



Gretchen Erickson receives the Golden Sparky award from Oregon State Fire Marshal Jim Walker March 22 during the Oregon Fire Marshals Association's annual conference. Also pictured are Scott Goff, Umatilla County Fire District #1 fire marshal; and Tom Bohm, former Hermiston fire marshal.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Fire safety outreach sparks award

By TAMMY MALGESINI
COMMUNITY EDITOR

Gretchen Erickson, fire safety educator for Umatilla County Fire District #1, recently received the Golden Sparky award.

Presented by State Fire Marshal Jim Walker, it is the highest honor given by the Oregon state fire marshal's office in recognizing outstanding achievement in fire prevention and safety education. Erickson accepted the award March 22 during the annual conference of the Oregon Fire Marshals Association, held in Bend.

"This means a lot to me," Erickson said. "I just feel like this is the icing on the cake for my career."

After serving with the Hermiston Police Department for 23 years, Erickson wasn't looking for a job

in 2004 when offered the position with the Hermiston fire district. However, she jumped at the chance to continue working with kids and the community.

"For the past 14 years, Gretchen Erickson has visited elementary schools throughout the Hermiston School District teaching students how to keep themselves and others fire safe," Walker said in presenting the award. "Over the years, Gretchen's lessons have had an enormous positive effect on hundreds of school children. She is certainly deserving of the Golden Sparky."

Scott Goff, Umatilla County Fire District #1 fire marshal; and Tom Bohm, former fire marshal, were both on hand during the award presentation. Both men, as well as fire chief Scott Stanton, said Erick-

son is very deserving of the honor.

Bohm, who recently retired, said over the years he sat in on a number of her classroom presentations.

"She does a great job," he said. "She kept them entertained but more importantly, they learn."

Stanton said it's sometimes hard to measure the impact of fire prevention education with youths. People, he said, don't know how often children remind their parents to check the battery in their smoke detectors or encourage them to create a safety plan after participating in a class with Erickson.

During the award presentation, Walker shared about a 2009 incident when Jazmin Silva, then a student at Desert View Elementary School, utilized information she learned from Erickson when a fire broke out in her

family's kitchen.

"Shortly after black smoke starting filling the air in her home, Jazmin remembered Gretchen's lessons and grabbed her 5-month old cousin, took her 2-year old cousin by the hand, and told her 7-year old cousin to hold onto her shirt as Jazmin led them outdoors to safety," Walker shared from an *East Oregonian* article.

Erickson estimates she sees an average of 2,000 students a month. The students, she said, seem to have as much fun as she does. Erickson said she works hard to be creative in her presentations in an effort to keep the attention of the students.

"They are really happy that they don't have to do math when I come in the room," she said with a laugh. "They are jumping up and down cheering."

Heppner man killed in crash near Lexington

HERMISTON HERALD

LEXINGTON — Joshua Kenneth Herrig of Heppner died March 21 in a car crash near Lexington.

Oregon State Police reported troopers and other emergency personnel at about 5:30 p.m. responded to the report of a single-vehicle crash on Highway 74 near milepost 31, just north of Lexington.

The preliminary inves-

tigation revealed a 1999 Dodge pickup was traveling north on Highway 74 when the driver lost control of the vehicle and rolled several times.

State police identified the driver as Anthony Enriquez, 42, of Ukiah. An ambulance took him to Pioneer Memorial Hospital, Heppner, for non-life threatening injuries.

The crash ejected Herrig, the passenger. He died at the scene. He was 35.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY OREGON STATE POLICE

The passenger in a pickup died Wednesday on Highway 74 north of Lexington.

"Alcohol, speed and safety restraints are being considered as factors in this crash," state police reported.

Police closed the highway for upward of three hours to

investigate the crash. The Morrow County Sheriff's Office, the Heppner and Ione fire departments and the Oregon Department of Transportation assisted state police.

Highland Hills wins Battle of the Books competition



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Highland Hills Battle of the Books team won first place at the regional competition, and will go to State in Salem next month. The team includes fifth-graders Alea Garrett, Reagan Stanek, Avena Garrett and Hailey Magallanes.

By JAYATI
RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Knowledge is power, and Hermiston students will wield that power next month at the statewide Battle of the Books competition in Salem. After competing against several other schools at a regional competition last weekend, Hermiston's Highland Hills Elementary School team came out victorious, taking first place from a pool of 18 schools throughout Eastern Oregon. Rocky Heights' team placed second.

Kristi Smalley, the Hermiston School District elementary schools librarian, said the top two Hermiston teams faced each other in the finals at Hermiston High School last Saturday, but only the first-place team will go to state. Last year, she said, the Rocky Heights team got first and went to state.

After competing at in-school competitions for the first half of the year, each Hermiston school sent a team to the regional competition to face off against teams from as far away as Jordan Valley and Vale, Smalley said.

"All five of the Herm-

iston teams scored really well in pool play," she said.

Middle and high school teams competed at the tournament, too, but Smalley said no Hermiston teams placed at those levels.

Melissa Garrett, the Highland Hills coach and mother of two of the four students on the winning team, said third through fifth grade students across the state are assigned 16 books at the beginning of the year. Those books vary in subject, spanning fiction and nonfiction genres.

"They make teams from each school, and are asked questions about different things," she said. "Each school has a competition, and from each school, teams go to regionals."

Garrett said all of Hermiston's elementary schools had teams at the regional competition.

The first-place team included four fifth-graders from Highland Hills: Alea and Avena Garrett, Hailey Magallanes and Reagan Stanek.

Garrett said the students are quizzed on the same books at all levels of competition.

"The questions they ask just get harder," she said.

Warrant scam returns to Umatilla County

HERMISTON HERALD

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office reported a warrant scam once again is circulating in the county.

"The scammer calls a potential victim, claims to be from our agency's warrant department and demands payment of money to resolve the issue," according to a statement from the sheriff's office.

One victim stayed on the phone while going to a store to buy a prepaid debit card, then provided the caller with the card

numbers.

"Please be aware, these calls are always a scam," the sheriff's office warned. Law enforcement does not call people to request payment to resolve a warrant or pay a fine.

"If the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office was aware of a warrant for your arrest, we would visit you in person to arrest you," the agency stated. "You can be assured we will not be giving you a call ahead of time to alert you."

The sheriff's office reported that it notified the FBI about the scam.

Houfmuse pushes for release, claims self-defense in shooting

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

A Hermiston man accused of murder and jailed for nearly a year will be considered for release next month. His attorney claims he was acting in self-defense during a confrontation in which another man who had been sending threatening text messages about him was shot and killed.

Tyree Houfmuse has been in the Umatilla County Jail since his arrest in June 2017 following the fatal shooting of James Cragun at a Hermiston apartment complex over Memorial Day weekend.

A hearing that began Tuesday at the Hermiston Circuit Court will continue April 18. Judge Eva Temple will consider releas-

ing Houfmuse, who faces charges of murder, manslaughter, and felon in possession of a firearm.

The trial was originally scheduled for late April, but in February prosecutors for the District Attorney's office requested postponement until November as they waited for results from the state crime lab. Houfmuse's attorney, Kara Davis, said if the trial is postponed, Houfmuse will have been in jail for more than a year while presumptively innocent.

Temple allowed both attorneys to give their opening statements Tuesday, but said the volume of evidence that she needed to review would prevent the hearing from being concluded in one day.

Temple said she has to review more than 14 hours

of video, audio and written evidence. That includes interviews with witnesses who were with Houfmuse the night of the shooting, Hermiston Police officers and Houfmuse himself. She will also review text messages between various parties, including between Cragun and his ex-girlfriend, who was with Houfmuse the night Cragun died.

According to witness accounts from that night, detailed in a search warrant affidavit from Hermiston Police officers, Cragun came to his ex-girlfriend's apartment and charged toward her. Houfmuse and Cragun fought, the accounts stated, and a gun went off in Cragun's hand while they were fighting.

Davis said that Houfmuse was within his rights because

he acted in self-defense.

She cited case law that details what a person is allowed to do if they feel their personal safety is being threatened. If bodily harm is imminent, she said, the person is within their rights to use lethal force against someone threatening them.

She then went on to read some text messages included in the evidence presented to the judge. The messages were from Cragun to his ex-girlfriend, who had been with Houfmuse the night Cragun died. Cragun had been convicted of assaulting the same woman two years ago, and in most cases the Hermiston Herald does not name domestic violence victims.

Davis said the day after he pleaded guilty, Cragun continued to send his ex-girl-

friend texts. Davis read some of the texts, in which Cragun made threats against his own life, as well as against the safety of the woman and anyone she was seeing.

"If there's another man in your life, either me or him is going to get hurt," said one of the texts that Davis read. Other texts made direct threats against Houfmuse's life.

"I think it's pretty reasonable to assume that Mr. Cragun was intending to hurt Mr. Houfmuse and [Cragun's ex-girlfriend]," Davis said.

Davis said toxicology reports for Cragun had just come back, and Cragun had methamphetamines in his system.

She said while the state would point out Houfmuse's demeanor and the placement

of the bullet, he was still within his rights.

District Attorney Dan Primus said he would reserve his argument for "proof is evident and presumption strong" at the next meeting. In Oregon, if the state can convince a judge that there is a strong enough presumption that a person is guilty of murder, the judge can order them to be held without bail.

Cragun's sister, Cynthia Bailey, said she hoped the judge would realize that only one side of her brother's actions was being presented during the hearing.

"As far as the text messages read in court, they've only seen one side," she said. "They haven't even accessed Jimmy (Cragun's) phone to see the horrible things that were said to him."