

# Boardman schools get its first resource officer

Morrow County also providing officer for schools in Irrigon and Heppner

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Staff Writer

Officer George Shimer walks into a class of first-graders at Sam Boardman Elementary School, where he is enthusiastically greeted by kids celebrating their 100th day of school by making necklaces and bracelets out of Froot Loops.

Though Shimer is on duty and in uniform, there is no apprehension about his visit. In fact, the kids have to be reminded several times about his “no hugs” rule — Shimer worries about fingers getting pinched in his police belt. Instead, he gives high fives to everyone who comes up to say hello.

As Boardman’s first ever school resource officer, Shimer said he wants to be a friendly face to young students who might otherwise grow up afraid of the police. That means he spends a good part of his day dropping in on classrooms to help out with art projects, or read a book, or talk about things like bicycle safety.

“Sometimes I’ll just pop in and listen,” Shimer said. “For me personally, it’s a great mix.”

The idea of hiring a school resource officer has been discussed for years in Boardman, but the budget always seemed to stand in the way. Paying for an extra officer isn’t cheap, between salary, training, uniforms and equipment. Funding finally came together at the start of the school year last fall, with the Morrow County School District covering \$50,000 and another \$55,000 from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone.

Boardman Police Chief Rick Stokoe said they tabbed Shimer to fill the role based on his ability to build a rapport with students. Shimer used to teach junior and senior high school Spanish for 17 years before he came to Boardman. His wife, Marie Shimer, is also the principal of Riverside Junior-Senior High School.

Shimer is bilingual, which is especially handy in a district where nearly 55 percent of students are Hispanic. He divides his time between all



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Boardman Police officer George Shimer talks to second-graders about bike safety recently at Sam Boardman Elementary School in Boardman.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Boardman Police officer George Shimer talks with third-grader Vlad Lissman about a report he is working on about P.T. Barnum recently at Sam Boardman Elementary School in Boardman.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Lead custodian Curtis Johnson talks with Boardman Police office George Shimer about safety upgrades to Windy River Elementary School recently in Boardman.

three schools in town, including Riverside, Sam Boardman and Windy River Elementary. His job is more than just patrolling the hallways; he has to be someone the students feel comfortable talking to when they notice something wrong.

“It’s about the rapport with the kids,” he said. “That’s been a major asset for me, because I already know how to build that.”

In addition, Shimer is teaching a new class specifically for high schoolers through the Police Explorers program, which offers students an introductory look into careers with law enforcement. Seven students have signed up for the class, which can be taken for school credit.

School safety is, of course, a major concern across the country, Stokoe said. He’s fought for a school resource officer since he became Boardman’s police chief five years ago. Already, he said kids are opening up and sharing informa-

tion with Shimer that they normally wouldn’t share.

“We’ve won if we can get those kids on our side,” Stokoe said.

Sometimes Shimer said he’ll hear a report about drugs in the school, or a student who’s cutting class. Boardman has a daytime curfew on the books, which allows Shimer to pick up truant kids and bring them back to school.

Other times, Shimer’s visits are quiet and uneventful, save for the kids who wave and holler as he passes by. That’s taken time to get to this point.

“You could definitely see it in the kids’ faces at first. They didn’t trust me at all,” Shimer said. “Now, they’re not afraid to talk to me.”

School administrators have taken notice, too. Sarah Kimmell, principal at Sam Boardman Elementary — which enrolls kindergarten through third grade — said Shimer is already challenging students’ stereotypes about police at the youngest level.

## Boardman Police Explorers to hold April fundraiser

The Boardman Police Explorers will host a shooting competition next month to raise money for the first-year class.

Law enforcement, military and civilians are invited to come test their skills on Saturday, April 16 at the Boardman Range on North Rippee Road. Lunch is provided, and prizes will also be raffled during the day. Check-in begins at 9 a.m. for

both the handgun and rifle contests. Participants must be at least 21 years old and attend a safety meeting before each event. The cost is \$40 per person.

Registration is due by Monday, April 4. For more information or to register, contact George Shimer with the Boardman Police Department at shimerg@cityofboardman.com.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Boardman Police officer George Shimer gets a high five from first-grader Juan Luis Flores Hernandez in the halls of Sam Boardman Elementary School recently in Boardman. Officer Shimer is the school resource officer for the Boardman School District.

They don’t seem to be afraid of him when he walks around. In fact, they like seeing him,” Kimmell said.

Morrow County Superintendent Dirk Dirksen said a school resource officer has the ability to see students every day, and settle issues with students before they start.

“We’re trying to prevent things from getting to the point where we’d have to make a (police)

call,” Dirksen said. “It’s all about building relationships, and making sure there’s an open communication.”

The Morrow County Sheriff’s Office has also started providing a full-time school resource officer in Irrigon and Heppner schools, Dirksen said. Deputy Todd Siex will shuttle between the two communities, which are located about 50 miles from one another.

Stokoe said he is confident Boardman will be able to continue funding both the school resource and Police Explorers programs, as long as they continue seeing success.

“It’s all about building that rapport and contact with the kids, and letting them know we’re just like everyone else,” Stokoe said. “We’re not the bad guy. We’re here to help make a positive difference in their life.”

### IN BRIEF

#### Documentary film cruises into Hermiston

A visual time capsule that explores how the landscape, architecture and culture of the Pacific Northwest has changed over the past 50 years is featured in “The Great Northwest.”

The 90-minute experimental documentary by Portland filmmaker Matt McCormick is based on the re-creation of a 3,200 mile road-trip made in 1958 by four Seattle women. They documented their journey in an elaborate scrapbook, which McCormick found in a thrift store.

McCormick will be on hand to introduce the film Tuesday, March 22, at 6 p.m. at the Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave. A question-and-answer session will follow the screening. The free program is open to all ages.

The program is sponsored by the Libraries of Eastern Oregon, a nonprofit organization that provides art-based programming at libraries in 15 rural counties. It supports workshops, presentations and art exhib-

its. For more information about the screening or other library activities, contact 541-567-2882, mbaldo@hermiston.or.us or www.hermistonlibrary.us.

#### Hospital auxiliary sets baked food, craft sale

An upcoming baked food and craft sale will help pay for hospital equipment and medical scholarships.

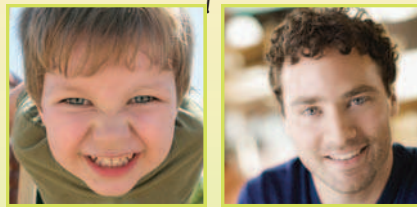
Hosted by the Hermis-

ton Hospital Auxiliary, the event is Wednesday, March 23, from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the pharmacy lobby at Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 N.W. 11th St., Hermiston.

In addition, the auxiliary announced the Hermiston Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Shop will re-open for the season Tuesday, March 22. The shop is located in the Umatilla County Fairgrounds at 435 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. The hours of operation are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Jacob Tyler Jones



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Send in your text and photos to cmcclellan@eastoregonian.com or bring to Chris at the East Oregonian office by May 18<sup>th</sup>. Mailing address: Attn: Chris McClellan 211 SE Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801

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