



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

**Boardman Fire Chief Marc Rogelstad addresses the Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District board on Wednesday night as part of an independent investigation into the loss of their brush truck in a fire early in the summer.**

## Investigation completed into loss of fire truck

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

Boardman Fire Chief Marc Rogelstad reported his findings to the Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District board on Oct. 2 after completing an independent investigation into a brush truck that burned up during a fire in July.

The district responded to a natural cover fire started by a cigarette, near the intersection of Highway 730 and Highway 395 on July 21 at approximately 1 p.m.

During that incident, a fire truck known as Brush 11 caught fire while unattended.

“People there didn’t fully recognize the danger,” Rogelstad said, chalking the incident up to inexperience and “tunnel vision.”

According to Rogelstad’s report and an internal report by Umatilla Fire Chief Steve Potts, responding personnel parked Brush 11 in tall grass.

“It was not a real good place to park, but there were not a lot of good options,” Rogelstad told the board.

The truck’s crew stretched 250 feet of hose through trees to reach the fire, according to the report Potts wrote. At some point while they were all up fighting the fire, a spot fire ignited and moved under the truck, which suffered “significant damage” as the crew tried to wind the hose through the trees back to the truck.

The 2018 brush truck was valued at about \$150,000, Potts said, and has already been replaced using a combination of insurance money and contingency funds.

Potts wrote in his report that inexperience led the crew to make mistakes, including parking in the grass

and not maintaining sufficient situational awareness of the fire’s behavior.

They believed parking far away from the fire was safest, he said, when in fact it would have been more prudent to park close to the fire and use a short length of hose so that they could maintain contact with the apparatus and move it out of harm’s way quickly if needed. He also noted that the grass they were risking the truck to defend was not valuable.

Rogelstad echoed many of Potts’ points in his own written and verbal report, noting the heavy grasses and swirling winds that day made it easy for spot fires to flare up. He said the Boardman district hadn’t lost a fire truck during his tenure there, but a truck he was on while working in Montana caught fire once.

“This is a bad deal that happened,” he said. “There are a lot of lessons learned out of it. The chief gave his report and the young guys will learn. This could happen anywhere. It could happen in Hermiston. In fact, it opened my eyes a little bit, and it will be a topic of conversation around the table tomorrow.”

Rogelstad conducted his investigation last week after fire board member Mark Keith stated at a previous meeting he felt it was inappropriate to only have an internal investigation into the loss of an expensive piece of taxpayer-funded equipment.

Keith told the *Hermiston Herald* on Thursday he felt that Rogelstad was chosen because he might give a more positive report than someone at the state level.

He said in an email he was also dissatisfied that formal disciplinary action wasn’t taken against the fire-

fighters involved, and criticized the fire district for using “untrained low level responders.”

“Our city is in a desperate situation with volunteers, paid staff and leadership,” he said.

Potts told the *Hermiston Herald* he considered more punitive actions against the firefighters involved, but decided against it. He said they were all “extremely remorseful” and seemed willing and able to learn from their mistakes. He felt that punishing them further might discourage them from continuing to serve as firefighters at a time when the district is struggling to recruit and retain experienced personnel. He also noted July was a difficult time for them, as a member of the staff had just been killed in a drowning accident.

Potts said additional training and refresher courses are being implemented to address the problems seen on July 21, and he is asking experienced officials from neighboring fire districts to help with the training to provide diverse perspectives.

As for the district’s problems keeping staffed, Potts told the fire board last Wednesday that he is looking at new ways to handle the shortage, which is a nationwide problem for fire districts.

Ideas he is working to implement include more collaboration with the neighboring districts, call response pay and creating a program where city of Umatilla staff could get trained as volunteer firefighters and remain on the clock for the city while responding to fires during their normal work hours.

“We’re trying to think outside the box and look at all options in order to boost our response,” he said.

## Parking problems frustrate business owner

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

If you’ve ever argued with your neighbor before, it may have been over parking.

Frustrated residents sometimes call the police or city hall to complain about someone parking in front of their home or business, but there isn’t much to be done. Unless it’s blocking a fire hydrant, driveway or other no-parking zone, anyone can legally park on the street in front of your property.

“On-street parking is for everyone,” Hermiston City

Planner Clint Spencer said.

Trying to use signs or paint to prevent people from using public, on-street parking is against the city’s code of ordinances.

Cynthia Traner owns the mercantile Her Shabby Shed at 165 S.W. Third St., on a block that contains several former homes that have since been turned into businesses, including a salon and law offices. She said most of the older homes where companies are now operating out of don’t have driveways or parking lots, causing their employees and company vehicles to take up

on-street parking in front of neighboring businesses.

“I have lost business as several of my customers said they came by and (there) was no parking like before, and furthermore I can’t even park in front of my shop to load or unload merchandise,” she wrote in a message to the *Herald*.

She said she understands that the on-street parking is public, but she wishes the city would increase its parking requirements for businesses operating in mixed commercial and residential areas.

Spencer said there are

requirements for businesses to have off-street parking, but the city passed an ordinance in 2017 stating that businesses within 500 feet of certain municipal parking lots can count that parking as their off-street parking. The neighborhood where Traner’s business sits is near a city-owned lot on Orchard Avenue, which allows them to count those spaces as their own off-street parking.

“The city passed the resolution to encourage some of those houses to convert to commercial use,” Spencer said.

## New nonprofit kicks off with appreciation dinner for veterans

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

As Sue Long-Hosek watched veterans bond with each other after a golf fundraiser last year, she knew she wanted to create more opportunities like the one unfolding before her eyes.

Long-Hosek’s first husband was a Vietnam veteran who struggled with severe post-traumatic stress disorder from the time he returned home up to when he took his own life in 2014. Afterward, she tried to do what she could to help veterans like him by hosting golf tournament fundraisers to benefit national veterans organizations and the local American Legion.

“That’s why this is a passion of mine,” she said. “That’s why I want to help in any way I can.”

She and her current husband, Ron Hosek, have started the Conrad Skinner Veterans Memorial Program, with the goal of acting as a “stopgap” for veterans and their families in Umatilla, Morrow and Union counties if they have needs that aren’t being met by other organizations. Their mission statement says they plan to provide “opportunities and support for Veterans and their families in time of crisis or need.”

“This is not in conjunction with the VA, it is not to take the place of the VA, but it is kind of a supplement for things that the VA might not be able to address on an immediate basis,” Long-Hosek said.

They will announce specific services they have in mind at a Veterans Appreciation Dinner cosponsored by the new nonprofit, American Legion Post #37, Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce and Herm-

iston parks and recreation department.

The dinner is on Sunday, Oct. 20 at 3 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway 395. It is free for all veterans and their immediate family, and community members who wish to attend and show their appreciation for veterans are asked to make a donation in an amount of their choosing. Everyone planning to attend is asked to RSVP to Hermiston Parks and Recreation, 541-667-5018 or gwicks@hermiston.or.us.

The Conrad Skinner Veterans Memorial Program is run by a board of 11 people, most of which are veterans or their spouses. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that accepts tax-deductible contributions.

Conrad Skinner grew up in Hermiston and served in the United States Marine Corps before taking his own life in April at age 23. Hosek said two of Skinner’s relatives sit on the nonprofit’s board, and he and his wife met with Skinner’s parents and grandparents to get their blessing before dedicating the project to his memory.

“We are losing 20 to 22 veterans a day to PTSD and suicide,” Hosek said.

He said he and Long-Hosek and other members of the board want to reduce those numbers locally, and also support family members who may be at a loss to know how to deal with their love one’s struggles. Hosek said they already have books they can loan out to help children understand that “mom or dad are not angry at them, it’s an illness.”

Long-Hosek said she is open to suggestions for what needs are not being met elsewhere, and how they can best help veterans with their limited resources.

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**PET OF THE WEEK**

**MEET BLACKIE**

Blackie is a young minpin chi mix. Great with kids and dogs, no cats. Needs a secured fence. Crate trained, leash trained and mostly potty trained. He was hit by a car and has healed from a back fracture and is ready for his forever home.

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