

Park district, landowner draft new Mirror Pond agreement

BEND (AP) — Bend parks officials will consider an agreement next week to improve Mirror Pond.

The *Bulletin* reports Mirror Pond Solutions LLC owns the land beneath the water.

Bend Park & Recreation District officials have the agreement on their Tuesday agenda.

The agreement spells out next steps on Mirror Pond for the company as well as the Bend Park & Recreation District.

Pacific Power decided in June to retain ownership of the dam that creates the pond, prompting the need for the new agreement.

An earlier agreement was based on Pacific Power shifting ownership.

The new agreement says Mirror Pond Solutions will donate its land beneath the pond to the district once work is finished.

Proposals are being requested to design and complete bank restoration work around the pond.

Veteran receives Purple Heart after 51 years

By **Kathy Aney**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON (AP) — Decades after a helicopter blade struck Ron Esselstyn's head, he finally received his Purple Heart.

The Pendleton soldier almost died 51 years ago in Vietnam at age 22 after an Army helicopter carrying him and other soldiers landed in a rice paddy and Esselstyn hopped out. When a Viet Cong sniper popped up from the weeds, the soldier jumped off balance into the chopper's moving tail rotor. The blade hit with such force that it mashed part of Esselstyn's fiberglass helmet into his brain, reported the East Oregonian.

His parents got a telegram calling their son's prognosis "guarded." When he awoke, speech eluded him. His doctors suspected he would never walk again.

The Pendleton man, once called "The Cat" by basketball teammates, surprised everyone by not only walking, but eventually running more than 100 marathons. He finished college and started a career as a tax appraiser at the Umatilla County Assessor's Office.

Esselstyn didn't receive his Purple Heart. The veteran believed he wasn't eligible because he was technically an "advisor," not a combat troop. Possibly he was passed over because of a misunderstanding of Army regulation, which bars soldiers from receiving Purple Hearts for vehicular accidents that

weren't caused by enemy action.

Last year, Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs Operations Director Ed Van Dyke began researching Esselstyn's service record and found that he was eligible for the Purple Heart and seven other medals, ribbons and badges.

On a Thursday afternoon in August at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla, the 73-year-old veteran finally got his medals in front of a crowd of about 75 gathered in the Outpatient Center Atrium.

Esselstyn sat in his wheelchair, wearing a black ball cap emblazoned with the image of a helicopter and the date of the incident, August 27, 1965. His hat covered the flat, runway-shaped surface left behind after reconstructive surgery to fix the place where the rotor sheared off part of his skull. He listened as Van Dyke said he first learned of Esselstyn's story from an *East Oregonian* article a year ago.

"As I read the article chronicling Ron's amazing story, I knew I had to do whatever I could do to ensure he received the honors and recognitions he deserved," Van Dyke said.

Van Dyke collected a thick file on Ron from the Army archives and sent the evidence to the Secretary of the Army last March. Van Dyke's request was forwarded on

to the Army Awards and Decorations Branch which determined Esselstyn should receive not only the Purple Heart, but a Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Service Medal (with two stars), Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, Expert Badge and Marksman Badge.

"These are tokens he should have received many, many years ago," Van Dyke said.

He walked over to Esselstyn and pinned the Purple Heart onto the veteran's shirt. Esselstyn teared up.

"I was shocked," he said later. "I didn't expect all this."

Ron's wife, Sue, stood nearby, looking emotional. She more than anyone sees the dark moments caused by that long-ago injury. About a decade ago, her husband lost his sense of balance and developed drop foot. He tumbled off his back porch and hit his head on a patio. He tripped in the driveway,

breaking his hip. He had to give up running. He struggles with post-traumatic stress, diabetes and concentration. He exhibits signs of bipolar disorder. She doesn't know which conditions are the direct result of the head injury and which aren't.

Today, however, she felt only joy as she watched Ron receive long-overdue recognition.

"He's overwhelmed with so much love and so many people," she said.

After the official ceremony, a parade of people came forward and addressed Esselstyn. The speakers included childhood friends, a junior high basketball coach, Sen. Bill Hansell (who worked with Esselstyn at the Umatilla County Courthouse) and a VA medical team that Sue Esselstyn has dubbed "Team Hope" for their caring. One of the nurses on the team, Lonna Lobe, addressed Ron.

"You take care of some patients that forever touch you," she said. "You and Sue will always be in my heart."

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