

# Police investigate shooting

Hermiston man hospitalized after incident Monday

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
STAFF WRITER

A 26-year-old man was shot early Monday morning on West Hartley Avenue in Hermiston.

He was identified Monday afternoon by police as Erik Campos Navarrete of Hermiston.

According to a news release from Hermiston Police Department, the department received a report of shots fired at approximately 1:20 a.m. in the 500 block of West Hartley Avenue, two blocks west of First Place.

Responding officers "located a 26-year-old male with what appeared to be a significant wound to his head," and the man was transported to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston and then Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Wash., where he was listed in critical condition.

He was still in the hospital as of Tuesday morning.



A house in the 500 block of West Hartley Avenue in Hermiston is blocked off after a shooting early Monday morning.

STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

On Monday morning police were still outside the residence, which was blocked off with crime scene tape, and the release from HPD stated that investigation is "still very much active."

The department has not announced a person of interest or arrest related to the incident but is searching for the person or persons responsible.

Anyone with information on the incident is asked to call Hermiston Police Department at 541-567-5519 or leave a message on their tip line at 541-667-5148.

An unrelated stabbing incident on Kelli Boulevard had taken place earlier that evening, and between the two incidents HPD received assistance from Oregon

State Police, Umatilla Police Department, Boardman Police Department, Pendleton Police Department, Milton-Freewater Police Department, Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team (BENT), the Umatilla County District Attorney's office, Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and Morrow County Sheriff's Office.

# Stabbing suspect arraigned on charges of attempted murder

His two victims are expected to survive their injuries

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
STAFF WRITER

Two Hermiston men are still in the hospital more than a day after they were stabbed by another man.

A nursing supervisor at Legacy Emanuel Hospital in Portland confirmed that Harold Piercy, 72, and Richard Rukaveno, 64, were receiving treatment at the hospital, but would not offer more about their condition.

According to Deputy District Attorney Jaclyn Jenkins, the two men are in intensive care but expected



Aaron Zuwala

to survive their wounds.

The suspect in the stabbings, Aaron Zuwala, 34, was arrested Monday morning and was arraigned Tuesday afternoon at the Umatilla County Courthouse in Hermiston. He is being charged with two counts of attempted murder, two counts of first-degree assault, and two counts of unlawful use of a weapon.

According to a news release from Hermiston police, all three men knew each other.

The stabbing took place at 2350 Kelli Blvd. south of Hermiston, at 9:55 Sunday night.

It happened at a residence on the same property as A and A Storage Units. A representative for the storage units, as well as Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston, said the business had nothing to do with the incident.

Jenkins said one man was stabbed under the chin, and the knife pierced his sinuses. She said the other was stabbed multiple times in the chest, to the point where the knife hit one of the vertebrae in the victim's spine.

Jenkins appeared by video from the Umatilla County Jail, along with

Zuwala.

Jenkins requested Zuwala be held at \$200,000 bail and, if released, have no contact with the victims or their families. Judge Eva Temple granted both requests.

Zuwala's preliminary hearing is Monday, June 11 at 3 p.m. in Hermiston.

Zuwala has had several criminal charges in his background, but this is the first in Umatilla County. He was charged with theft on two separate occasions in 2017, in Jefferson and Deschutes County, for stealing merchandise from grocery stores. He has a charge of criminal mischief in the second degree in Jefferson County that same year, as well as theft in the second degree for stealing more than \$100 worth of water from the Deschutes Valley Water District.

# Telecom execs buy out business

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla Electric Cooperative announced Thursday that it has sold its subsidiary internet and phone provider, Eastern Oregon Telecom, to EOT company executives.

Joe Franell, EOT general manager and CEO, said the sale had been discussed for about four years, and that three executive officers would share equal ownership of the company. The three officers are Franell, Chief Financial Officer Paul Keeler and Chief Operating Officer Richard Holbo.

A press release from UEC stated that the EOT executive team did business under the name Columbia Basin Development Group.

Franell said he could not discuss the terms of the sale, but said he hopes that it will eventually allow for all employees to have a stake in the company.

"Step one was to get own-



EO FILE PHOTO  
Joseph Franell is the CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom.

ership of the company," he said. "Our corporate attorney is looking at options for us."

The most formal option, he said, would be to form an "Employee Stock Option Program," or ESOP. Employee-owned companies such as Bi-Mart use this structure, he said. Other possibilities include allowing employees to purchase stock options, or profit-sharing, which Franell said is not

true ownership.

He said they have no set timeline for when employees will be able to have a stake in the company's ownership. He said when they do provide that option, the three current owners intend to remain equal partners.

Franell said the goal with taking over ownership of the company was to serve other areas not currently in the UEC footprint.

"Our intent is to look at opportunities to grow the business," he said.

Without naming specific locations, he said they are considering areas in adjacent counties on both sides of the river.

"Anything east of the Cascades in Oregon and in Washington is fair game,"

he said.

He said they will likely see employee growth with that expansion.

Eastern Oregon Telecom currently has about 3,500 customers, and covers area from Tower Road, west of Boardman, to Pendleton. They also provide service to some areas in Washington.

They have been in a new building, on 2180 SE Kelli Blvd., Hermiston, for a month, and have an open house on June 14.

EOT was formed in 1999, and was initially owned by UEC, Douglas Electric Cooperative, four telephone cooperatives and a telecommunications consulting firm. Initially offering telephone services, EOT expanded to high-speed internet in 2003.



HH FILE PHOTO

A substation technician installs a ground wire on a riser structure in December 2017 at the new Umatilla Electric Cooperative substation on East Elm Avenue in Hermiston.

# Electric utility learning from rash of outages

Car crashes, wind, equipment failure behind some recent incidents

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston's electric utilities have heard the message loud and clear that people are tired of power failures.

Nate Rivera, general manager of Hermiston Energy Services, apologized May 29 to the city council and Hermiston residents for the rash of outages that occurred recently.

Between April 27 and May 16, Hermiston-area residents — depending on their address — experienced anywhere from one to six outages, he said. Since then he has heard from a number of people about how those outages affected their businesses and homes.

"We understand that is too much," he said, adding he wanted to assure the council and the community that there is a "laser focus" at Hermiston Energy Services and at Umatilla Electric Cooperative on improving reliability.

While UEC and HES are separate entities, HES contracts operation and maintenance of infrastructure, meter reading and some other tasks to UEC.

According to information provided by Steve Meyers of UEC, there were outages affecting more than 1,000 UEC customers on April 27, May 3, May 8, May 9 and May 16, with multiple outages on the 16th.

The disruptions to service on April 27 and May 8 were caused by windstorms and May 9 was caused by a van colliding with a transmission pole. The single-vehicle crash at Northeast 10th Street and East Elm Avenue caused extensive damage to the pole and transmission lines that took several hours to repair.

On May 3 at about 5:10 p.m. an equipment failure at the new Hermiston East Substation caused an outage, and on May 16 an equipment failure at the

Hermiston Butte Substation caused a series of four outages over a three-hour period in the middle of the day.

Meyers said in an email that the new substation at Hermiston East helped reduce the number of customers affected by the outages and allowed for quicker restoration times by providing an alternative source to transfer customers.

New automated meters that have been installed at buildings around Hermiston also helped the utility company pinpoint the problem more quickly and respond with "greater speed and accuracy."

"After every major outage, we assess our restoration efforts and look for opportunities for improvement, with the emphasis on being protective of our members, the general public and employees," Meyers said. "We understand the impact of these outages, and we are committed to reducing restoration times."

Rivera said the outages had been learning opportunities that should lead to better service in the future, but in the meantime he wanted to sincerely apologize to all who had been inconvenienced.

"I just wanted to let you guys know that we have heard the message and we are listening and responding," he said.

During power outages in the Hermiston area customers can call 888-465-5701 to report an outage or check UEC's real-time outage map, which includes information on estimated restoration times, at outageviewer.umatillaelectric.com.

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