

Judge sends Umatilla gang member back to prison

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

A Umatilla gang member who killed a man in 2011 will spend more years in prison after pleading guilty to a gun crime while on a conditional early release.

Teodoro "Teddy" Parra Mendoza, 21, was on the right track while in custody, Circuit Judge Eve Temple said Tuesday morning in a Hermiston courtroom, but he took the wrong path on the outside.

"When you went back to Umatilla," she told Mendoza from the bench, "your

behavior went back to exactly what we all hoped it would not."

Mendoza was 17 in October 2011 when he and Kevin Melendez and Andres Carrillo, who also were 17, had a run-in with Mario Calvillo-Ramirez, 27, of Irrigon. Calvillo-Ramirez was a member of a rival gang and started a fight with the trio.

But they ended it, and Mendoza beat Calvillo-Ramirez with his own baseball bat. The older man died from the injuries.

Mendoza pleaded guilty



Mendoza

to criminally negligent homicide in 2012 to avoid a possible manslaughter conviction and received a sentence of six years and three months in the custody of the Oregon Youth Authority. His age and length of sentence qualified him under Oregon law for a "second look" hearing, which allows judges to reevaluate youth offenders. Temple found Mendoza was doing well and rebuilding his life in custody, and in June allowed him out of youth prison.

Umatilla police arrested Mendoza on Sept. 29 at the Marina Apartments, 1600 Second St., Umatilla, after a couple of residents reported a drunk man had a gun outside their apartment.

Jacklyn Jenkins, chief deputy prosecutor for the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office, told the court Tuesday morning Mendoza was drunk and passed out when police found him, and his finger was on the trigger of a loaded gun. All of that violated his release, she said, but given his state, he was lucky not to be facing a new

manslaughter charge.

Mendoza agreed he violated his release and pleaded guilty to felon in possession of a firearm, so the state dropped two counts of recklessly endangering others. But defense attorney Thomas Gray argued any sentence on the gun crime should run concurrent with the time left on the homicide.

Jenkins disagreed, and so did the judge. She sent Mendoza to state prison for 18 months on the gun possession charge on top of what he had left on the original crime.

Jenkins afterward said Mendoza had about three years left on that sentence, so now he is looking at a maximum of four-and-half years in lockup, though with good behavior he could reduce his sentence on the gun crime.

Temple also set the record straight about the spelling of Mendoza's name. She said the original case used Theodore Mendoza, and that was wrong. Mendoza confirmed his legal name was Teodoro Parra Mendoza, and the judge told the court clerk to have records reflect that.

Young population drives growing program needs across city

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

The rest of the country may be worried about a "silver tsunami" of aging Baby Boomers. But in Hermiston, it's a flood of young people who are stretching some resources to the limit.

Thirty five percent of Hermiston's population is under the age of 20, far outpacing the state average of 26 percent, according to data compiled for the city's new Livable Hermiston committee. The group has been tasked with prioritizing a list of livability projects for the city to work on.

Teenagers in town say Hermiston's adults should pay attention to the needs of its younger population.

"Usually they just try to tell us 'Oh, there's school activities,' but that's not enough," Hermiston High School senior Cynthia Macias said.

Macias said she would like to see some sort of youth center or other "hangout" place for teenagers in Hermiston. Her friends agreed, noting that now teenagers congregate at parks, the movie theater or bowling alley, even though the parks are weather-dependent and movies can get expensive.

"At the bowling alley there's always adults there, too, so it's awkward," sopho-

more Sara Ortiz said.

Other suggestions were an indoor pool, more sports fields and a trampoline center.

Hermiston has increased funding for its Parks and Recreation department in recent years. For the current fiscal year, the city set aside nearly \$300,000 for park improvements and eventual construction of a skate park.

Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter said the city's unusually large youth population does put a burden on the department. Three months of outdoor swimming weather doesn't leave time to schedule enough swim lessons to accommodate everyone, he said, and the city needs to get out ahead of the demand for more soccer and softball fields.

"From the parks side, it's scrounging for grass in a desert," he said.

Fetter said non-city leagues like youth football and AYSO are crucial for filling in gaps on the recreation side.

"The city could not accommodate, nor are we interested in accommodating everyone's needs in the city," he said.

Recreation director Dan Earp said the department does offer a "fairly comprehensive program" for a city of Hermiston's size, because of its young population. Those of-



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Cory Bowe, 10, and Jantzen Wrathall, 12, practice lines Wednesday for Hermiston Park and Recreation's "The Little Town of Christmas." The young cast will perform on Dec. 10 and 11 at Armand Larive Middle School.

ferings stretch beyond sports into educational programs, enrichment classes and drama productions like the performance of "The Little Town of Christmas" that is currently in the works.

"We do offer a lot of classes, and they keep filling up," Earp said. "We have a waiting list."

At the Hermiston Public Library, programming is also affected. Library director Marie Baldo said the library gets 400-500 children and teens signed up for the summer reading program each year, and activities during the

school year can have as many as 100 children or teens attending. Even the Baby Boogie sessions can attract more than 50 children and their parents every Wednesday morning.

"It gets rather lively," she said.

Baldo said for teenagers, the library tries to host activities — like scavenger hunts — that can be done over the course of a day instead of having everyone show up at once.

"Those type of static events allow us to serve more and more people even as our

staff doesn't grow," she said.

As for circulation, Baldo said the staff buys new books for children and teens monthly. Baldo said she likes to take the library's Teen Advisory Council on "mall crawls" where they head to Barnes and Noble in the Tri-Cities to browse the aisles and pick out new young adult literature for the library.

"Quite frankly they're better equipped to pick out books they want to read than a 60-year-old lady," she said.

The most obvious and well-documented effects of Hermiston's "youth tsunami" are in the school system.

Enrollment in Hermiston School District rose by more than 200 students this year, causing the district to plan for another five two-classroom modulars to the 24 portable classrooms it already has.

Deputy Superintendent Wade Smith described the lack of permanent classroom space for the district's growing population as a "desperate situation" last week. The district has been looking at possible bond measures to address the growth but is limited by how much debt it can take on until the community pays off the district's previous capital construction bonds.

Preschool is also expanding in Hermiston. In March Umatilla Morrow County Head Start received

a \$780,000 grant from the federal government to train and certify private preschool providers as Head Start teachers, allowing them to take on some of the students that have been relegated to a waiting list for regular Head Start classrooms due to the area's high number of preschool-aged children.

In the private sector, the needs of a younger-than-average population also come into play.

Nick Bejarano, director of marketing and communications for Good Shepherd Health Care System, said the hospital is aware of the city's young population and is committed to doing what is necessary to meet the needs of local families.

Good Shepherd currently has four full-time and one half-time pediatrician, in addition to the family doctors who also provide general wellness visits for children. Bejarano said pediatricians are hired based on population ratios recommended by organizations like the American Medical Association. The hospital wants to make sure its pediatricians are able to take their time to get to know each patient, he said.

"If we know our pediatricians are kind of being overwhelmed we look and say 'Maybe we need to hire another,'" Bejarano said.

Hermiston man joins Alice Cooper in Hall of Fame

Gene Snyder crowned as a new craving king of White Castle

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

A Hermiston man is in the same Hall of Fame as rock legend Alice Cooper.

Not the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, mind you.

The White Castle Cravers Hall of Fame.

The Midwestern restaurant chain inducted Gene Snyder, 74, this year, christening him the "Traveling Slider Man." The first thing Snyder always does when he travels is check for the nearest White Castle. He has eaten the restaurant's famous sliders from New York to Las Vegas.

"It's been a part of my life for almost 70 years," he said.

Last year's inductees included Alice Cooper, who has discussed his love of White Castle burgers during media interviews in the past. This year no one particularly famous got the honor, but Snyder pointed out that there were only 11 inductees out of 1,148 people who applied.

"It's easier to get into Harvard than to get inducted into the White Castle Hall of Fame," he said.

His lifelong craving for White Castle's two-inch sliders started when he was a kid growing up in Chicago.

"I was always real slight and did not like to eat anything but White Castle, so my mom and dad would take me there to make sure I ate," he said. "That's what started it."

When the family moved to the north side of the city, picking up a bag of White Castle sliders meant an hour-



PHOTO COURTESY GENE SNYDER

Gene Snyder holds a box of White Castle sliders during his trip to Columbus, Ohio to be inducted into the restaurant's hall of fame.

long drive, but that didn't stop them. Neither did an eventual move to Seattle, where the nearest White Castle was thousands of miles away.

"We would get freshly cooked White Castles and put them in our luggage and take them back to Seattle," Snyder said. "The smell would permeate the whole cabin."

His wife Karen said the tradition of bringing White Castle sliders back from vacation continued after the couple married.

"We used to bring them home by the hundreds," she

said.

He said out of all the foods that he missed after moving away from the Midwest, the reason he missed White Castle sliders the most was the restaurant's unique way of cooking the mini-burgers in a steamer surrounded by juicy onions.

"It's a whole different taste," he said.

Today the sliders are available in the frozen food section of some grocery stores in the Pacific Northwest, but it's not quite the same.

When he saw a notice on one of the boxes calling for people to submit their stories of White Castle cravings he sent something in and then forgot about it, figuring at

most he would get a few coupons for free sliders.

Instead, the company contacted him with free

round-trip tickets to the restaurant's headquarters in Columbus, Ohio, for Snyder and his wife

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