

Gov. forms workgroup to evaluate lab procedures

SALEM (AP) — Oregon Governor Kate Brown is forming a workgroup to review the practices and procedures of the Oregon State Police crime lab, as the state investigates a forensic analyst for allegedly tampering with evidence.

The workgroup will examine the recent allegations of tampering and identify any changes that need to be made. It also will help draft new legislation if statutory changes are needed.

Last week state authorities said evidence in hundreds of criminal cases was being reviewed following accusations that a forensic analyst stole pills and other drugs.

The analyst, 35-year-old Nika Larsen, worked in OSP's Bend lab since 2012 and at two other state labs prior to that. She was placed on leave earlier this month.

The state Department of Justice took over the criminal investigation from OSP earlier this week. Spokeswoman Kristina Edmunson said the state police will continue to assist with the probe.

"The credibility of the criminal justice system is critical to Oregon's citizens," Brown said in a statement.

The discovery puts current cases and convictions in doubt and could cost counties thousands to retest and retry cases. State police declined to publicly release the number

of potentially affected cases, citing the ongoing criminal investigation.

Deschutes County District Attorney John Hummel said he must retest the evidence in 502 cases dating back to 2012. In Klamath County, District Attorney Rob Patridge said he's reviewing 328 cases dating as far back as 2007. And in Polk County, District Attorney Aaron Felton is reviewing 35 cases.

Last week, state police also said a second forensic analyst at its crime lab had been investigated. Investigators found Jeff Dovci, who worked at OSP's Central Point lab, had overstated evidence during a criminal trial in 2005. Dovci, who has since retired, disputes the allegations and says his interpretation of evidence is a matter of opinion.

The state police operates five labs. Others are in Springfield, Pendleton, and Portland. Lt. Bill Fugate, a state police spokesman, said the labs have very strict policies and procedures in place, including regular audits. The disclosures about the analysts are prompting further reviews.

Author sets novel in Sisters

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Author Jeanette Hubbard had the opening scene for a novel in mind — a suicide.

"What do you do with that?" she said. "It's kind of a downer."

You turn it into a comedy, of course.

And, because you love the area and visit it four times a year on camping trips to the Metolius River, you set the story in Sisters.

"I've loved the town for decades," says the Portland author. "I'm very familiar with the city — though I certainly don't know the dirt."

The set-up for "Secrets, Lies and Champagne Highs" rolls out like this:

"Comedy begins with a botched suicide and ends with a barn burning. Claudie O'Brien has driven to her favorite spot on the Metolius River in Central Oregon. She is armed with some very nice Champagne and a boatload of Percocet. But her best-laid plans of checking out are thwarted by Peter, a laid-off vice-principal working as a tow-truck driver.

"She comes to live in the converted garage that Peter's

wife, Chrystal, has renovated. This doesn't please Mrs. Fowler, the noisy neighbor across the street who has problems of her own in the form of her meth-cooking son Marty.

"Chrystal is soon distracted by the handsome older spiritual guru who has breezed into town with plans to build a 'transformational' retreat in the woods. He endeavors to help Chrystal clear her seven chakras in his luxurious suite at the Six Firs Resort. One person in town knows that he is a fraud ... and she's living in Chrystal's converted garage.

"How will Claudie reconcile herself to her new life, straighten out the mess in Chrystal and Peter's life, and bring about the comeuppance to the husband who walked out on her 40 years ago?"

Those looking for a roman a clef dishing the dirt on the lurid underbelly of Sisters will



PHOTO PROVIDED

not find it. The setting is real, but the characters are made up and do not resemble anyone living or dead. Probably.

"It's a purely fictionalized version," says Hubbard. "I hope so."

"Secrets, Lies and Champagne Highs" can be found at online booksellers and at Paulina Springs Books in Sisters.

THE COTTONWOOD CAFE

Keep an eye out for The Cottonwood Supper Club Beginning mid-October The Cottonwood Cafe will offer a casual, 3-course, set menu dinner on Friday and Saturday nights. **Watch here for details.**

541-549-2699
403 E. Hood Ave. Sisters

AMERICA'S FAVORITE
SAS
COMFORT SHOES

Shoe Inn
WE FIT YOU FOR COMFORT

Annual SAS Event
October 3-17th

SAVE \$15
ON
ANY PAIR OF SAS SHOES OR SANDALS

The Shoe Inn
2680 NE Hwy 20, Suite 380, Bend
541-385-7405

Monday - Saturday 10-6, Sunday 11-5
In the Costco Forum Center, across from Barnes & Noble
Offer valid until Saturday, Oct. 17th.
\$15 off the regular price of any pair of SAS shoe or sandal.

Ready For Cooler Temps?
We've got your workout covered!

Over 40 classes per week included with your membership!

Spin • Body Sculpt
Water Aerobics • Zumba
Yoga • Pilates

Swimming pool, steam room and hot tub. Single, couple and family membership options. All memberships are month-to-month.

Bring in this coupon during the month of October for your **FREE TWO-WEEK TRIAL!**

SISTERS ATHLETIC CLUB
541-549-6878
www.sistersathleticclub.com