

Stanfield market robbery suspect arrested

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

Police arrested a Hermiston man for the Dec. 6 robbery of Center Market in Stanfield. Alfredo Lopez Rodriguez, 22, is in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, on charges of first-degree robbery, unlawful use of a weapon, coercion and failure to appear.

Hermiston police Chief Jason Edmiston said Stanfield’s lone on-duty officer, plus police from Hermiston and the local drug enforcement team, caught up to the suspect Dec.

15 at about 3 p.m. at a Hermiston restaurant where he worked. Rodriguez cooperated with police and went without incident, Edmiston said.

Umatilla County Circuit Court records show Rodriguez pleaded not guilty to charges Dec. 16, and Circuit Judge Dan Hill set his bail at \$75,000.

Stanfield city manager Blair Larsen previously said the suspect was “clearly visible” on surveillance footage and police knew who he was. Umatilla County Circuit



Alfredo Rodriguez

Court records show Rodriguez is serving two years of court probation after pleading guilty in August to second-degree theft from Wal-Mart.

Rodriguez was the only suspect in a robbery that happened Dec. 6 at 2 a.m. at Center Market, Stanfield. Market owners Gurbal Singh and Jaswinder Kaur reported a man came in, pointed a gun at Kaur and demanded she take all of the money out of the cash register and put it in a bag. According to Kaur’s ac-

count he hit her on the arm, then fled with the cash.

Edmiston said Hermiston stepped up patrols through Stanfield in the wake of the robbery. The small city near Hermiston is down to just one officer while the police department’s chief and lieutenant are on paid leave and under investigation.

Edmiston also said he knew the robbery was a traumatic experience for the victims and his department would assist another any time it could to help resolve crimes.

IN BRIEF

Tax program needs volunteers

With tax season right around the corner, volunteers are needed for the AARP Tax-aide program.

People will assist in providing free tax preparation in Umatilla and Morrow counties. All necessary training and equipment will be provided to volunteers. Not all positions require computer or tax knowledge.

The training is planned in January and assistance is provided February through April 14.

For more information or to register for training materials, call Vivian at 541-567-8054 or Joan at 541-567-8034.

Morrow County Fair seeks board members

The Morrow County Fair has two vacant openings.

The board meets once a month, rotating the meetings between Heppner and Boardman.

For more information, call Ann Jones at 541-676-9474.

Hospice offers grief materials

A library featuring grief-related materials for adults, children, medical professionals and pastors is available at Vange John Memorial Hospice.

People can check-out books and other publications for up to one month. The hospice office is open Monday though Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 645 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston.

For more information, call 541-667-3543.

Umatilla County returns fire district merger to voters

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

Voters in Hermiston and Stanfield will vote again on whether to a merge their fire districts.

Stanfield voters in November 2014 approved the plan for a new district, but Hermiston voters did not.

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners last Wednesday voted 3-0 to start the formation of Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 to replace the Hermiston and Stanfield districts. The process includes a public hearing on the new district Jan. 20 at 9 a.m. at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton.

This time out the tax rate is \$1.75 per \$1,000 of assessed value, lower than the previous proposal. Scott Stanton, chief for the Hermiston and Stanfield fire districts, told commissioners that public safety on the west side of Umatilla County is at risk in the current formation.

“We don’t have enough people,” he said. “We don’t have enough funding to replace our capital needs, such as fire engines, cardiac monitors and ambulances.”

Hermiston provides ambulance service to four cities and operates the regional hazardous materials team for six counties. The district will not run out of

money, Stanton said, but cuts to services could come as soon as 2017.

Stanton also told commissioners the new permanent tax rate would mean the larger district would not have to go out for bonds for capital or equipment improvements.

Just like in 2014, voters would need to pass measures to dissolve both districts and then approve a measure to form and fund the new district. Residents of the Hermiston Fire District currently pay a tax rate of \$1.20 per \$1,000. Stanton explained in an email that residents in the city limits would not see any tax increase, because of com-

pression. The city of Hermiston, though, would lose money while the fire district would receive about \$900,000 in additional funds.

Citizens outside both cities would see an increase of 55 cents, which amounts to \$55 per \$100,000 in assessed value or approximately \$4.58 per month.

Citizens in Stanfield pay \$2.06 per \$1,000, so they would see a small decrease.

“When all is said and done,” Stanton said, “All citizens will pay \$1.75 per \$1,000 towards the new fire district. This will still be the cheapest rate for fire departments our size throughout the state.”

EOTEC board seeks \$2 million in community donations

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

The fundraising committee for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center needs to raise \$2 million in private donations in the next four months to finish the \$16 million project on schedule.

That goal — and a plan for reaching it by April 1 — was approved by the EOTEC board at the end of a public meeting Dec. 16.

Falling short of the goal will mean cutting planned features from the EOTEC project.

“I’ll just be frank with you, we need your resources,” Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann told community members in attendance.

Drotzmann sits on the fundraising committee with Hermiston Energy Services director Nate Rivera, accountant Dennis Barnett and Threemile Canyon Farms manager Greg Harris.

If the committee raises \$625,000, the third of three planned livestock barns will be built. If another \$600,000 is brought in, it will pay for 2,000 permanent seats in the rodeo arena. The next \$700,000 brought in will build permanent pens, panels and stalls. The final \$75,000 will go to extending water and electricity to the “extended stay” area where exhibitors can park RVs.

Drotzmann said if the money isn’t raised, the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo will have to rent temporary pens, seats and other items each year.

“What it does is it hurts operation and maintenance costs,” he said.

He said the committee is happy to take any donation, no matter how small. Drotzmann even said there are volunteer opportunities available, such as laying out sod or unloading chairs, for those who want to help but cannot give monetarily. For those planning larger donations, the committee unveiled a sponsorship plan.

The plan includes eight levels of fundraising, starting with recognition in the 2017 fair and rodeo programs for a \$100 donation and ending with a custom-engraved bronze plaque on a sponsor recognition wall for a donation of

\$250,000 or more.

The \$2 million the committee is seeking is in addition to \$11.8 million the board already had in its coffers, \$600,000 recently pledged by the city of Hermiston, \$600,000 from Umatilla County, \$450,000 from the fair’s “moving fund” and \$1 million pledged by hoteliers via an increase to the bed tax.

In order to allow donors to spread out their donations across as many as five years while still allowing the EOTEC board to meet its planned July 2017 completion date, the committee had planned to take out a loan equal to the amount of promised contributions, using the EOTEC property as collateral. The loan would have been paid back using the promised donations as they came in.

But that plan hit a snag last week during the Umatilla County Commissioners meeting. The intergovernmental agreement forming EOTEC requires the board to get permission from the county and the city of Hermiston before entering into any finance agreements. The city approved the plan Dec. 14, but on Dec. 16 county attorney Doug Olsen informed the commissioners that Oregon’s constitution makes it illegal for a county to use

land as collateral for a loan of that size.

“EOTEC only has the authority that both the county and the city have,” he said in response to a comment by EOTEC board chair Ed Brookshier that the land was in EOTEC’s name and not the county’s. “So if the county does not have the authority, then EOTEC doesn’t have the authority.”

After the meeting Olsen said the county could sign off on using something other than land as collateral, and that more research would be done to look at other options.

After the EOTEC meeting in Hermiston, Rivera said Olsen’s news was a surprise, but the committee was confident that they could find a way to finance donors’ long-term contributions.

During last week’s evening meeting, board members also took questions from the audience.

In response to a question about what would happen to a program that had allowed people to purchase engraved bricks to support the project, Dan Dorran said the bricks that had already been purchased would be displayed, but the program was being pushed to the back burner to focus on the new fundraising effort.

In answer to a question about the opportunity for concerts, Dorran said EOTEC could host them in several spots. The Umatil-

la County Fair’s outdoor stage would be moved over to the new fairgrounds, the indoor event center would feature a stage and room for 800 seats, the rodeo arena could seat up to 10,000 people if enough bleachers were brought in and the acres of green space that will be used for parking during the fair could accommodate outdoor concerts as well.

In answer to a question



about irrigation, Brookshier said EOTEC currently has one well completed and has identified the location of a second well. Those two wells won’t be enough to support the entire project, he said, but the board is in talks with the Stanfield and Hermiston irrigation districts about the possibility of leasing additional water rights.

Questions offered up by the community on

Wednesday night will be added to an already-compiled list of Frequently Asked Questions found on www.eotechermiston.com. Rivera said as community members continue to submit questions during the fundraising process they will be added to the website, which also includes the full list of sponsorship information and a PayPal link where people can donate directly.

More inside

See more on EOTEC on Page A6, including a guest commentary from Hermiston mayor and EOTEC fundraising committee member David Drotzmann.

**Notice of Availability of the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility (NWSTF) Boardman Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations [40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508]), the U.S. Navy, in cooperation with the National Guard Bureau and Oregon National Guard, has completed a Final EIS to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with ongoing and proposed military readiness activities within NWSTF Boardman and associated airspace.

Proposed Action:

The Navy and Oregon National Guard propose to:

- Increase the types and the number of certain training activities conducted at NWSTF Boardman
- Develop and enhance training facilities at NWSTF Boardman
- Create additional special use airspace to support existing aircraft training

The Proposed Action is needed to enhance the training environment at NWSTF Boardman – including ranges, training areas, and instrumentation – to better support current and future unit and personnel training requirements.

The Final EIS will be available for public review from Dec. 18, 2015, to Jan. 19, 2016.

The document is available online at www.NWSTFBoardmanEIS.com and at these locations: Multnomah County Central, Salem Central, West Salem, Oregon Trail Heppner, Oregon Trail Boardman, and the Stafford Hansell Government Center.

For more information:

Visit the project website at www.NWSTFBoardmanEIS.com or contact: Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest Attn: NWSTF Boardman EIS Project Manager 1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203 Silverdale, WA 98315-1101

Comments may be submitted by U.S. postal mail to the above address by Jan. 19, 2016.

Public Involvement:

The completion of the Final EIS follows years of research, analysis, and public involvement. The Navy held two public scoping meetings in October 2010 and two public meetings in September 2012 to provide information and receive public comments. The Final EIS includes responses from the Navy and the Oregon National Guard to the public comments received on the Draft EIS. Regulations provide for a 30-day public review and wait period after the Final EIS is published before action may be taken.

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