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Snow dusts the restroom near South Falls on Feb. 14. DAVID DAVIS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Silverton High suicides leave grief in their wake

Christena Brooks Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A student suicide has again deeply grieved the Silverton High School community.

The most recent death, officially addressed Feb. 7 in a district-wide message by Silver Falls Superintendent Andy Bellando, follows the suicide of another Silverton High student last spring.

Many questions will go unanswered as family, friends and staff protect the privacy of the students and their loved ones.

"This challenge is not specific to us; it's a nationwide issue," Bellando said. "Our kids are growing up in a world that is very different from the world we experienced as youth."

The most recent data shows that 38 Oregonians 19-and-under died by suicide in 2015. This and more information is included in the Oregon Health Authority's 2016 Youth Intervention and Prevention Plan Annual Report.

According to the report, those 38 suicides accounted for 45 percent of the suicides reported among youth 24-and-under, a slice of the state's population being tracked more carefully than ever by prevention specialists.

Three years ago, concerned lawmakers commissioned the OHA to create and keep updated a statewide plan and report to the legislature.

At the time, Oregon's youth suicide rate had been climbing steadily since 2011. This continued until 2015, when the rate improved slightly, dropping Oregon from having the 12th highest youth suicide rate in the nation to the 16th, according to the report.

"Oregon Health Authority will be monitoring youth suicide in future years to determine if this slight decrease in 2015 is the beginning of a downward trend or a one-year dip in an increase over time," coordinator Ann Kirkwood wrote.

In Silverton, "two suicides are too many," Bellando said. "We've struggled to understand the loss of precious lives, and we've stood together in support of families and each other."

The Silverton Appeal left messages with the other seven high schools in the OSAA's 5A-2 conference, requesting unofficial suicide data. Representatives from three – Central High School in Independence, Woodburn High School, and South Albany High School – responded by deadline, saying there were no reported such deaths among their students over the past two years.

"You are always in shock when anybody who seems to have everything to live for chooses that path," said Superintendent Chuck Ransom, of Woodburn School District. "It's obviously related to mental health, to depression."

South Albany High School Principal Brent Belveal said he's convinced his staff prevents "at least one suicide a year," through a process that starts with asking all students to take a 10-minute survey every year. The survey is not anonymous, and it's typical for staff to call 200 of its 1,400 students in for counseling afterward, he said.

In 2017, nearly 17 percent of eighth-graders and 18 percent of 11th-graders statewide who took the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey reported they'd seriously

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California natives fall for Sublimity

13 years later, Silver Falls park volunteers feel right at home

Justin Much
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

When Jim Thomas took his regular morning walk around a snow-dusted Sublimity recently, one thing came to his mind:

"I'll bet the falls are a pretty place today."

A light snow up the road at Silver Falls State Park always adds something to its seasonal appeal. Thomas, 76, and his wife, Janet Thomas, discovered that appeal 13 years ago, and it provided enough impetus to relocate from Southern California and call Sublimity home.

"I was born in Los Angeles and raised there," said Thomas, who worked in the title insurance business. "The last office I worked in, I was on the 18th floor of a building, and from my window I could see the hospital where I was born."

That all changed the year the Thomases' daughter moved to Washington, and they decided to visit her. The couple had never heard of Silver Falls State Park, but a friend from Eugene recommended they cruise up there with their RV and visit.

They did, and the experience was life-changing.

The Thomases moved to Sublimity in short order and they've been volunteers at the park for 8½ years.

"The (South Falls Nature) Store opened in July of 2009 and I started volunteering in September," Jim Thomas said.

"It is such a beautiful place to volunteer and spend

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Jim Thomas and Janet Thomas are volunteers at the South Falls Nature Store. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

Commissioners kick off annual tours in Mt. Angel

Staff reports

A range of topics from infrastructure to homelessness are set to take stage in Mt. Angel.

Marion County Commissioners Janet Carlson, Kevin Cameron and Sam Brentano will kick off a series of annual community tours in Mt. Angel with a town hall from noon to 1 p.m. Feb. 21, at the city library, 290 E Charles St. Mt. Angel Chamber of Commerce will host the visit.

"The commissioners will be taking a tour of GEM Equipment at 2 p.m. after the town hall," Marion Coun-

ty Public Information Officer Jolene Kelley said.

The commission will hold its Silverton Community Forum at 11:45 a.m. Friday, March 9, in Silverton Hospital's conference room above the Birth Center, 342 Fairview St. Silverton Chamber of Commerce is hosting that forum.

The commissioners delivered their annual State of the County address as part of SEDCOR's monthly economic forum on Feb. 14, where they addressed innovation and technology for agriculture, infrastructure investments, public and mental health, public safety, and homelessness. That provided a glimpse of the top-

ics expected to emerge at the upcoming community town halls.

Brentano touched on emergency management but focused on transportation issues, including the safety value of rumble strips alerting motorists of upcoming stop signs in rural areas and the importance of improved infrastructure, such as a proposed third bridge across the Willamette River in Salem.

"The roads from Marion and Polk counties are necessary to get people and products to and from Salem

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Silverton Poetry Festival kicks off Feb. 23

Christena Brooks
Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Silverton Poetry Festival will make its 18th annual appearance this weekend, offering six poetry events.

On Friday, Feb. 23, things kick off with readings by John Brehm and Emily Ransdell from 7 to 9 p.m. at Frank Lloyd Wright's Gordon House.

On Saturday, Feb. 24, Silver Falls Library will host an event from 10:30 a.m. to noon, where attendees can read aloud their favorite published poems, as well as their own work.

Then kids, fourth grade through eighth grade, are invited to attend a poetry workshop at the Silverton Arts Association from 1 to 3 p.m. Registration is \$5.

From 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. that same day, Voces Poet-

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