss my friend Allen Phillips.

At this time we do not know of when or where there will be a service. Baker County Assessor’s office is reaching out to the family for details and will ask that his obituary be run in the Baker City Herald.

Kerry Savage
Baker County Assessor



OPEN FOR DINING IN

6 am to 12 am Daily

Take out and Catering is Available.

515 Campbell Street Baker City

541-523-4318

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