

SafeOregon tip line provides life-saving service

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

SafeOregon has only been active in Eastern Oregon for two years, but it has already saved at least one life.

Late last year, a Hermiston teen used the anonymous tip line to alert police that one of their peers was suicidal. Police went to the home and found the child in his room with a belt around his neck, unconscious. Officers performed CPR and a sternum rub, and got the person breathing on his own. He was then taken to a hospital and received treatment. The two officers, Riley Studebaker and Derrick Williams, were given lifesaving awards for their work.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said since the service has been in place, his department has followed up on three calls, all of which have been tips about attempted suicide.

But the tip line is available for students who want to report anything from self-harm to harassment and bullying, and is available in most schools in Eastern Oregon.

The free service operated by Oregon State Police allows students to ask for help via call, text, email, a web portal or an app on their phones. It operates around the clock, 365 days a year. Students can remain completely anonymous.

Adults appreciate the extra set of eyes.

"The biggest piece is that we're adults, but we don't see or hear everything," said Stacie Roberts, principal at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston. "With students (giving) information, they're also a voice for students who may not have one."

Hermiston School District, along with the Inter-Mountain Education Service District, were two of the pilot programs for SafeOre-

Share a tip

To submit a tip to SafeOregon, call or text 844-472-3367, or visit www.safeoregon.com.

Get some help

Other resources to help prevent suicide or address other crises include:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- Spanish Language National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

1-888-628-9454

• Umatilla County Crisis Line: 541-240-8030

• Crisis Text Line: 741741

• Lines for Life: linesforlife.org

• OregonYouthLine.org: 1-877-968-8491 or text "teen-2teen" to 839863

• The Trevor Project (for LGBTQ youth): 1-866-4-U-TREVOR

• Native Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-877-209-1266

• Military Helpline: 888-457-4838 or text MIL1 to 839863

• Alcohol and Drug Helpline: 800-923-4357 or text RecoveryNow to 839863

"If you are in a bad place, you can go get help. It's helping to make school a positive place to come and learn and be themselves."

Stacie Roberts, principal at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston

gon in late 2016 and early 2017, said Jodi Sherwood, the tip line coordinator for the Oregon State Police.

Roberts said before the tip line, students could report things to their teachers or administrators, but the anonymous nature of SafeOregon makes it more likely that they will ask for help.

"That took a lot for students," Roberts said of the old system. "I think we missed a lot, because of the 'What if they see me walking into the office, or talking to the teacher,'" Roberts said. "It's unreal to know what kids could have been reporting all these years to make school a safe place."

When a student reports an incident, tip line technicians will evaluate and classify them by urgency. "Standard tips" are those that don't present any immediate risk of bodily harm, and make up about 85 percent of calls, Sherwood said. For those calls, school administrators will be notified by email. With urgent tips, such as a report of a fight that's supposed to happen at school, administrators will be called within 10 minutes. If necessary, SafeOregon will notify the local dispatch service too, so they

can contact police.

Sherwood said about 950 of Oregon's 1,250 schools are signed up for SafeOregon.

Roberts said Armand Larive will typically get anywhere from two to 10 tips a week, ranging in severity. Regardless of the nature, the school follows up on every incident, even if a child reports being pushed in the hall. They will ask the student named in the report about the behaviors, and try to find out what's going on.

"We've got to change those negative and unsafe behaviors," she said.

She added that while it does happen, it's uncommon for kids to use the reporting system as a joke, or make false reports.

Some of the tips are more urgent, Roberts said. They have caught children posting photos of themselves cutting their arms, or other suicidal tendencies, and have been able to intervene.

Edmiston said so far, he feels the service has worked.

"The traditional model of policing — something bad happens, and police respond — is almost nonexistent. We're forced to be as proactive as possible, and

this is a proactive measure."

Sherwood said since the Parkland, Florida shooting incident, there have been more tips coming in.

"As people started to hear about what they should be reporting, they started reporting more," she said.

The most recent data shows that nearly 700 tips have come in over the past year, and close to 300 of those are for bullying and harassment. Other categories include possession or distribution of drugs, threat of assault, suicide threats (self-reported or reported by others), and sexual assault or harassment.

Roberts said the service is available for parents to report concerns, as well.

Roberts said they train their students how to use the reporting system every year, and that she and some Armand Larive students made a presentation about the service at a recent state school board conference.

"If you are in a bad place, you can go get help," Roberts said. "It's helping to make school a positive place to come and learn and be themselves."

Judge Hill honored as distinguished alumnus

HERMISTON HERALD

Judge Daniel Hill has been selected as the distinguished alumnus for the Hermiston School District, a title that brings more responsibility this year.

Hill will spend Friday at Hermiston High School, where he will meet with students and administrators and answer questions from seniors about his career. Then on June 7, Hill will be a featured speaker at the HHS commencement ceremony at the Toyota Center in Kennewick.

For the last three years, the distinguished alumnus has been announced in May and been a part of the graduation ceremony. The process changed this year, according to a press release

from the school district, to give the alumnus a chance to serve as a mentor before graduation.

Hill is a 1979 graduate of Hermiston High School and went on to earn an associate's degree from Blue Mountain Community College, a bachelor's degree from Oregon State University and his doctorate from the Willamette University School of Law.

He began his tenure as circuit court judge for the 6th Judicial District in Umatilla and Morrow counties. In 2017 he was promoted to Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Assistant to the Chief Counsel, National Guard Bureau and National Guard Advisor to the Judge Advocate General of the US Army.

Interest-free loans for home repair available

HERMISTON HERALD

HERMISTON — Homeowners struggling to afford repairs can now take advantage of the Housing Rehabilitation Revolving Loan Program.

The program, offered in a partnership between Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation and the city of Hermiston, allows homeowners to use loans with a zero percent interest rate to make essential home repairs. They are not required to make any repayment on the loan until they sell the home.

Repairs covered by the program include health concerns such as asbestos removal, structural repairs, roof repairs, weatherization, electrical repairs, plumbing repairs, heating system repairs or accessibility items like wheel-

chair ramps.

Applicants must own and occupy the home in question and have enough equity in the home to secure the loan, but be low to moderate income. The home must be located within Hermiston and not in a flood zone. Manufactured homes must be newer than 1978 and the homeowners must maintain hazard insurance until the loan is repaid.

"This is a great opportunity for older workers, or seniors who are on a fixed income and want to remain in their homes, but can't afford major repairs," Mayor David Drotzmann said in a news release.

For more information visit www.geodc.net/housing-programs or contact Judy Moore of GEODC at 541-612-7090 or judy.moore@geodc.net.

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