

Man pleads not guilty to school threats

By **MATT HUDSON**
The Daily Inter Lake

A Kalispell man pleaded not guilty Thursday to charges that he threatened violence against Jews and attacks on a local school.

David Joseph Lenio, 28, has been charged with intimidation and criminal defamation, both felonies.

Unlike his initial court appearance, in which he disrupted the court with claims of conspiracies, Thursday's proceeding was quick and quiet.

Lenio asked for a quick clarification after District Judge Heidi J. Ulbricht read his rights. Then his attorney, Brent Getty, entered a plea of not guilty.

Police arrested Lenio on Feb. 16 after threatening online

messages passed through law enforcement from coast to coast. It started when Lenio had a run-in with an anti-gun-violence activist over the Internet.

The activist was Jonathan Hutson, the chief communications officer for the Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

The organization is based in Washington, D.C. After he exchanged messages with Lenio online, Hutson looked into Lenio's archives and found years of inflammatory comments.

"His current and former social media accounts contain a trove of information about his movements and motives," Hutson said.

On a hunch, he contacted law enforcement in Oregon, which tracked Lenio to the Flathead Valley. Law officers arrested Lenio as he was leaving White-

fish Mountain Resort.

In their investigation, police found two rifles at his home and a handgun in his car. They also learned that Lenio had moved a rifle from a storage unit to his residence the day before.

Hutson has dug into Lenio's archives to learn about the man who would make such heinous threats. He found that Lenio graduated from high school in Michigan and lived in Colorado before moving to Kalispell in 2014.

All along, he posted videos and messages online about various conspiracy theories, perceived institutional problems and outright threats.

On Dec. 30, Lenio Tweeted that he wanted to go on a killing spree at a Kalispell elementary school, referring



DAVID JOSEPH LENIO appears in Flathead District Court for his arraignment on Thursday afternoon in Kalispell. Lenio pleaded not guilty to intimidation and criminal defamation, which are both felonies. (Brenda Ahearn/Daily Inter Lake)

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Whitefish celebrates new high school

By **HILARY MATHESON**
The Daily Inter Lake

In 2009, the Whitefish School Board set a goal to be in a new high school within four years. The goal followed on the heels of two failed bond requests to renovate the high school in 2003 and 2008.

Although it took more time to achieve the goal, on Thursday it was mission accomplished.

In the new high school gym, Whitefish High School Superintendent Kate Orozco welcomed an audience to the dedication of the new high school, which cost \$23 million to build. The process began in 2012 with passage of a \$14 million bond request.

"After five years of hard work, and design and discussion, and debate and dreaming we are standing here now thanks to all of you and many others," Orozco said. "We are standing in a beautiful state-of-the-art school that is truly worthy of the promise of our kids."

To commemorate the occasion, Montana Governor Steve Bullock gave some remarks, beginning with his ties to Whitefish — the town where his wife was born and where her father had been a teacher at the high school.

Bullock spoke to the importance not only of the teachers inside the building to education, but the building itself.

"Our children cannot learn as effectively if they don't have an effective place to learn," Bullock said. "You have a wonderfully effective place to learn. As students prepare for jobs of the future they now have a building that will also keep pace."

City of Whitefish Mayor John Muhlfield also spoke about the city's involvement in supporting the high school construction project, by allocating \$2.5 million from the city's tax increment finance district to move the project forward in 2012.

"When the TIF district was originally



MONTANA GOVERNOR Steve Bullock speaks during the Whitefish High School dedication on Thursday in the new high school gym. (Aaric Bryan/Daily Inter Lake)

set up in 1987 the city agreed to support the school district," Muhlfield said. "As a community we did this because we recognized then and we recognize now the importance education plays in sup-

porting and growing our economy in Whitefish."

WHITEFISH HIGH SCHOOL Principal Kerry Drown described the progress

of the construction project as going "from idea, to paper, to dirt, to concrete, studs and steel to the incredible building called

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Spaghetti supper

The 2015 4-H Interstate Exchange spaghetti supper and dessert auction will be today in the Grandstand Building at the Flathead County Fairgrounds in Kalispell.

Dinner starts at 5:30 p.m. and the baked goods auction gets under way at 6 p.m. Everyone is invited. Tickets are \$6 each or \$20 for a family of four.

All proceeds go toward hosting 4-H members from other states and sending 4-H members from the Flathead to different states.

Fractured spelling

A Fractured Spelling Bee fundraising event for the Whitefish Education Foundation is from 7 to 9 p.m. today at the O'Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish. Seven local teams will compete in three different knowledge categories.

Public participation is encouraged as either teams or audience members may reach out with a funded "lifeline" to help answer their team's questions.

In the first category, each team will write out their word and use it in a sentence. The second category features answering questions on local history, geography and regional facts. In the final category, teams will test their elementary-school smarts in varied categories. Each category will be scored by a team of local judges.

The Whitefish Education Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Money raised by the organization goes directly to local classrooms to support educational needs.

Admission at the door is \$20 per person.

For additional information, contact Eric Hosek at 871-2743; or Marie Shaw at 250-8081.

Weekend update

A preview of public events around the valley this weekend

Dream dinner

Dream Adaptive celebrates 30 years of providing year-round adaptive outdoor recreation for children and adults with disabilities by hosting a fundraiser starting at 5:30 p.m. Saturday at the Hilton Garden Inn in Kalispell.

The evening features a plated dinner, live music and dancing with local favorite The Smart Alex and live and silent auctions. Auction items include a four-day fishing trip to Alaska, three-day pack trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, spa packages, golf packages and much more.

Tickets are \$50 per person or a table of eight may be reserved for \$400.

For more information, call 862-1817 or visit www.dreamadaptive.org.

Spring Swing

The Salvation Army hosts the annual Spring Swing Fling Thing at 6:30 p.m. Saturday.

B.J. Lupton's Swingin' on High band will be the featured entertainment. The Stillwater Christian School Jazz Band also will perform and the gymnasium will be ready for those who want to dance.

This free event is a gift to the community by the Salvation Army and the Swingin' on High band and is for all ages. Refreshments will be provided.

The Salvation Army Community Center is located at 110 Bountiful Drive in Kalispell, between

Immanuel Lutheran Home and Brendan House.

Fundraiser

Columbia Falls American Legion Freedom Post 72 sponsors a spaghetti dinner fundraiser Saturday at the Columbia Falls Fire Hall.

A full dinner will be served from 5 to 7 p.m. Tickets are available for \$8 per person or \$20 per family. There will be several door prizes drawn.

All proceeds will be used for veterans programs and sponsoring of local high school students for Boys/Girls State.

For more information, contact Commander Shepard at 250-9806.

Float Smart

A free Float Smart program for inflatable, one-person pontoon boat operators is being offered from 11 a.m. to noon Saturday at the Lone Pine State Park Visitor Center near Kalispell.

The interactive program will focus on potential hazards, recognition of danger, navigation, equipment and safety concerns. Using video and classroom discussion, participants will learn about cold-water survival, protective gear and what to do when something goes wrong or equipment breaks.

Go to www.floatsmart.info for more on the training and to view related safety videos.

For more details, contact Brian Schwartz, park manager, 755-2706, extension 3.

Child-seat safety

Child passenger safety technicians will inspect car seats at Kalispell Fire Station 62 from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Parents and caregivers with children from newborn up to 8 years old should bring their vehicles, car seats and, if possible, the children who use them. Technicians will check for secure installation, proper harness adjustment, manufacturer's size and weight limits and whether or not the seat is on a recall list, plus answer questions about choosing the right car seat.

Those who cannot make it to the inspection Saturday can contact Wendy Olson at the Flathead City-County Health Department at 751-8106 to make an appointment.

'Going for Green'

A "Going for the Green" fundraiser for the proposed Paws to Play community dog park is from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at Kalispell Center Mall.

Three mini-golf courses will be set up. Play five minutes for \$3 or bring a new bag of dog food for a free round.

There will be raffles for gift certificates and baskets, as well as a 50/50 raffle with the drawing on May 5.

The animal shelter will have shelter dogs on hand for those considering adoption.

Dog trainer Ellie Bell will answer canine behavior questions and information on how to

join the Walk Your Dog Club will be available.

Chili supper

The Birch Grove Community Center hosts a chili supper and silent auction from 5 to 8:30 p.m. Saturday. Cost is by donation. Proceeds benefit the center at 594 Birch Grove Road in Kalispell.

For more information, call Kayleen Bristow at 253-5789.

Bird tour

Join Flathead Audubon birder Craig Hohenberger on Sunday to explore Creston-area wetlands for migrating swans, geese, ducks and early migrant songbirds. All ages and birding abilities are welcome.

Meet at 10 a.m. at the Creston School parking lot on Montana 35 to carpool. Participants will return around 1 p.m. Bring binoculars and/or scope, snacks and dress for the weather.

To sign up or for further information, contact Gael Bissell at 406-261-2255 or gbissell535@gmail.com.

Music recital

A "Celebration of Spring" music recital will be held at 3 p.m. Sunday in Polson at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 409 Fourth Ave. E. Everyone is welcome.

Donna Rowold, church organist and music has gathered numerous vocalists and musicians for a concert of a wide variety of music, from classical to blues.

A free-will offering will be received to benefit the Mission Valley Friends of the Arts heat/air conditioner upgrade fund. The Greater Polson Community Foundation will match the collection.

NW MONTANA

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Whitefish High School.” Drown used the moment to recognize and applaud the work of numerous supporters, donors, school board members and employees.

“On behalf of our faculty, staff and student body, I’m here to express gratitude and thanks to the many, many people who are part of the Whitefish High School building project,” Drown said.

Project manager Dow Powell and contractor Loren Cantrell of Langlas and Associates were among the people thanked.

Cantrell recalled his early involvement in the project.

“I heard several times from those already involved with the project, ‘Are you sure you know what you’re getting into? Building in Whitefish is different,’” Cantrell said, his comment met with chuckles from the audience. “Each time I heard that I smiled politely and thought, ‘We’ve built a lot of schools around Montana and in small communities, how different can it really be?’”

Cantrell said in the months following he came to appreciate — in a positive way — just how different it was.

“Never before had I been involved in a project where the city stepped forward as they have. Where private organizations such as the Iron Horse Foundation and private donors stepped forward and said, ‘We want to make this school even better than it already is.’”

ON THURSDAY afternoon, outside the high school’s main entrance, student body president and high school senior Keaton Grove cut through the green ribbon, officially marking the opening of



WHITEFISH SUPERINTENDENT Kate Orozco embraces Joan Vetter Ehrenberg as Governor Steve Bullock looks on at the Whitefish High School dedication on Thursday. (Aaric Bryan/Daily Inter Lake)

the new school.

“On behalf of all the students at Whitefish High School, I just want to thank the community because they’ve done so much for us,” Grove said. “I would also like to welcome you to the new Whitefish High School.”

Grove later said construction has not only transformed the look of the building but also the way students learn, noting the move to block scheduling this year.

“The new school has totally remodeled the way we’ve learned and the teachers have taught us. We have a new schedule and there’s more communication and collaboration then there ever has been before, and I think there’s more substance to what we’re being taught,” Grove said.

As visitors filed into the school to tour the building and celebrate the milestone, visitor Joan Vetter Ehrenberg gave Orozco a big hug. Vetter Ehrenberg has been a supporter of the high school construction project from the start. She served as co-chair of the “Vote Yes! Whitefish High School Bond,” campaign along with community leader Bob DePratu, who died in January 2014.

“We went through so many hurdles, and so many challenges, and so many tests,” Vetter Ehrenberg said. “This was a non-partisan, community-wide effort. It was the greatest experience of my life.”

Reporter Hilary Matheson may be reached at 758-4431 or by email at hmatheson@dailyinterlake.com.

Drivers: Lock your vehicles

The Daily Inter Lake

After four vehicles were stolen on Monday, law enforcement is calling on residents to lock up.

Monday’s reports came into the Flathead County Sheriff’s Office and the Kalispell Police Department, according to a news release from Sheriff

Chuck Curry.

The vehicles were recovered, but the thefts could have been prevented.

“We’re not having forceful entries of vehicles,” sheriff’s Sgt. Sam Cox said. “They are going through vehicles that are unlocked with valuables left in plain sight.”

Cox advised people to lock their vehicle doors and conceal things such as phone chargers and navigation systems.

According to the news release, a vehicle is stolen every 44 seconds in the United States, and nearly half of the thefts are due to driver error.

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to the tragic 2012 mass shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

“He was indicating that he wanted to use Sandy Hook as a template for his own actions,” Hutson said. “And then after Tweeting his threats, he went to his storage locker to retrieve his rifle.”

That escalated the concern for local law enforcement, and they arrested Lenio on President’s Day, when most schools were not in session.

Hutson said that he acted more as a concerned father than as a spokesman for the Brady Campaign.

As the case moves forward in court, he said that he would be paying close attention.

It was Hutson’s concern that alerted police to a serious threat.

“This is a case of ‘If you see something, say something,’” he said. “We can all play a role in making this the safer America we all want and deserve.”

Lenio’s next court appearance will be an omnibus hearing on May 6. A trial is tentatively scheduled for July 6.

Reporter Matt Hudson can be reached at 758-4459 or by email at mhudson@dailyinterlake.com.



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