

Polk County
Itemizer-Observer
 Volume 141, Issue 48 www.Polkio.com November 30, 2016 \$1.00

Crash claims life of Falls City woman

Itemizer-Observer staff report
 MONMOUTH — A Falls City woman was killed, and a Dallas woman suffered serious injuries in a two-car crash on Highway 99W near Monmouth on Saturday night.

At about 6 p.m., Oregon State Police troopers and emergency personnel responded to the report of the accident near milepost 70 on the highway, the intersection with Suver Road, said an OSP press release.

Preliminary investigation revealed a 2002 Ford F250 was traveling westbound on Suver Road when it attempted to cross the highway and was T-boned by a southbound 2010 Honda. After the crash, both vehicles came to rest on the roadway.

The driver of the Honda, Cecilia L. Nicosia, 23, was taken by air ambulance to Good Samaritan Medical Center in Corvallis for treatment of serious injuries.

The passenger in the Ford, Sara L. Brown, 24, was pronounced deceased at the scene. The driver of the Ford, Matthew L. Serry, 25, Brown's husband, was not injured. The couple lived in Falls City. Preliminary investigation indicates neither were wearing their safety belts, police said.

Highway 99W was closed for about six hours while the crash was investigated. A detour was put in place.

OSP was assisted by the Polk County Sheriff's Office, Polk County Fire No. 1 and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The investigation is ongoing. More information will be released when it is available, police said.



Top: McKenzie DeVault and Parker Peterson. Bottom row: Garrett Vinson, Becca Boyce, Bryar Eames, Shana Lavier and Maggie Hanson. Lavier has been part of Dallas High's Developmental Learning Center for nine years.

A TEACHER'S HEART

Dallas' Lavier shares gift of equality with her students

By Lukas Eggen
 The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — When Shana Lavier entered the world of education, she was sure of two things.

"I wanted to teach anything but math," Lavier said with a chuckle. "And I wanted to teach older kids. The little ones, they scare me."

Lavier, a life skills teacher, joined Dallas High School 17 years ago, beginning with the Educational Resource Room program.

For the last nine years, she has been part of the school's Developmental Learning Center — a program where individualized instructional programs and techniques are used to address moderate to severe learning and physical disabilities, or special social/behavioral cultural and language needs of the students — and helping guide the school's peer tutoring program.

"Getting to know the kids and the staff in this room,



Becca Boyce, left, celebrated senior Ashlee Lichtenberger's last home soccer game earlier this school year.

when the opening was available and nobody else wanted it, I knew they were missing out on an amazing program," Lavier said.

Heather Peffley, whose son Jacob is a junior and has Down syndrome, has seen firsthand what kind of difference Lavier makes.

Jacob had a difficult time during junior high,

Peffley said. Once he arrived at DHS, things were different.

"It was a phenomenal change," Peffley said. "He went from not wanting to go to school to dreading Christmas break. He doesn't want to come home. The weekends are too long to be away from his friends and his peers. His speech is improved.



He's hilarious, and totally gets jokes now. He has developed so much being in this program. I never worry about him going to school. I know he's completely protected, and he has friends and students there to stand up for him, and it's because of the way she runs the classroom."

Lavier's approach is simple. "She's a fun-loving person and knows how to work with kids and get them to perform at higher levels," 2014 graduate Ryan Spencer said. "She treats her students like you would anyone else."

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'Toys' fills gaps, provides gifts for kids

By Jolene Guzman
 The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Traci Weston is feeling a little overwhelmed — but for a good reason.

The busier she is, the more families she is helping as the Polk County coordinator for Toys for Tots and the Monmouth-Independence Christmas Project.

"Donations are coming in and (toy) boxes are going out," Weston said last week "It's an exciting time."

Weston compiled applications for Toys for Tots last week, but estimated in recent years, the organization has provided gifts to 2,200 children from infants to 18 in Polk County.

Each community has toy drives,

Need help?

What: Monmouth-Independence Christmas Project application days.

Where: Independence Women's Clubhouse, 340 S. Third St., Independence.

When: 1 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays through Dec. 7.

Of note: Photo ID for proof of address is required.

For more information: 503-339-4955.

and the communities share to make sure all needs are met. Toys for Tots Foundation will fill in the gaps if any requests haven't been filled.

"I love the foundation," Weston

said. "They have helped fill the gaps. We've lost so many donors. Times are tough."

Toys for Tots has donation bins in all Polk County communities, so those wanting to make a toy donation don't have to go far to help a family in need. Weston noted that Walmart has Toys for Tots giving trees, which have tags with children's requests.

"Those are kids' wishes," Weston said. "Those are for kids all over the community."

Weston said the organization has a "top five" list of needed gifts. Soccer balls top the list.

"We can't get enough of them," Weston said.

Legos are another popular gift

that appeals to both boys and girls. For children 12 years or older, a frequent request is bath and body sets. Weston said some families the program serves struggle to provide teens with their own toiletries.

"This time of year, they sell these beautiful sets," she said. "They are popular gifts for the kids over 12, and one that is very needed."

Superhero toys are next on the list. Weston recommends characters from the latest superhero movie.

The final of the top five, skateboards, can be donated or, better yet, people can make a financial contribution.

"I can buy them for \$10.50 (each) through a wholesaler," she said.

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IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS
 Dallas High to perform "Aristocats" for one night only.
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FALLS CITY
 City awaits word on grant for sewer system project.
»Page 10A

INDEPENDENCE
 Central High brings a holiday classic to life.
»Page 14A

SPORTS
 Western Oregon's men's basketball team splits games.
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POLK COUNTY
 Student homeless population remains steady.
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House fire leaves family displaced

Itemizer-Observer staff report
 RICKREAL — A family of nine is displaced following a Tuesday morning house fire near Rock-n-Rogers at Farrol's in Rickreal.

Firefighters responded to a call about smoke coming from a manufactured home behind the restaurant at 9:13 a.m. and were on scene by 9:22 a.m., said Dallas Fire & EMS spokeswoman April Welsh.

The occupants of the home, three adults and six children, were not home when the fire started and no people were injured in the blaze.

Firefighters rescued two rabbits from the home. Of the occupants' two cats, one ran away and the other died in the fire.

The initial investigation concluded the source of the fire could have been a pot left on the stove unattended, Welsh said. Further investigation in the cause is ongoing.

"We are working with the Red Cross to come up with housing for the family," Welsh said.

Nineteen firefighters from Dallas, Southwest Polk and Falls City fire departments responded to the fire, which was knocked down by 9:50 a.m. The Polk County Sheriff's Office assisted on the scene.

THE NEXT 7 DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK

wed
 Helping Hands Emergency Food Bank distributes food boxes to the needy each Wednesday.
10 a.m.-noon. Free.

Cloudy
 Hi: 50
 Lo: 38

thu
 James2 Community Kitchen serves meals to all who are hungry at United Methodist Church in Dallas.
4:30-6 p.m. Free.

Cloudy
 Hi: 49
 Lo: 39

fri
 Central High School presents "White Christmas," sure to get all in the holiday spirit, at the auditorium.
7 p.m. \$5-\$8.

Rain
 Hi: 48
 Lo: 44

sat
 Don't miss the one-time performance of "The Aristocats Kids," by the Dallas High School theater department.
2 and 7 p.m. \$4.

Cloudy
 Hi: 51
 Lo: 44

sun
 Today is the Boy Scouts' annual Scouting for Food, where they will collect canned goods donations.
9 a.m.-3 p.m. Free.

Rain
 Hi: 49
 Lo: 36

mon
 Indy Heritage Museum will host a 40th anniversary party at the civic center with music, cake and snacks.
7 p.m. Free.

Showers
 Hi: 41
 Lo: 31

tue
 Show off your skills by taking part in World Trick Shot day, originally created by the Harlem Globetrotters.

Mostly cloudy
 Hi: 40
 Lo: 29