

Woman escapes from ex who kidnapped her

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

A Boardman woman escaped a man that kidnapped, strangled and assaulted her this weekend, according to Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack.

The suspect, Travis Lane Thomas, 44, pleaded not guilty Monday in Morrow County Circuit Court to 11 counts: four of first-degree kidnapping; two of first-degree assault; and one each of second- and fourth-degree assault, menacing and strangulation.

A caller on Saturday morning at 7:35 asked law enforcement to pick up a woman outside his home on Hill Top Lane, Boardman, according to a written statement from the Morrow County Sheriff's Office. The woman, the caller stated, was an assault victim "covered in blood and only wearing a coat."

Boardman police officer Matt Clinard and Morrow County sheriff's deputy Matt Crowell were the first police on the scene, and the Boardman Ambulance took Heather Payne to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston. There she talked to officers before the hospital transferred her to Kadlec Regional Medical Center, Richland, Washington, due to a serious head injury.

Matlack said she had bleeding in her brain from the assault, and Kadlec treated her and sent her back to Good Shepherd, which expected to release her early this week.

Matlack said Payne was staying alone in a friend's recreational vehicle in the



Thomas

West Glen Edition of southeast Boardman. Thomas was at his motor home at 70072 K u n z e

Road on the same property where Payne was. Saturday around sunrise, Matlack said, Thomas kidnapped Payne and forced her into his home. The two were previously in a relationship and Morrow County records show Thomas has domestic violence convictions in 2015 for menacing and assaulting her.

Thomas bound Payne's feet and hands, the sheriff said, then assaulted and strangled her.

Thomas stepped out around 7:30 a.m. but told Payne he would be right back.

Matlack said Payne broke her bonds, grabbed her coat and left out a window. She made it about 100 yards before getting help from residents on Hill Top Lane.

Members of the sheriff's office and Boardman police tried to contact Thomas at his home, Matlack said, but he did not answer the door. So sheriff's detective Brian Snyder obtained a search warrant.

Matlack said Thomas was wearing blood-stained clothes and sitting on the floor when officers entered the home, and he did not put up a fight during the arrest.

Circuit Judge Eva Temple set bail Monday for Thomas at \$100,000. He remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

Hermiston EOTEC more than halfway to \$2 million goal

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

The fundraising committee for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is 57 percent of the way toward its \$2 million goal.

"We're very confident that things are on track," committee chair Dennis Barnett of Barnett & Moro said.

The committee had raised \$1,140,639 as of Feb. 17. Its goal is to raise \$2 million by April 1.

Barnett said some area businesses are in the process of sending a donation request up their chain of command, while others have indicated they would like to donate but have not yet decided how much to give.

Some donations have come from the east side of Umatilla County, and others from Morrow County, but Barnett said so far the majority of donations have come from Hermiston residents and locally owned Hermiston businesses.

"They're people who live here, who work here, who sleep here," he said.

Barnett said even though EOTEC will benefit the county by bringing travelers to the area and providing larger, higher-quality facilities for the Umatilla County Fair



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

A sign marking the fundraising efforts for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center on Highway 395 in Hermiston shows more than half of the \$2 million goal has been raised.

and Farm-City Pro Rodeo. In 2015, the Umatilla County Fair Youth Livestock Auction raised more than \$492,000.

"When you're talking about the fair, you're talking about the county," he said.

In order to provide donors the option of spreading donations out over a period of two to five years while still being able to access the entire sum during construction, the county commission and Hermiston City Council have given permission for EOTEC to borrow up to \$1.5 million.

Barnett said it is hard to say how much the board could end up borrowing, but it should be

significantly lower than that. He said a large number of "very generous people" are giving their entire donation up front. And although the board needs to know by April 1 how much money it will have for construction in order to design components and send them out to bid, Barnett said they won't actually need all of the money to finish paying contractors until early in 2017, after donors have already made their second payment.

He said the fundraising committee has been making itself available to give an informational presentation about EOTEC to any inter-

ested city council, business or civic group. The committee has also been actively soliciting donations from people and businesses identified as likely donors. Some people have donated unsolicited, too, Barnett said, including someone who walked into his office recently and handed over \$8,000.

He said some major sponsors, including one individual who donated \$100,000 to EOTEC, have asked to remain anonymous. After 30 years in the community, he said it doesn't surprise him that the committee has found so many people willing to support the project.

"This area is supremely giving," he said. "People are very charitable."

The committee has already raised the \$625,000 needed to build a third barn on the fairgrounds and is very close to reaching the next \$600,000 needed for permanent seating in the rodeo arena. The following \$700,000 will go toward permanent pens, panels and stalls and an additional \$75,000 beyond that would pay for utility hook-ups for RVs.

The fundraising committee will continue to look for ways to raise money after April 1 to improve the facility.

Equipment failure knocks out power to 1,165 homes

Power was out for 1,165 households in Hermiston for the second time in less than a week after an equipment failure on Monday night.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative spokesman Steve Myers said an underground line coming out of the Hermiston Butte substation, located at UEC headquarters on Elm Avenue, failed shortly after 8 p.m. Monday night.

The substation serves several thousand customers, he said, but only 1,165 were affected by the outage. Myers said in order to make repairs those customers have been temporarily switched

to the Feedville substation. He said for safety reasons the switch took several hours to implement gradually, which is why the last of the customers affected did not get power until about 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

"Cold weather can slow down the process, because power loads are heavier when people have their heating switched on," he wrote in an email.

On Friday afternoon about 10,000 Hermiston-area customers experienced a power outage after a high-speed wind gust knocked out a transmission line and damaged other sections of line in town.

Hermiston AD Blaine Ganvoa resigns

Blaine Ganvoa has submitted his resignation as athletic director of Hermiston High School.

The Hermiston School Board of Education accepted the resignation Monday night during a board meeting and work session.

Ganvoa said Tuesday the decision was made for personal and professional reasons but said he had no further comment. "I am definitely fully committed to Hermiston

until the end," he said. "I will continue that until the end of the school year."

Ganvoa became the athletic director at Hermiston High School in July 2014. He previously served as a teacher and athletic director at Irigoin Senior High School.

Ganvoa's submitted his resignation Feb. 12. His last day with the Hermiston School District will be June 30.

— Jennifer Colton



Ganvoa

Fire district merger goes back to voters

Cost to Hermiston, Stanfield taxpayers is lowered in second attempt for approval

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

Hermiston and Stanfield voters will have a second chance at merging their fire districts.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners voted 3-0 Wednesday, Feb. 17, to place the matter on the May ballot. The proposal would establish a permanent tax rate of \$1.75 per \$1,000 of assessed property value to create Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, replacing the Hermiston and Stanfield fire districts.

The creation of the district went before voters in November 2015. That time the rate was \$2 per \$1,000. Stanfield voters approved the proposal, but Hermiston voters turned it down and the measure failed.

The county commissioner's approval came after the second and final public hearing to place the matter on the ballot. Scott Stanton, fire chief of both the Hermiston and Stanfield fire districts, again

spoke in favor of the merger.

He said the notion started in 2009, and a 2012 study showed one district would better serve the people the two communities. In 2014 the fire districts merged administrations and Stanton became chief of both.

The next step was asking the voters to approve a new district. Stanton said that failure led to getting additional input and dropping the amount of the tax to \$1.75 per \$1,000.

That would be a 31 cent decrease in Stanfield's rate, but a rate increase of 55 cents for rural areas around Hermiston, which works out to paying about an extra \$9.17 a month on a \$200,000 home. Property owners inside the Hermiston city limits may not see an actual increase because of compression, the Oregon law that limits property tax rates.

The tax would generate about \$900,000 a year, most of which would go

toward additional staffing and the rest toward capital improvements. Stanton said the new district would provide 24/7 staffing at Hermiston's main station and at station No. 2, as well as day shifts at station No. 3 and in Stanfield.

The new district would also have enough money to cover equipment costs, he said, and not have to ask voters to pass future bonds.

Without the new fire district, Stanton told commissioners back at the first public hearing in January, Hermiston and Stanfield may have to put off equipment upgrades and cut staff. He also said at that time the new district would tie Redmond as the cheapest in the state for its size. Most districts of this size, he said, have a rate exceeding \$2.

Stanton was the only person to speak for the proposal, and no one spoke against it, just like at the January hearing.

Riverside High coach arrested

A Boardman high school sports coach and educational assistant was arrested Tuesday and may be charged with supplying alcohol to minors.

Matthew Ryan Summers-Johnson, 27, coaches football and junior varsity boys basketball at Riverside High School. He is on administrative leave from the school district pending the allegation.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office began investigating Summers-Johnson on Feb. 9 based on a complaint that he provided alcohol to a group of student athletes. He was arrested on a warrant out of Clatsop County for violating probation from a 2014 charge of driving under the influence of intoxicants.

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said he has not yet charged Summers-Johnson with a crime, and planned to review the case on Monday. Summers-Johnson has been with the Morrow County School District since July 2015.



Summers-Johnson

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Megan Glynn
PILOT ROCK HIGH SCHOOL

Pilot Rock High School student of the week is senior Megan Glynn. Megan has many outstanding qualities, but foremost is her positive attitude in all situations. Her infectious smile makes anyone she meets in the hallway feel better immediately. Megan is the senior class president, National Honor Society president, and a member of Key club and leadership class. She is also involved in athletics and can be seen after school sprinting around town in preparation for the upcoming track season. Megan likes to set goals and is looking forward to attending college in the fall.

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