

POLICE DOGS, HANDLERS GATHER FOR EXERCISES IN PENDLETON

Police partner up for K-9 training

By Alex Wittwer

The (La Grande) Observer

PENDLETON — Under blue skies amid brisk wind, a cadre of K-9 handlers and trainers met Saturday, March 20, in Pendleton. The purpose: Train the working dogs that serve Eastern Oregon's police and sheriff's offices.

Police resources for training in rural Oregon are limited, so interdepartmental training is a crucial way to pool assets and provide opportunities that resemble real-life situations the K-9 units could run into while working calls.

"There's good knowledge sharing that occurs with different departments, and how things they have seen in the past add to the experience," said Noah Robbins, master trainer and owner of Howling Creek in Hockinson, Washington. "It's a good opportunity to learn from others."

The training compound, just north of the Pendleton Police Department, hosts a small warehouse, a derelict bus and a firing range. Here, the dogs can train in several tactical situations, such as tracking, apprehension, evidence finding and with real gunfire.

"We have a lot of room here," Robbins said. "From the dog's perspective, the more weird (expletive) you can do with them, the better."

Pendleton police officer Cass Clark and K-9 Bali, as well as Union County Sheriff's deputy Dane Jensen and K-9 Molly, were in attendance. Other adjacent counties — Morrow and Baker



Alex Wittwer/The (La Grande) Observer

Union County Sheriff's Office K-9 Molly helps apprehend a suspect (played by dog trainer Darin Campbell, left) during a training exercise Saturday, March 20, in Pendleton.

— join the training sessions when time permits.

The departments enlist the aid of two nonprofit organizations that specialize in training working dogs — Howling Creek and Working Dogs Oregon.

The latter was started in 2014 to train service dogs for veterans and psychiatric patients.

"Our original goal was to educate businesses on what they can and can't do (regarding service dogs)," Campbell said. "And then K-9 Mick in Portland was killed, and that got us thinking about the law enforcement side."

Mick, a German-born shepherd, was only a month into his career when he was shot and killed while attempting to apprehend a burglary suspect on April 16, 2017.

His handler, officer Jeffrey

Dorn of Portland Police, also was shot but suffered non-life threatening injuries.

In Pendleton last week, as the dogs were unleashed from the patrol vehicles — one at a time to keep chaos to a minimum — they made their way around greeting handlers, trainers and volunteers who had come to serve as bite or tracking targets. Bali, the K-9 with Pendleton police, jumped up to greet his former trainer Robbins just moments after his release from officer Clark's police vehicle.

Robbins had set up an interview station for the handlers and their dogs inside the warehouse — a way to bolster social media presence with quick one-on-one interviews that give insight into the life of K-9 units. Afterward, it was time to train.

Darin Campbell, owner of

Working Dogs Oregon, was the first to don the bite suit before heading out to hide in the compound. The dense padding made him waddle like an 1980s arcade bad guy through the gravel.

The comically large suits serve to protect the volunteers and trainers from serious injury. Other implements, such as fake limbs, provide a more real-life experience for the dogs, but the suit works well for quickly rotating volunteers through the training.

Molly was the first up, taking direction from Jensen before darting off toward where Campbell hid. The two officers approached with finger-guns drawn. Campbell's acting was convincing, playing a scared fugitive while Molly barked at the same man she had warmly greeted moments prior.

Three hurt in crash on Interstate 84

By Chris Collins

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Three passengers were hurt, one seriously, in a one-vehicle crash on Interstate 84 Sunday, March 21.

Oregon State Police Sr. Trooper Nicholas Hagedorn responded to the crash at 4:52 p.m. It happened in the westbound lanes of Interstate 84 about 30 miles south of Baker City near the Weatherby Rest Area.

Hagedorn wrote in his daily media log that the driver, David Arthur Rioux, 64, of Baker City, failed to negotiate a curve and struck the cement barrier with the driver's side of his 2010 Chevrolet Equinox.

Hagedorn said the vehicle veered across both lanes and came to rest along the paved shoulder.

Riding with Rioux in the vehicle were Jared L. Foster, 46, of Haines; Robin Mae Foster, 45, of Baker City; and Christina Margaret Miller, 44, of Baker City.

The westbound freeway was closed to allow a Life Flight helicopter to land. Robin Foster, who was riding in the left rear passenger seat, was flown to St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise, Hagedorn stated.

Mark Snider, St. Alphonsus spokesman, said Foster was admitted to the Boise hospital for treatment but upon seeking information about her status Thursday afternoon, he found that she was no longer in care at the hospital.

Miller, a passenger in the right rear seat, and Jared Foster, who was riding in the front passenger seat, were taken by Baker City ambulance to St. Alphon-

sus Medical Center in Baker City. No information about their conditions was available in time for this report.

Hagedorn stated that while completing paperwork, he found that Miller had an outstanding Malheur County warrant charging her with second-degree failure to appear on a second-degree theft charge. Miller was cited and released, Hagedorn said.

Rioux, who was not injured, also was cited and released on a charge of failure to drive within his lane.

Five Star towing responded and transported the vehicle and Rioux to Baker City.

Hagedorn was assisted at the scene by Baker County Sheriff's Department deputies and Oregon Department of Transportation employees.

City Council awards bid for airport work

By Samantha O'Conner

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The Baker City Council on Tuesday, March 23, awarded a bid for filling cracks and applying a sealant to the main runway and a parallel taxiway at the Baker City Airport.

Road Products Inc. of Spokane, Washington, was the lowest of three bidders, at \$313,290.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will pay 90% of the cost, and the Oregon Department of Avia-

tion 9%. The city's share, in administrative costs, will total about 1%, or about \$3,130.

The other bidders are C.R. Contracting LLC of Bend (\$347,738) and Idaho Lines & Sign LLC of Boise (\$370,218).

According to a report to the Council from Michelle Owen, the city's public works director, the airport work will be done in late summer of 2021.

In a related matter, councilors approved an agreement with the FAA for a \$13,000 grant from federal COVID-19 relief funds.

Owen told councilors the city will use the money to improve the septic drain field at the city-owned airport, and clean fuel tanks.

Last year the city received \$30,000 from the federal CARES Act. The city used some of the money to plow snow this winter, and will use the remainder to patch sections of pavement at the airport this summer.

In other business Tuesday:

- Jeff Nelson, with the Blue Mountain Community College's Small Business

Development Center, gave a presentation to councilors about the Center.

- Councilors discussed a proposal to change the city golf board from five members to seven.

Lyle Kuckenbecker, a current board member, said he's in favor of making the change.

Oregon Senate approves bill banning guns at state Capitol

By Sara Cline

Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — The Oregon Senate voted Thursday, March 25, to advance a bill banning guns at the Capitol and other state facilities and letting cities, counties, schools and commercial airports decide whether to allow people carrying licensed, concealed handguns into their buildings.

Despite four hours of discussion and overwhelming opposition by gun owners and Republicans, the bill passed, 16-7, and will move to the House. Four GOP senators were absent from the floor, an increasingly common occurrence by the minority party in attempts to block Democratic priorities by denying quorum. Sen. Lynn Findley, the Republican from Vale who represents Baker County, was present and voted against the bill.

Besides exacerbating tensions between the parties, the bill gained lots of attention from Oregonians — more than 2,000 people sent written testimony, most of which criticized the bill.

"People in the eastern part of our state and in the southern part of our state — some of the rural areas — may have a different view of guns than we have in the urban area," said Sen. Ginny Burdick, a Portland Democrat. "Senate bill 554 gives (local jurisdictions) the option of whether to continue concealed license handgun holders to bring loaded guns into schools and public buildings. The school board gets to decide. That means the community gets to decide. Not just the gun owner."

States have been split about allowing Capitol visitors, legislators or employees to carry guns. But the issue has drawn increased attention after the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol.

About 50 far-right protesters also breached the Oregon Capitol on Dec. 21, during a one-day special session that was closed to the public. They had gathered outside to oppose statewide COVID-19 restrictions, and some toted guns and broke glass doors.

"The events of 2020 are a red flashing light that we need to do something," Burdick said.

She also cited a U.S. Department of Homeland Security bulletin on Jan. 27 that warned extremists may be emboldened by the breach of the U.S. Capitol to target elected officials and government facilities.

However, others argued that licensed concealed handguns — which about 300,000 Oregonians have — could save lives and protect people.

"It appears as though the supermajority and others believe that you only have the right to possess a gun if you are in your home, and that would be terrific if you lived your entire life in your home. But we don't. We live our lives in our communities," said Sen. Tim Knopp, a Bend Republican.

"We go to the store — not normally thought to be a dangerous act, to go to the grocery store, yet as we have seen recently it can be deadly," he said, noting this week's mass shooting in Boulder, Colorado.

Under current Oregon law, a person with a concealed handgun license can possess a firearm or other weapon while in a public building, including the Capitol.

Guns are allowed in statehouses in some form in 21 states, according to a February review by The Associated Press. Eight states allow only concealed firearms inside their capitols, while two states allow only open carry. In addition, at least 13 states, including Oregon, do not have metal detectors at the entrance to their capitols.

A Michigan panel banned the open carry of guns in the state's Capitol just one week after the U.S. Capitol riot and following a plot last year to storm the statehouse. In Montana, a law signed last month allows anyone with a permit to bring a concealed firearm into the state Capitol, while Utah passed a law allowing people to carry concealed weapons in its Capitol and elsewhere in the state without a permit.

Oregon's proposed bill authorizes any city, county, commercial airport, school district, college or university to limit or preclude a concealed handgun licensee from possessing firearms in public buildings.

Republicans proposed that the bill be re-referred to a committee for further public hearings, arguing one four-hour hearing is "not a fair process" for such a controversial bill.

THEFTS

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The estimated value of all the items is \$10,615.

Thomas will be eligible to be placed in an alternative incarceration program (AIP) only after serving 16 months of his sentence, court documents state.

Thomas may be considered for release on post-prison supervision after successful completion of the AIP.

He was ordered to complete two years' post-prison supervision upon release. If he violates terms of the post-prison supervision, he will be subject to sanctions, including additional prison time.

Other special conditions of his post-prison supervision include no contact with Kirkway Drive or the Catholic Church. And he was ordered to seek substance abuse treatment.

Imposition of sentencing was suspended on the two counts of unauthorized entry into a motor vehicle. Items valued at an estimated \$600 were taken in the car prowls.

For those crimes, Thomas was placed on 48 months' bench probation, again with special conditions of no contact with the victim locations and orders to seek substance abuse treatment.

All other criminal charges were dismissed as part of the plea agreement.

A restitution hearing is set for 2 p.m. May 24 in Baker County Circuit Court. The extended period allows the District Attorney's Office time to gather more exact restitution figures from all victims involved, said District Attorney Greg Baxter.

Thomas was represented by Baker City attorney Damien Yervasi.

Michael Spaulding, chief deputy district attorney, prosecuted the case.



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