## Commentary...

## Be alert to elder abuse

By Betsy Leighty-Johnson **Guest Columnist** 

Cheat grass. Once you know what to look for, you begin to see it everywhere.

Elder abuse is kind of the same — once you know the warning signs you begin to see it more frequently. "See it, stop it, prevent it" have become the watchwords for this insidious and growing crime.

One reason it may seem elder abuse is on the rise is the increasing number of Baby Boomers cresting age 65. Wes Fitzwater, a Portland-based attorney specializing in elder law, has been a presenter at various forums including to Oregon attorneys, eldercare service providers, as well as financial and insurance groups. He emphasizes the "human tidal wave" that will "change the face of America" based on U.S. Census Bureau data. In the next 15 years, more than 10,000 Baby Boomers will reach age 65 per day. Further, he presents the economic outlook that "America is sitting on the edge of what is expected to be the greatest transfer of wealth in our history." The prediction is "by the year 2052, an estimated \$40.6 trillion will change hands as Baby Boomers and their parents pass on their accumulated assets to their heirs."

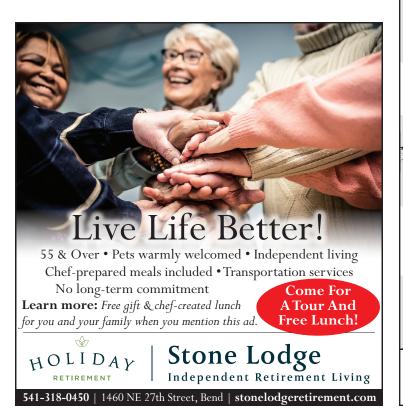
The Oregon Legislature and Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) have worked together to improve Oregon laws. ORS 124.005-124.040 is the Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Abuse Prevention Act (EPPWDAPA).

DHS' Adult and Protective Services (APS) is responsible for coordinating and conducting abuse investigations and providing statewide services to reports of neglect and abuse of vulnerable adults, including: adults over the age of 65, adults with physical and/or developmental disabilities, adults with mental illness, and children receiving residential treatment services.

If you're reading this and are over the age of 65, you are part of the vulnerable population and are covered by Oregon's elder abuse

The DHS APS 2017 Data Book reports they conducted 16,793 investigations to determine whether abuse or self-neglect had occurred, encompassing 18,855 distinct allegations, some involving multiple victims; 70 percent of these allegations were community based and 30 percent were for facilities. Of these allegations, 4,720 were determined to be abuse with 32 percent financial exploitation, 26 percent verbal abuse, 15 percent self-neglect, 15 percent physical abuse, 9 percent neglect, 2 percent abandonment, restraint, and seclusion, and 1 percent for sexual abuse.

What is elder abuse? "Elder abuse includes physical harm, failure to provide basic care, abandonment or involuntary seclusion, unwanted sexual contact, verbal or emotional abuse, neglect, self-neglect, wrongful restraint and financial exploitation. Abuse can happen in a person's own home or the home of family or friends. It can also occur in a professional care setting such as a nursing facility, a residential care facility, an assisted living facility, an adult foster home, a retirement home or a room and board home" (from the DHS website).



This is Part 1 of a multipart series on Elder Abuse Awareness, intended to raise community awareness and to provide resources for individuals who are themselves vulnerable or are caregivers, family or friends of vulnerable people.

If you become aware of signs that a person over 65 (or a person with disabilities of any age) is being abused, report it and let the authorities investigate. Protect any evidence you may have and call the toll-free abuse hotline at 800-503-SAFE or by calling local law enforcement in the county where the abuse occurred. If you report elder abuse in good faith, the law will protect you from being sued by the alleged abuser if you are mistaken.

Dr. Betsy Leighty-Johnson has a PhD in Human Services with a specialization in Social and Community Services. In September 2014, the author and her husband discovered his (then) 96-year-old mother had been the victim of financial elder abuse. They were very involved in the collection of evidence assisting in the felony prosecution of the victim's daughter for the crime. Since that time, the author has become an elder-abuse advocate, currently assisting the Deschutes County District Attorney's office with elderabuse cases.

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# **Efforts planned to improve Whychus Creek**

By Sue Stafford

Correspondent

Grant applications are being submitted to support the restoration and improvement of Whychus Creek where it runs between the Creekside Campground and Creekside Park inside the city of Sisters.

The Upper Deschutes Watershed Council (UDWC) will apply to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the Pelton/Round Butte Fund. There is approximately \$150,000 available to pay for fish passage and instream and riparian habitat restoration.

The City submitted a grant request to FEMA to help fund the Locust Street component of the project, which involves removing the bridge-mounted sewer line from the upstream side and placing it under the streambed to avoid damage to the line during high water

The UDWC and the City are planning to implement the fish passage and riparian restoration work along with ADA retrofits on the pedestrian bridge over the creek based on funding availability.

July 1 through October 15 is the window for the in-stream work to occur in order to have the least impact on the fish. The water will be at its lowest flow level so the least amount of water will need to be piped around the in-stream work. The City will take the lead on the bridge and sewer line work.



