

Victims' parents make case for sex offender

Ramirez sentenced to 18 months

By **JENNIFER COLTON**
Staff Writer

The victims' parents tearfully asked the judge for leniency March 9 in the sentencing of a man convicted of sex abuse.

Luis Alberto Ramirez, 21, entered the Hermiston Circuit Court with eight counts of first-degree sexual abuse and two counts of first-degree sodomy involving two female relatives who were under the age of 14 at the time of the abuse. He left the courtroom with a plea deal of 18 months in

jail, four years of probation and a lifetime record as a sex offender.

"We all do things, and we have to pay for it," the mother of the victims said through an interpreter. "My daughters love him. My son misses him as well. They say they forgive him."

The court did not identify the parents by full name to protect the identity of the victims. The age of the victims was not released, other than that both were younger than 14 at the time of the incidents. Through most of the hearing the parents, sitting in the back of the courtroom, wore headphones and listened to a translation of the proceedings in Span-

ish while Judge Eva Temple worked through the case.

Ramirez, born in Mexico, came to Hermiston via California to live with his aunt and uncle. Over a period of time in 2010 and 2011, while a student at Hermiston High School, Ramirez allegedly assaulted the victims, both his relatives.

In October, Ramirez was arrested on sexual abuse charges. He pleaded not guilty.

According to defense attorney Kara Davis, a psychological evaluation in February determined Ramirez could participate in his own defense although

his IQ was "significantly low." After the evaluation, Davis filed a motion for a change of plea. Davis said Ramirez is not "a predator" and is unlikely to re-offend with treatment.

Ramirez then pleaded guilty to two felony counts of first-degree attempted sexual abuse. The charges were one count for each of the victims.

Each count is a deportable offense, but the family asked that Ramirez not be sent back to Mexico. Temple said that decision is out of her jurisdiction. The mother acknowledged Ramirez had a severe prob-

lem, but said he knows no one in Mexico and comes from a family that has suffered. The father of the victims also spoke.

"I've known him as a child, and I know something happened to him. But he is a good boy and he always respected us," he said through a translator. "I've always taught everybody from childhood that when someone commits a crime, they have to pay for it. That's why he's here today — because we love him, not because we hate him. ... Lastly, I want him to know that he's not alone, that he can always count on us."

Ramirez was sentenced

to 18 months in prison, eligible for early release for good behavior. He was also sentenced to 200 hours of community service work and 60 months of post-prison supervision.

Ramirez will be required to register as a sex offender within 10 days of his birthday every year.

Ramirez, clad in a yellow jumpsuit and handcuffs, spoke little during the hearing, providing yes and no answers to most questions.

"I just wanted to say that at the time I was going through a lot of things being a teenager," Ramirez told the court. "I just wanted to say I'm sorry."



Ramirez

Highway 395 committee considers paving roads privately

Group also wants to make landscaping recommendations

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Property owners on Umatilla County's Highway 395 North Technical Advisory Committee are hoping their neighbors will agree to voluntarily contribute to road improvement efforts instead of forming a local improvement district.

The committee of landowners and business owners has been working with the county on finding ways to foster economic development in the area between Hermiston's urban growth boundary at Punkin Center and Umatilla's at Bense Road.

One of the committee's top priorities is improving the roads branching off the highway that are public roads but not owned by any specific jurisdiction.

"A lot of them are in pretty rough shape," county planning director Tamara Mabbott said during a meeting March 8. "They probably weren't built to standard and nobody has taken responsibility to maintain them."

Committee chair Steve Watkins, who owns the Columbia Court Club, said the first order of business is getting the loop of Baggett Lane to West Fourth Street to Kik Street and back to Highway 395 paved. The loop is bordered by a patchwork of commercial and industrial property, including a strip mall along the highway, Eastern Oregon Machine and Hermiston Sanitary Disposal.

To pave the road, property owners could form a local improvement district or handle the project privately.

Forming a local improvement district would only require 50 percent of landowners to agree, and money contributed to the district would mean a property tax credit. The downside, Watkins said, is that the project would have to follow government standards for contracts — including paying prevailing wages — and would cost an estimated \$1 million to pave a loop that is less than a mile long.

Watkins said he and Bill Kik have been talking to contractors who have told them they could do the project for \$200,000 if the property owners handled it privately. But that money wouldn't be credited to their property taxes, and it leaves a question of what to do with neighbors who can't or won't contribute to the project even though their business will benefit.

"There was a small con-

sensus that we should try to handle this ourselves," Watkins said.

He said about two-thirds of property owners abutting those roads had already expressed some interest and he planned on meeting one-on-one with the rest.

If the property owners take the initiative to pave the loop of road starting where vehicles turn west onto Baggett Lane from Highway 395, Watkins said trucks would gravitate there when accessing the network of businesses west of that stretch of highway. He said a traffic signal at Baggett Lane — another priority for the committee — is already in the Oregon Department of Transportation's master plan to improve safety. Paving Baggett Lane "elevates it up the priority list" past projects in other cities.

"There won't be any more laying on the throttle once you pass Punkin Center and going 70 once you hit Baggett Lane," he said.

On March 8, the committee also gave other updates on their work to neighbors who had been invited to the meeting. One thing they discussed is that a lack of water for fire suppression was hindering economic development in the area.

Mabbott said the committee was looking for grants to bring more non-potable water to the stretch of land but was "not quite there yet" as far as sending in applications. There was also some talk of seeing if the city of Umatilla would be interested in extending its urban growth boundary in order to bring water south and speed up the building permit process by moving it from state to city juris-

diction.

Tom Houge, an economic development planning specialist from the Oregon Department of Land Conservation, also spoke with the group about creating more flexibility with zoning in the area, particularly by creating an overlay.

He said it is not uncommon for the allowable uses in zones to be out of date. Creating an overlay instead of changing the base zoning would add more allowed uses to properties if they meet certain requirements such as landscaping or clean-up.

"You want to make sure businesses can get on the ground here, stay on the ground and play well with their neighbors," he said.

Committee member Kari Christiansen, owner of nearby Sherrell Chevrolet, told property owners in attendance the committee had also been working to come up with some design standards and drawings for landscaping and facades. She said the standards wouldn't be mandatory, but they would provide helpful information to developers new to the area about things like which trees grow best in the climate.

"I think we need something in place that when we have potential landowners or potential developers coming into the county we have some sort of packet we can hand to them and say 'This is our goal,'" she said.

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for June 7.

BRECKHEIMER GETS EIGHT YEARS FOR FATAL DUI

By **JENNIFER COLTON**
Staff Writer

Alicia George Breckheimer, 33, of Hermiston, was sentenced to more than eight years in prison Monday for manslaughter in a drunk-driving car crash that killed an Ione man in 2014.

Breckheimer was sentenced to 100 months for second-degree manslaughter, plus a year for each of three counts of recklessly endangering another person and reckless driving and a year for driving while under the influence of intoxicants. The sentences are to be served concurrently, followed by a period of probation and post-prison supervision. She also must pay \$2,600 in fines and her driver's license was suspended.

At 1:27 a.m. March 7, 2014, Breckheimer was driving westbound in the eastbound lanes of Interstate 82 near milepost 4. Her vehicle collided head-on with a vehicle driven by Robert Henry Baker, 66, of Ione. Baker died at the scene, and Breckheimer was extricated from her Cadillac CTS by firefighters and was transported to Good Shepherd Medical Center. She later was transported by air ambulance to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland.

Her blood alcohol level after the crash was at least .15 percent, and the legal limit is .08 percent. This was Breckheimer's second DUI conviction, the first coming in 2003 after she crashed into a Hermiston building.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Alicia Breckheimer, of Hermiston, talks with her attorney Monday at her sentencing at the Stafford Hansell Government Center for driving drunk and killing Robert Henry Baker, of Ione, in a head-on crash on Interstate 82 near Hermiston.

Breckheimer was released from the hospital after treatment; she was arrested at her Hermiston home in June 2014.

Breckheimer initially pleaded not guilty to charges of first- and second-degree manslaughter, three counts of recklessly endangering another person, one count of reckless driving and one of driving under the influence of intoxicants. In Oregon, manslaughter is the charge for vehicular homicide, and the three counts of recklessly endangering another person refer to other drivers on the road.

In February of this year, Breckheimer changed her plea to guilty on one count of driving under the influence of intoxicants, three counts of recklessly endangering another person and one count of second-degree manslaughter. The state dismissed charges of reckless driving and first-degree manslaughter as part of the agreement.

Breckheimer appeared in court Monday at the Stafford

Hansell Government Center. In half of the courtroom, her friends and family cried audibly; in the other half, Baker's friends and family sat stoically, waiting for the announcement.

Baker's family declined to make a statement. Speaking quietly with her head down, Breckheimer said pleading guilty was the first step in atoning for what she had done.


"I just want to tell everyone here that I'm sorry for the pain that I've caused everybody," she said. "I would never imagine that something like this could happen, and I just want to say I know it will never go away for me and it will never go away for anyone in this courtroom."

A civil suit between Breckheimer and the victim's family had already been settled.

A request by Breckheimer's defense to have her transported on her own to custody was denied, and she was taken into custody from the courtroom.


STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Tucker Wilson
GRISWOLD HIGH SCHOOL



Senior Tucker Wilson is involved in multiple activities including Varsity Basketball, in which he was a co-captain, Varsity Track, Key Club, National Honor Society, and is a three time state champion, in different events for FBLA. Tucker is also the Chapter President for FBLA, the Sergeant-at-Arm for ASB, and the Knowledge Bowl team captain. Tucker is a two time state finalist and national qualifier in National History Day, two time Voice of Democracy state finalist, a four time participant of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth program, and will be the Class of 2016 Valedictorian for Griswold High School. Tucker plans on going to either Whitworth University or Gonzaga University to get his Bachelor's in Biology, and then continuing on to pursue a doctorate in zoology to become an animal researcher.

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