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# Siuslaw News

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SERVING WESTERN LANE COUNTY SINCE 1890

FLORENCE, OREGON

## FLORENCE POLICE INVESTIGATE HOMICIDE

*Ex-wife, 73, allegedly  
shoots former husband,  
93, and then calls 911*

BY JACK DAVIS  
Siuslaw News

Early Sunday morning, former Florence resident Carolyn Stickley, 73, was arrested for shooting her 93-year-old ex-husband in the head, killing him.

Florence Police Department received a 911 call from Stickley on Feb. 12 at 2:42 a.m., saying she had shot her ex-husband, Erwin Drake.

Police responded to Drake's riverfront residence at 13 Wild Winds, and found him deceased from an apparent gunshot wound to the head.

Stickley, who has a Green Valley, Ariz., address, was arrested on murder charges and transported to Lane County Adult corrections, where she is being held.

See **POLICE 9A**

## Special district filing deadline is March 16

Western Lane County has 24 special district positions open for the May 16 special election. The filing deadline is March 16.

Interested candidates need to have a completed SEL 190: Candidate Filing — District application turned into Lane County by 5 p.m. on that day.

Lane County Clerk Sheryl Betschart said, "We want to remind people to make sure the forms are completely filled out and that all instructions are followed."

Special district positions and terms for Western Lane County are:

See **ELECTIONS 9A**

## SPECIAL SERIES (PART 1)

# Desire for dignity

*Death with Dignity Act has 'Catch-22' requirements that many are unable to meet*

BY MARK BRENNAN  
Siuslaw News

In one of the most famous and enduring dramas ever written, William Shakespeare poses perhaps the fundamental question for each of us, "To be or not to be?"

That is the question that Florence resident Bruce Yelle asks himself on a regular basis. And the answer he has settled upon, at least for today, is that he wants to continue "being."

But that could soon change.

Yelle suffers from a number of life threatening diseases, the most debilitating of them being Parkinson's. He also has Diabetes and exhibits many of the more acute symptoms that accompany his illness. His circulation is not good and he has numbness and pain in his extremities. His vision can become blurred and cuts and bruises heal slowly and painfully.

His ability to move about freely is steadily decreasing while his overall level of pain continues to increase.

While Yelle knows he wants to continue "being" for now, he also knows he does not want to be at a place near the end of his life where he is in pain, confused and unable to care for himself — or worse, be unable to communicate to others that he wishes to exercise his right as an Oregonian to die with dignity.

His concerns about issues associated with quality of life and self-determination have compelled Yelle in his decision to eventually take his own life.



MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

**Florence resident Bruce Yelle wants greater control over the time, place and quality of the end of his life, but his multiple illnesses complicate matters.**

Yelle says he doesn't want to die today or tomorrow or even next week. But some day, in the not too distant future, he will want to avail himself of Oregon's Death with Dignity Act (ODDA).

The problem is, while the intent of the ODDA is to ensure that citizens are provided a safe process to legally end their life, individuals have to meet a number of criteria to participate in the ODDA program.

Since the ODDA was enacted in 1997, 1,554 individuals have received prescriptions for life ending medications.

Yelle's deteriorating mental condition may eventually preclude him, or his loved ones, from engaging in the legally-sanctioned process designed to end his suffering.

Ironically, while Yelle would likely meet the ODDA's criteria today, there's a good chance he won't at the time when he'll want it most.

"The law now says that I have to be of sound mind. So I could say, now, that I don't

want to live with this condition," Yelle said, "But as it worsens, I may not be able to use the law because I may no longer be considered of 'sound mind' as I get closer to actually dying."

These challenges have not prevented Yelle from planning his next step.

"I am working on writing a petition to get the law changed. I want to make sure that someone with a terminal disease that has no chance of recovering, regardless of whether they have six months to live or not — especially if it is a neurodegenerative disease — that they can make arrangements to end their life while they are still rational," he said.

Yelle is fortunate that he has adequate health care for his current level of need. He also has a partner, his wife Kathleen, to help with his physical challenges and to support him on the days that his emotions are raw.

But while his health challenges are manage-

able at this point, the nature of his illnesses dictates that his physical and mental abilities will continue to diminish in the months ahead.

Yelle has come to terms with the inevitable outcome that awaits him; he knows that he will eventually die from his conditions. In the meantime, he wants to know his wife and friends won't have to care for his increasing physical and mental needs as his condition worsens.

What is uncertain is how to proceed with planning his death to ensure his own sense of dignity

"I want to be able to draw the line now. I do not want to have someone toilet me and feed me," Yelle said emphatically. "I do not want to be dependent on others for these and other personal hygiene tasks. And I should not have to."

See **DIGNITY 9A**

# Ownership of iconic Stearman biplane changes hands

*The familiar blue and yellow plane will continue to 'hang' in Florence*

BY MARK BRENNAN  
Siuslaw News

Florence residents have become accustomed to the muffled whirr of the old plane's engine and its bright blue and yellow paint job passing overhead. They look skyward hoping to catch a glimpse of this airborne relic from another time.

And a lot of them make their way to the Florence Municipal Airport to take a trip skyward in the colorful biplane that was built in 1943.

The ownership of this well-known aerial wonder has recently been transferred to

transplants Terry and Winette Tomeny.

Often referred to by locals as "The Stearman" the biplane's longtime owner, Sam Spayd, has decided that he is ready for a change in his personal flight plan.

"I've had the airplane for 20 years and I am very accustomed to flying it. So I am looking for a different type of plane to purchase and fly. Basically, I am looking for a new challenge," he said.

Spayd's decision to find a new plane came at a good time for recent retirees Terry and Winette. The Tomenys had been looking for a place on a

lake with a nearby airport and they heard about Florence.

Terry came for a visit and realized this was the perfect spot. They relocated, moved the piper cub they owned to the airport and started getting to know their hanger neighbors, which included Spayd.

"About a year ago, a friend of ours mentioned to us that Sam was thinking of selling the Stearman, and so we talked to Sam. He said he was interested in selling the plane," Terry said. "And I asked him, do you make any money doing this? And he said no. Then I asked him, do you lose any money doing this?

And he said no. And then I said perfect!"

Terry is a pilot and aviation enthusiast and he and Spayd became friends almost immediately.

"Sam and I have very similar backgrounds. We are both career Air Force guys that continued to fly afterwards. And one of the main things that connected the two of us is, we both have a real love for aviation. And we have both flown all kinds of stuff. Sam flew the big airliners and I flew the fast jets, but we both



MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

**Members of team Aero Legend, from left, Winette Tomeny, Sam Spayd and Terry Tomeny stand in The Stearman's hangar. The Tomenys recently purchased the 73-year-old biplane from Spayd.**

See **BIPLANE 9A**