

The Blue Mountain EAGLE

Grant County's newspaper since 1868

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

152nd Year • No. 22 • 18 Pages • \$1.50

MyEagleNews.com

Suspects identified in homicide of missing couple whose house burned down in 2018

District attorney plans to take evidence to grand jury when social distancing allows

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Closure may be coming almost two years after a couple vanished after their cabin became engulfed in flames in the Laycock Creek Road area.

Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter said May 20 he planned to prosecute suspects in the murder of Terry and Sharon Smith.

"There are suspects in the case," Carpenter told the Eagle, "and a substantial amount of evidence that points to the suspects, such that, I will be taking it to the grand jury."

Carpenter said, as soon as grand juries can meet without social distancing restrictions, he plans to take the case to a grand jury, and he anticipates an indictment.

The couple and their pickup were not found after their home on Nan's Rock Road between John Day and Mt. Vernon burned down in the early morning hours of July 18, 2018.

The case evolved into a homicide after investigators confirmed DNA samples from remains found in the residence belonged to Terry and Sharon Smith. The pickup was later located in Boise, Idaho.

Carpenter said the Oregon Department of Justice was brought in as a special prosecutor for Grant County, and the DOJ had been directing the investigation and working toward



Contributed photo

District Attorney Jim Carpenter said the 2018 homicides of Terry and Sharon Smith will be prosecuted as soon as social distancing restrictions are eased and a grand jury can be summoned.

prosecution. He said, several months ago, Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer requested the case back from the DOJ to have it prosecuted in Grant County.

prosecution.

Carpenter said, because of limited resources, he attempted to bring in a special prosecutor, a local attorney whom he declined to name, who initially agreed to take the case but then backed out after receiving the materials from the DOJ.

"It was initially assigned to the Department of Justice because I simply didn't have the resources to take care of it," Carpenter said. "I still don't, but there are no other options. The Department of Justice isn't going to take it back."

The case is being investigated by the Oregon State Police and Grant County Sheriff's Office with the assistance of the FBI Bend office.

"I've discussed the case recently with the FBI, and they are assisting the sheriff's office with a few final steps in the investigation," Carpenter said.

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer declined to comment in an email on May 14, stating it was "an ongoing criminal investigation."

Family and friends told the Eagle about the social nature of Terry and Sharon Smith and how unusual it would be for them to disappear for any length of time without communicating with their friends and family.

"The Smiths' friends and

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The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Annabelle Raschio delivers a hot meal Tuesday at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church. The church, along with businesses and members of the community, has provided meals since March 17.

St. Elizabeth's Church distributes hot meals

Shannon Taylor carries containers of hot meals to deliver around the county.



The Eagle
Steven Mitchell

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As grim economic statistics continue to roll in, with unemployment reaching an all-time high of 14.7% in April and 20.5 million people losing their jobs, the coronavirus pandemic has left many without the means to buy food.

For over two months, the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church, along with various businesses and volunteers — members of the congregation and nonmembers — stepped up to feed the hungry in the community.

Every Tuesday, from mid-March through May 26, St. Elizabeth offered hot meals for pick up or delivery.

The team of volunteers, a diverse collaboration of businesses and private citizens from all different walks of life came together with a common goal of providing someone in the community a hot meal once a week.

Rob Raschio, a volunteer, said both Russell's Custom Meats and local family Clint and Etelie Benge donated food, while Cornerstone Church

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Raschio and Carpenter to face off in November

No candidate for judge received 50% of the vote in the primary

Blue Mountain Eagle

The race to determine the next circuit court judge for Grant and Harney counties will likely move on to the November election after no candidates received 50% of the vote in the primary.

According to the final unofficial results Wednesday morning, John Day attorney Rob Raschio received 46.8% of the votes for the 24th District, followed by Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter with 32.6% and Burns attorney John Lamborn with 20.3%. Write-in candidates received 0.25%.

"I look forward to going down there (to Harney County) and spending a lot more time here in Grant County as the restrictions are being lifted and as we move toward a November election," Raschio said.

Jim Carpenter said he expected the contest to move into the general election in November.

"It's always unlikely that one will get 50-plus-1% of the vote. And so my objective has always been to get through May, and look forward to November," he said.

Grant County Clerk Brenda Percy said Wednesday there are 12 ballots with challenged signatures, 20 ballots with no signatures and one ballot she is aware of coming from another county. She said ballots with signature problems can be corrected until June 2.

"The election must be certified within 20 days after the election so until then the results are unofficial, but I do not expect any of the unofficial results to change," she said.

The 24th District covers Grant and Harney counties.

In Grant County, Raschio received 52.2%, followed by Carpenter with 38.5% and Lamborn with 9%.

In Harney County, Raschio received 41.9%, followed by Lamborn with 30.6% and Carpenter with 27.2%.

In uncontested Grant County races, incumbents were reelected: County Assessor David Thunell received 98.6% of the vote, County Commissioner Jim Hamsher received 92.1% and County Surveyor Michael Springer received 99%.



Jim Carpenter



Rob Raschio

Grant Union adjusts graduation ceremony plans

Each graduate now allowed two cars for family members for drive-in ceremony

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant Union has made several adjustments to its planned graduation ceremony May 30 after Grant Union Principal Ryan Gerry had a chance to speak with graduates' parents.

Each graduate will now be able to have two vehicles for family members, and a system will be in place to ensure a graduate's family will be able to see them receive their diploma.

During a Grant School District board meeting May 20, Marissa Williams, mother of graduating senior Taylor Allen, said she appreciated the work the staff has done to ensure recognition for the seniors, but she and other parents had concerns about the plans. She said 20 parents contacted her.

"I understand we have a limited

amount of time to make changes, and there is a process of approval, but I believe our family and students deserve up to the last minute to get the most out of this experience as possible," Williams said.

Williams shared three major concerns: being able to see their graduate receive their diploma in the drive-in setting, possible parking disputes and split families being allowed only one vehicle.

Williams said there will be parents who may not be able to see their graduate, and with emotions running high, everyone will be vying for front-row parking spots, which could cause issues prior to the ceremony.

Williams said there are also split families who aren't able to be in the same room, but families are being asked to be in the same vehicle.



Ryan Gerry



Marissa Williams

"Myself, along with a group of parents, have spent hours brainstorming possible plans that would be safe and help alleviate emotional clashes in the parking lot while meeting (the Oregon Department of Education's) guidelines," Williams said.

Gerry spoke with Williams and other concerned parents Thursday before announcing the changes.

He said there was already a plan in place for parking. The Grant Union parking lot will be barricaded on May 28. On graduation day, there will be one entrance, and staff will

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