

# 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

## Couple's disappearance turns into homicide case

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The mysterious disappearance of a "social" couple and their pickup truck following a cabin fire on Nan's Rock Road south of Mt. Vernon evolved into a homicide case after human remains were identified by the state crime lab.

Terry Smith, 67, and Sharon Smith, 65, owned the cabin that burned down July 17-18. The cabin was located in a remote area off Laycock Creek Road and was completely gone by the time fire crews arrived.

Sheriff Glenn Palmer said his phone was "off the hook" in the days following the fire as numerous friends and family called from around Grant County and out of state.

Foul play was not suspected at first, Palmer said, but law enforcement was searching for the missing 2006 Toyota Tacoma. He also noted that the Smiths were often in contact with friends and family and wouldn't just take off without telling them.

Palmer confirmed a few days

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Contributed photo

**Sharon and Terry Smith went missing following a fire at their cabin on Nan's Rock Road south of Mt. Vernon on July 17-18. The suspicious case was later declared a homicide investigation.**



Eagle file photos

**A garage and bedroom of a house on Skyline Drive in John Day were destroyed by a fire of unknown origin Nov. 4. Dale and Shelly Mosier escaped unharmed with their dog.**

## A month-by-month recap of 2018

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

### January

Rep. Cliff Bentz was chosen by county courts and commissions from nine Eastern Oregon counties to replace Sen. Ted Ferrioli to represent Senate District 30. Ferrioli had resigned to take a governor-appointed position with the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Council. Bentz, a Republican from Ontario, had been in the state house since 2004. Lynn Findley, the former Vale city manager, was appointed by the same group to replace Bentz as state representative for House District 60.

Bradley D. Moles, 31, John Day, was convicted of sexual abuse by a 12-person jury Jan. 17. A jury in September 2017 had failed to reach a verdict. He was sentenced Jan. 31 to 75 months in prison. Grant County Circuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr. denied a request to grant Moles a new trial Feb. 23. Moles submitted notice of his intent to appeal the conviction in March.



**Dave Bantish closed his Prime Time Video store on Main Street in John Day on Jan. 27.**

Grant School District 3 announced plans for a \$932,300 seismic upgrade to Humbolt Elementary School, which was built in 1956. The project would take place in summer and include a new roof.

Thomas J. Elliott, 55, John

Day, pleaded guilty Jan. 18 to first-degree manslaughter and unlawful use of a weapon in the shooting death of Todd A. Berry near Dog Creek Road on Aug. 24. He was sentenced June 26 under amended charges to 60 months in prison and ordered to pay \$16,405 to a criminal injuries compensation account.

Fire destroyed a two-story home on Pine Creek Road owned by Jim and Mary Jensen on Jan. 25. The house was fully engulfed when firefighters arrived. The Jensens owned the Oxbow Trade Co. antique business in Canyon City.

### February

Four Main Street businesses in John Day underwent major changes. Dave Bantish closed Prime Time Video after 30 years, Greg Armstrong began selling everything in Muzzy's 123 Dollar Store in preparation for closing, the Eastern Oregon College of Industries and Arts College closed to reopen as a beauty salon and Sherry Dress moved her Naturally Yours Health and Wellness

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## Kam Wah Chung site draws media attention

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site attracted media attention this year, and two television documentaries now in the works could lead to a significant increase in tourism next year.

It's been about 140 years since the Chinese store opened its doors in a former military outpost in John Day. And it's been about 10 years since the Friends of Kam Wah Chung organization established an interpretive center for the site.

The Portland Lee's Association Dragon & Lion Dance Team appeared at a celebratory dinner in John Day on June 9 after marching in the '62 Days parade in Canyon City.

Former First Lady Mary Oberst joined other notables at the dinner, including Dr. Eric Brand, an expert in Chinese herbal medicines who speaks Chinese and spent time studying in Hong Kong under Professor Zhao Zhongzhen.

Brand and Zhongzhen were back in John Day in mid-August as a crew from the Yiping Media Group of Shenzhen, China, worked on a documentary about Kam Wah Chung for the Chinese version of the Discovery Channel.

Zhongzhen, who appeared in the video, also sits on a tourism board in China that sees 3 million visits on its website. Museum curator Don Merritt said

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## Prairie City water emergency leads to new well

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher declared a water emergency Aug. 6, but city residents were not surprised and instead frustrated by recurring water shortages.

For the second summer in a row, residents had been asked in late July to cease all outdoor watering. Public Works Director Chris Camarena blamed drought conditions caused by low snowpack and falling water tables.

The city had imposed water restrictions in summer 2017 after a June 26 lightning strike that knocked out electrical controls coincided with a well improvement project. Water levels in the city's reservoir fell to 4 feet before crews were able to restore safe levels around 23 feet. But the city's water supply prob-



Eagle file photo

**Water was trucked to Prairie City from John Day after Prairie City declared a water emergency on Aug. 6.**

lems were older and more involved. Prairie City had incurred significant debt after building a \$2 million slow-sand filtration system in 2008 for water drawn from Dixie

Creek. But the creek often ran dry in drought years, and the debt made it difficult for the city to invest in a new water source.

The city's Dixie Creek infiltration

galleries, which reached 200 gallons per minute in August 2005, had dropped to 15-20 gpm this year when Hamsher declared a water emergency. The level in the city reservoir had dropped to a foot and a half by that time as demand exceeded output from city wells.

Water tenders went to work Aug. 12 hauling donated water from John Day and dumping it into Prairie City's water mains on Dixie Creek Road. Hamsher said he was concerned about elevated wildfire danger and wanted to replenish the reservoir.

He also was frustrated by city water users who allegedly ignored the water emergency and continued sprinkling. City Recorder Bobbie Brown said warning notices were sent to about 40 customers known

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