

Robber strikes at Sinclair convenience store

HERMISTON HERALD

Another convenience store robbery in Hermiston has the police chief calling 2018 a “frustrating” year so far, and saying steps are being taken to cut down on crimes of opportunity.

Jason Edmiston, the Hermiston police chief, sent a press release about a Wednesday night robbery and asked for the public’s help finding the culprit and stopping future thefts.

Police were alerted Wednesday at 9:45 p.m. that the Sinclair Station at 710 W. Hermiston Ave. had been robbed.

When officers arrived two minutes later they were informed that a man with a covered face wearing dark clothing and possibly armed had entered the store and demanded money.

The suspect left with an unspecified amount cash, but police aren’t sure if he fled on foot or in a vehicle.

Police said in a press release they aren’t sure if the crime is connected to other

recent robberies, including one at the 11th Street Market the week before.

Anyone with information is urged to call Lt. Randy Studebaker at 541-667-5095.

“While we don’t know all the facts, we know that somebody in the community holds a key piece of information that could help solve these cases,” Studebaker said in the release.

“We’re encouraging people to call us, even if they don’t think their information is important.”

People should call 911 if they see suspicious activity around businesses in the evening, the release stated, and businesses should ensure their security systems are working.

“Hermiston has consistently enjoyed a relatively low violent crime rate as compared to other like-sized cities,” Edmiston said in the release.

“... Steps are being taken internally within the department and externally with our business community to prevent further incidents.”



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Residents from evacuated homes on Southwest 9th Place stand on the corner as firefighters check for natural gas Thursday in Hermiston. A resident hit a natural gas line while digging in his yard.

Neighborhood evacuated after homeowner ruptures gas line

HERMISTON HERALD

The neighborhood of Southwest Ninth Place and Duane Avenue in Hermiston was evacuated Thursday afternoon for a ruptured gas line.

Troy Stolz, who lives on Ninth Place, said he was using a shovel to dig up a leaky water line when he struck a natural gas line instead.

“Just one stab of the shovel and

out it came,” he said. Stolz said he wasn’t sure who to call so he called the non-emergency line for Hermiston Police Department and they took it from there.

The department and Umatilla County Fire District 1 responded shortly before 1 p.m. to assist in blocking off the neighborhood, evacuating residents and securing the area before Cascade Natural Gas employees arrived to fix

the line.

People are supposed to call 811 before they do excavation work in order to find out where utility lines are placed.

Stolz said he hadn’t thought to call about such a small project, but now he was embarrassed by “all this attention.”

For more information about avoiding underground natural gas, electrical and water lines, visit www.call811.com.

BRIEFS

Church sets Shrove Tuesday meal

The public is invited to celebrate the beginning of the season of Lent during a Shrove Tuesday meal at St. John’s Episcopal Church.

A tradition held on the day before Ash Wednesday, the tradition is to use up high calorie, high fat foods, eggs, and milk, to prepare for the season of Lent. A pancake supper will be served Tuesday, Feb. 13 from 5-6:30 p.m. at the church, 953 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. A donation of \$5 per person is requested.

“This meal is the tradition of getting all of the ‘fat’ out of the house prior to Ash Wednesday, thus the term Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras,” said Rev. Chuck Barnes.

Also, the service of Imposition of Ashes and Eucharist is Wednesday, Feb. 14 at 7 p.m. The service, Barnes said, begins the reflective season of Lent, which lasts 40 days — ending on Palm Sunday (March 25).

For more information, contact Barnes at 541-567-6672 or chuckb@eotnet.net.

Call *OSP to connect with state police

SALEM — The Oregon State Police announced the launch of a fast and easy way for people to connect via mobile phones to the agency’s dispatch for a non-emergency situation.

“*OSP (*677) is a mobile phone direct call number established to provide the public with a quick, easy to remember number to use for non-emergency reporting of traffic safety, highway hazards and obstructions, minor crashes, and requests for assistance,” according to the announcement from state police. “*OSP is not an emergency number, and 911 still remains the emergency number to call for an emergency.

Calling *OSP rings directly into the state police dispatch center, where a real dispatcher is ready to take the call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

State police in collaboration with Oregon Department of Transportation and Oregon’s cellphone providers secured the new number to make it easier to call for non-emergency police services and road hazards.

Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and US Cellular have worked with the state police to facilitate the service.

“It is the department’s goal that, as this program develops, other cell providers will partner with us in this venture to provide access to all cellphone users,” according to the agency,

The number is a way to help ensure people can report non-emergencies directly to OSP. For members of the public who do not have cellphone service, or have providers that do not support the access number, state police said they can dial the department’s toll free phone number: 800-452-7888.

Warmer weather in January continues

Hermiston hit 63 degrees on Sunday, tying a record high temperature from 2011, according to the National Weather Service. The temperature also was 18 degrees above the city’s normal maximum on that date.

Pendleton reached 60 on Sunday, no record but 15 degrees warmer than the normal maximum for the date.

The two towns also were almost 5 degrees warmer than usual for January, with the Round-Up City’s mean temperature at 39.9 and Hermiston’s at 39.6. Area highs remain in the 50s this week, with peaks in the lower 60s on Thursday.

The Weather Service also reported Pendleton and the surrounding areas have a possibility of rain, and the precipitation and warm weather means melting snow and ice will cause rivers and streams to rise through Monday. The Weather Service, however, has not issued flood warnings or advisories for Umatilla or Morrow counties.

This January also was far warmer than last year’s, when Pendleton’s mean was 22.5 and Hermiston’s 21.4.

Relay for Life sets planning meeting

Gearing up for its second year as the Relay for Life of Umatilla County, organizers have announced meetings to discuss plans for the 2018 event.

In an effort to maximize resources, the American Cancer Society combined the Hermiston and Pendleton events into one larger event last year. Plans for a single Umatilla County event are underway again this year.

Carol Preston, event lead, invites people to get involved with the fundraiser. Money is used to fund cancer research and provide assistance with patient care programs.

The upcoming planning meeting is Thursday at 6 p.m. in the medical office of Dr. Patricia Winn, 3001 St. Anthony Way, Suite 135, in Pendleton. Meetings continue the second Thursday of each month.

The Relay for Life of Umatilla County is Saturday, June 16 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. at Roy Raley Park in Pendleton. For more information, contact Preston at relaypendleton@yahoo.com or 541-379-6294.

Windy River teacher’s sex abuse charges came from time in The Dalles

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER



Robert Weems



Bryan Bates

A Boardman teacher arrested Friday was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse for incidents that took place last year while he was teaching in The Dalles.

Robert Weems, 42, was arrested by The Dalles Police and has been charged with one count of official misconduct in the first degree, two counts of sexual abuse in the second degree, and one count of sexual abuse in the third degree.

According to the indictment, Weems abused a girl under the age of 18 between

March and November of 2017 in Wasco County.

Weems was hired by the Morrow County School District in July 2017, and is now a sixth-grade teacher at Windy River Elementary School. He has been placed on paid administrative leave, according to a press release from the district.

“The district was made

aware of a potential situation regarding Weems on the morning of Thursday, Feb. 1, and immediately placed him on leave,” the release said. He was arrested the following day.

Brian Schimel, the human resources director for North Wasco County School District, said Weems was a substitute teacher for the district from 2015 to 2017. Schimel said that Weems worked at the high school, the middle school and all three elementary schools during that time. Schimel said he did not know when the investigation into the abuse started. Weems is the sec-

ond teacher from a Morrow County school to be charged with sexual abuse of a minor in the past several weeks.

Ione Community Charter School teacher Bryan Bates, 24, was arrested Jan. 24 on accusations of harassment, third-degree sexual abuse, and official misconduct.

The Morrow County Sheriff’s Office stated that Bates abused a 16-year-old female student on school property. Bates was in his second year of teaching K-12 music at the school.

Ione Community School is not part of the Morrow County School District.

Umatilla Electric is offering the following scholarships for the 2018-19 school year:

ACADEMIC

Twelve \$2,500 scholarships are available for members of UEC and/or their dependent children who are enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate program at a two- or four-year college. Apply online at: www.oregonstudentaid.gov.

ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

A \$5,000 scholarship is administered to a college student who has completed their freshman year and is interested in pursuing a degree in Electrical Engineering-Power Systems. Apply online at www.oregonstudentaid.gov.

LINEMAN TRADE

A \$2,500 scholarship is available to members and/or applicants whose parent or guardian is an active member, and are interested in the Line Construction trade and will be attending an accredited Line College. Go to: UmatillaElectric.com to download the application.

For more information visit our offices in Hermiston or Boardman or our website: UmatillaElectric.com.

You can also call us at 541-567-6414 or OSAC at 1-800-452-8807.



Deadline is March 1, 2018