

Drone testing advances in Pendleton

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian



Spright/Contributed Photo

The unmanned aerial systems company Spright in February 2022 tests a proof-of-concept program to transport medical tests from Interpath Laboratory in Pendleton to Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center in Mission.

PENDLETON — Pendleton's drone testing program is starting to come off the hill.

In February, the unmanned aerial systems company Spright announced it was starting a proof-of-concept program with Interpath Laboratory and Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center to transport medical tests from Interpath's facilities in Pendleton to Yellowhawk's clinic in Mission.

Spright ran its first test in mid-February, but it was a long time in the making.

Pendleton Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman said the origins of Spright in Pendleton can be traced back to a conference sponsored by the Association for Unmanned Aerial Systems International last year.

"It was just kind of fortuitous, bumping into each other," he said.

Chrisman didn't bump into the people behind Spright, an Arizona subsidiary of a medical transport company, but instead found himself

tually led to Spright renting a hangar from the Pendleton UAS Range.

In an email, Justin Steinke, Spright's vice president of operations, explained what drew the company to Pendleton. While Spright's unmanned vehicles are undergoing the Federal Aviation Administration certification process, Steinke said Interpath and Pendleton offered the right conditions for it to test its product.

"Interpath Laboratory is located inside the current test range, which allows us to accelerate the testing of the aircraft and the business case," he wrote. "Having usable airspace to test and validate our operations in Pendleton is enabling Spright to accelerate the development of our solutions and more rapidly help people around the globe. Most importantly, Spright intends to continue to operate with Interpath after the testing phase is complete, making it an innovative win for the community of Pendleton."

Steinke said Spright intends to test for the next six to nine months in locations around Pendleton before

making its product fully available next year.

Interpath CEO Tom Kennedy did not return a request for comment, but in a press release, he explained why the lab testing company would be interested in investing in drones.

"Medical laboratory services in rural areas frequently must invest intensive time and resources into sample pick-up," Kennedy said in a statement. "We anticipate Spright's drone delivery service will alleviate many of the drawbacks and costs associated with automobile-based delivery. This initiative represents an example of our embrace of innovative solutions that provide more efficient and effective services to our clients."

Yellowhawk became the third partner in the group through Interpath, which processes the medical tests conducted at the Mission clinic.

Yellowhawk CEO Aaron Hines said the medical center was attracted to the test program because it could mean faster test results for its patients. As it stands now, an Interpath vehicle picks up tests at Yellow-

hawk once per day. But if UAS took over test delivery, Yellowhawk could deliver and receive tests multiple times per day, meaning their patients could be treated more quickly.

While Hines likes the idea, he said he would want to study a drone delivery system for a longer period of time before moving forward with it. He said he wants to know how test specimens might be affected should one of the drones fail and crash. And while drones might be more efficient, conventional vehicular transportation has a much longer track record.

To Chrisman, Spright's partnership with two well-known local entities is evidence drones are closer to integrating into people's everyday lives.

In the Pendleton UAS Range's early days, drone companies tended to conduct most of their testing at the Pendleton airport or in a secluded area far from public view. While many operations at the drone company still are opaque, Verizon and Amazon have recently confirmed, or even announced, their presence in Pendleton.

COPS AND COURTS

Arrests and citations in the Blue Mountain Eagle are taken from the logs of law enforcement agencies. Every effort is made to report the court disposition of arrest cases.

Grant County Circuit Court

March 10: Travis Farr, 29, of Mt. Vernon pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of harassment constituting domestic violence in connection with an incident on Nov. 13. He was sentenced to one year of bench probation and 20 hours of community service or work crew time. He was also ordered to have no contact with the victim, obtain a domestic violence assessment, complete all recommended treatment and pay a \$100 fine.

March 14: Spencer Edward Leifheit III, 45, of Mt. Vernon pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges of harassment constituting domestic violence and second-degree disorderly conduct stemming from an incident that occurred on March 2. He was sentenced to 18 months of bench probation and 30 hours of community service or work crew time. He was also ordered to have no offensive contact with the victim, obtain a domestic violence assessment, mental health evaluation and substance abuse evaluation and complete all recommended treatment. He was also found guilty of violating his probation on an earlier offense.

March 17: Levi Westley Albert Fine, 27, of John Day pleaded guilty to a felony charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm and a misdemeanor charge of reckless endangerment in connection with an incident that occurred on Dec. 30. Fine was sentenced to 19 months in prison with credit for time served, followed by two years of post-prison supervision. Two additional charges of menacing and resisting arrest, both misdemeanors, were dismissed. According to the grand jury indictment in the case, Fine was accused of threatening another man and putting him at risk of serious injury by indiscriminately firing a gun in his vicinity.

Grant County Sheriff

The Grant County Sheriff's Office reported the following for the week ending March 16:

- Ce concealed handgun licenses: 9
- Average inmates: 12
- Bookings: 9
- Releases: 8
- Arrests: 2
- Citations: 1
- Fingerprints: 1
- Civil papers: 24
- Warrants processed: 0
- Asst./welfare check: 0
- Search and rescue: 0

Dispatch

Grant County dispatch worked 127 calls during the week ending March 18, including:

- Oregon State Police March 18
8:50 a.m.: Advised of a cow on the roadway on Highway 26 near milepost 150.
- Grant County Sheriff's Office
March 11

6:51 p.m.: Responded to Highway 26 near Childress Loop to check on a motorist with a disabled vehicle.

7:08 p.m.: Received a complaint about a dog attacking other dogs on Highway 26 in Mt. Vernon.

8 p.m.: Received multiple reports of illegal fireworks in the vicinity of Southeast Franke Drive, John Day.

9:15 p.m.: Received a report of illegal fireworks in the vicinity of Southeast Hillcrest Road, John Day.

9:38 p.m.: Responded to a noise complaint from Southeast Hillcrest Road, John Day.

10:26 pm.: Responded to Southeast Gunther Street, John Day. Dillon Winters, 24, of John Day was arrested for violation of a release agreement. Matika Long, 21, of John Day was arrested for menacing.

March 12

10:16 a.m.: Responded to Highway 19 near milepost 121 for an injured deer.

10:36 a.m.: Responded to East Main Street, John Day, for a dispute.

March 13

7:30 a.m.: Responded to South Canyon Boulevard, John

Day, for an open door.

6:05 p.m.: Received a noise complaint from Southeast Hillcrest Road.

9:18 p.m.: Responded to South Overholt Street, Prairie City, for a disorderly conduct report.

9:31 p.m.: Responded to Riverside Mobile Home Park, John Day, for a report of an overdue motorist.

March 14

8:24 a.m.: Traffic stop, Highway 26 near milepost 150. Vehicle reportedly clocked at 75 mph in a 55 mph zone. Robin Olterman, 61, of John Day cited for violating the basic rule.

1:09 p.m.: Responded to Grant County Fairgrounds, John Day, for a dog running loose. Owner warned.

1:45 p.m.: Responded to South Bridge Street, John Day, for a burglary report.

March 16

8:02 a.m.: Traffic stop, West Main Street, John Day. Driver warned for speeding.

11:38 a.m.: Responded to Marysville Lane west of John Day for suspicious circumstances.

5:10 p.m.: Responded to

South Washington Street, Canyon City, to follow up on a complaint of kids shooting a BB gun.

6 p.m.: Responded to Grant County Fairgrounds, Canyon City, for a dog complaint.

March 17

11:30 a.m.: Received a report of possible trespassing on Dog Patch Lane east of John Day.

5:40 p.m.: Responded to Highway 395 North near milepost 51B for a driving complaint.

March 18

6:46 a.m.: Responded with John Day Ambulance to Mountain Boulevard, Mt. Vernon, for a possible suicide. Unable to locate subject.

12:30 p.m.: Traffic stop, South Canyon Boulevard near Grant Union Junior/Senior High School, John Day. Driver warned for speeding.

5:49 p.m.: Responded to

for a public assist.

• John Day Ambulance March 12

3:14 p.m.: Dispatched to East Main Street for a 77-year-old male with severe abdominal pain.

5:40 p.m.: Dispatched to East Main Street for a 43-year-old female with a fall injury.

March 13

1:33 a.m.: Patient transfer at the airport.

5:51 a.m.: Patient transfer at the airport.

5:31 p.m.: Dispatched to Valley View Assisted Living for a 98-year-old female with signs of confusion.

9:01 p.m.: Patient transport from Valley View Assisted Living to Blue Mountain Hospital.

March 14

8:20 a.m.: Dispatched to East Main Street for an elderly man with difficulty breathing.

5:02 p.m.: Patient transfer at the airport.

10:46 p.m.: Patient trans-

port from Blue Mountain Care Center, Prairie City, to Blue Mountain Hospital.

March 17

7:43 a.m.: Dispatched to Malheur Lumber for a male who fell and hit his head.

• Long Creek Ambulance March 16

10:56 a.m.: Dispatched to Highway 395 North in Long Creek for a man with a fall injury. John Day Ambulance also responded.

March 18

4:44 a.m.: Dispatched to East Main Street for an 81-year-old man needing a lift assist. Long Creek Fire and John Day Ambulance also responded.

• John Day Rural Fire March 18

2:49 p.m.: Responded to Marysville Drive east of John Day for a structure fire. Canyon City Fire, Prairie City Fire, Mt. Vernon Fire and Grant County Sheriff's Office assisted.

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