

COMMUNITY

Umatilla crime numbers down in 2014

Patrol officer vacancies contributed to some of the declines

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

Fewer criminal incidents were recorded in Umatilla in 2014 compared with recent years, but fewer patrol officers than normal likely contributed to some of the decline.

Police Chief Darla Huxel said the Umatilla Police Department had to fill two vacant patrol officer positions in the last half of 2014 and another officer was injured, which reduced the number of officers on the streets and led to fewer traffic stops and outside agency assists.

"Overall, the numbers are pretty consistent," she said. "Towards the second part of the year, we were down staff. We had injuries and new people coming on, so some of the numbers may be a little lower (than normal). The criminal cases are pretty consistent, but traffic (cases) goes down with the manpower we have."

There were 492 total traffic-related incidents in 2013 compared with 327 in 2014. Although violations for speeding increased from 77 to

93 and failure to obey a traffic control device increased from 50 to 65, the other traffic categories declined. Insurance and registration violations declined from 139 to 55. Driver license violations declined from 78 to 43. Driving while suspended violations declined from 109 to 53. Equipment violations declined from 39 to 18.

Huxel said some criminal categories were also affected by the reduction in officers. Outside agency assists fell from 503 to 263. Drug-related and driving under the influence of intoxicants incidents fell from 146 to 65, and warrant arrests fell from 128 to 97.

"Pretty much, last year, we were just maintaining the minimums," she said. "At one point, you know, when you are three officers down, that's almost half your patrol force, so we struggled."

UPD is comprised of the chief, a lieutenant, a sergeant, seven patrol officers and a code enforcement officer. The total criminal cases fell from 1,239 to 838 from 2013 to 2014, but some of the decline was not caused by a reduction of staff.

Assaults were reduced by almost half, from 52 to 27, burglaries declined from 47 to 34, thefts declined from 133 to 109 and trespass incidents declined from 108 to 79. Huxel said a new trespass



Umatilla Police Chief Darla Huxel, left, and office administrator and dispatcher Kylie Baker look at several monitors at the Umatilla Police Department Thursday. Huxel said incident numbers were down in 2014, but a lack of patrol officers contributed to some of the decline.

SEAN HART PHOTO

protocol that requires the signature of the offender may have decreased those incidents, but she did not know what led to the other declines.

Some criminal reports increased from 2013 to 2014: criminal mischief was up from 53 to 72, forgeries increased from 30 to 37, unauthorized entry of a motor vehicle was up from 17 to 24 and unauthorized use of a motor vehicle increased from 18 to 31.

"Like the majority of agencies in our area, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, car

thefts, it's up here like it was everywhere else," Huxel said. "We kind of attribute that to people not locking their cars and leaving their keys in their cars and going out and starting their cars and leaving them running. From what I understand, pretty much the majority of agencies in Umatilla County saw an increase in car thefts, so we're not an anomaly by any stretch of the imagination."

Huxel said, overall, she is pleased with what the department accomplished with the resources it had available last

year.

"Knowing our staffing levels, I am satisfied with the numbers," she said. "I would like to see more proactive stuff that would address some of these other numbers. I have always said that we will be getting an influx of drug and DUI arrests because of the marijuana issues, which is only going to get worse now. We will be doing more training to address that. When I'm talking about proactive policing, that's a number that I hope will go up, not go down. Numbers can show a couple

different things."

Huxel said the department's injured officer is again healthy and back on active duty, and two other officers have been hired to fill the vacancies. One officer, she said, recently completed the police academy and is completing field training, and the other officer is currently at the academy. She said the training process takes several months, but the department should be back to full force by this summer.

Huxel said the department will then focus on traffic-related issues and proactive targeted enforcement, such as crosswalk, gang-recognition and intoxicated-driver focus patrols.

Because of the staff reductions, UPD suspended its Gang Resistance Education And Training program in the schools beginning in the fall, but Huxel said she hopes to re-staff that again soon.

"We always have a goal of being involved with the schools," she said. "I think that's where we need to start at that level. One of the things I really like about our GREAT program is it gives us a chance to be in the schools because neither the school nor the city can (afford to) have a school resource officer, so we do the best we can by getting officers into the schools with the GREAT program."

McNary Heights students spend week doing kind acts

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
HERMISTON HERALD

McNary Heights Elementary School students learned kindness is contagious after they spent this week completing acts that made other people feel good.

The students spent all this week participating in "The Great Kindness Challenge," where they checked off items from a list of 50 acts that included things like "smile at 25 people" or "make a new friend." They were then encouraged to complete some kind acts that they made up themselves.

Fifth-grader Thalia Trujillo said she gave an apple to a teacher as one of the acts of kindness she performed this week. Fourth-grader Emilio Jaimez said he helped his physical education teacher carry in equipment and checked off 35 kind acts from the challenge list this week.

Additionally, students had activities they completed during lunch and recess that emphasized being kind to one another and teachers. During one recess, students swarmed the table out on the playground in an effort to write someone a kind note.

"It was chaos. It was so popular," fifth-grader and class Vice President Taylor Durfey said laughing.

What was especially great about the week, many students said, was that no awards were given for the effort.

"It was all just for fun," fifth-grader and class President Marisol Santa Cruz said Friday.

In addition to doing the kind acts for their classmates and teachers, some older

students also had another motive: teaching the younger students what kindness at school looks like.

"We wanted to show first-graders and kindergartners to be more kind to peo-

ple," Trujillo said.

The project was organized by McNary Heights Vice Principal Rick Cotterell and the student body at the school. Cotterell said he received an email inviting him to participate in a webinar about the challenge and liked what he heard. He then presented the idea to the student council, who elected to take it on as a project.

"I feel this week was very successful," Cotterell said. "I saw a lot of students start the week in competition mode,

being kind in order to try and fill their sheet. However, by the end of the week, I think everyone was just having fun doing things for others. We moved from the extrinsic to the intrinsic and really saw our school's culture of kindness come to life."

In particular, Cotterell said he saw a lot more smiles on students' faces as they were challenged to smile at people they saw at school.

"I must have been on everyone's list because I am sure I saw all 676 of those lit-

tle smiles this week," he said.

Cotterell said it will be fun to analyze all the data collected from the week to see how many acts of kindness students completed school-wide throughout the week.

Many students said they found the experience of being kinder than usual a "fun" and positive experience. Many said they will also continue doing the same kind acts now that they have seen what kind of an impact it has on others.

"I will definitely keep doing kind things," Durfey said.



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

McNary Heights Elementary School students lead their school in the Pledge of Allegiance Friday morning after being named the character trait students of the week for following rules, displaying good behavior and being kind to others

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