

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2019 ■ SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

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Driver in fatal did DUI diversion; does it work?

Whitney Woodworth
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The night of June 2, a 25-year-old Salem man allegedly ran a red light while driving drunk, plowing into a car and instantly killing three teens.

After the crash, Juan Rodriguez-Palacios' blood-alcohol content was 0.239 percent — almost three times the legal limit of 0.08.

It was not his first time being caught driving intoxicated.

Four years earlier, Rodriguez-Palacios was one of the thousands of Oregonians who have participated in a DUI diversion program in order to get those charges dismissed.

Yet, according to multiple state and local agencies, little is known about whether DUI diversion participants are less, or more, likely to drink and drive again.

Officials with the Oregon Judicial Department, the Criminal Justice Commission, the Oregon Health Authority and Marion County Circuit Courts told the Statesman Journal they do not track recidivism rates of DUI diversion participants.

And no data is available on how often these participants receive a second DUI conviction.

Rodriguez-Palacios was arrested on DUI, hit-and-run, reckless driving and reckless endangerment charges in 2015 after he struck a trailer being towed on Lancaster Drive and fled the scene. According to court records, his blood-alcohol content was 0.145 percent at the time of the crash.

He was driving home from a friend's house with three passengers in his car.

Rodriguez-Palacios admitted to driving drunk, hit-and-run and reckless driving.

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A memorial is shown set up by friends and family for Makayla Tryon, 18, of Keizer; Madison Capobianco, 19; and Trinity Watt, 19, both of Salem, near the intersection of Cherry Avenue and Salem Parkway.

PHOTOS BY MICHAELA ROMÁN/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Families gather on the dock during free fishing day on Saturday, June 4, 2016, at the Silverton Reservoir.

STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

Mineral rights sold to Silverton quarry

Controversial sale of mineral rights approved by the State Land Board

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The path for a Silverton Rock Farm to start operating a quarry bordering Silverton Reservoir has been eased after the State Land Board approved the sale of mineral rights to the landowner.

For the second time.

Though operations could be a year or more away, the State Land Board concluded a four-year process by approving the sale of the mineral rights to the property owner for \$50,000.

The Silverton Rock Farm sits on 63.1 acres just west of Silverton Reservoir, a popular recreation spot and secondary water source for Silverton, on unincorporated Marion County land.

A significant concern raised by opponents of the proposed quarry is the potential for impacts, since a small waterfall runs from the property into Silverton Reservoir.

"My personal feeling is that there's nothing that can be done at this time," said Charles Baldwin, whose house borders the property. "It's been approved. It's been done. The only thing I think we can do now is to point out to the city that it had an opportunity to do something about it."

Mineral rights improperly separated

The property was purchased by Silverton Rock Farm 2013, according to records from the Marion County Tax Assessor's office.

A rock quarry operated on the site until 1996, but the Department of State Lands found the mineral and geothermal rights for the land had been improperly separated from the land deed in the 1940s with the state retaining those rights.

In 2014, Silverton Rock Farm, which is owned by Richard Beck according to Marion County records,

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Church cuts medical debt of Oregonians

Samantha Hawkins
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Medford church has abolished the medical debt of 1,238 Oregonians — including several dozen from Marion County — whose unpaid bills had been sent to collections.

Dale Schaeffer, the pastor for New Life Church of the Nazarene, saw a John Oliver segment where the comedian used a nonprofit named RIP Medical Debt to abolish around \$15 million in debt, and was struck by its simplicity.

"I was really moved by the power of a little bit of resource to eliminate that much debt," Schaeffer said. "I've had family members and friends who have had to file bankruptcy due to those kinds of debts — it's just heartbreaking to watch that."

On average, each dollar donated to the nonprofit abolishes \$100 of debt.

Raising \$30,000 for their annual Christmas offering, New Life was able to forgive more than \$2 million in medical debt for Oregonians and \$1 million in medical debt for veterans around the nation.

In Marion County, 73 residents had \$165,878 in medical debt forgiven.

How debt buying works

"First of all you make the egregious error of getting sick or injured in America," said Jerry Ashton, co-founder of RIP Medical Debt. "The next mistake you made is going to the hospital."

Hospitals often turn to collection agencies to recoup the costs after a few unsuccessful months of trying to get a patient to pay their medical bills.

Generally, collection agencies are unsuccessful with 85% of unpaid accounts, and send them back to

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Navy WAVE taught instrument flying to WWII pilots

Capi Lynn
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Her father emigrated from Norway when he was 16 and served in the U.S. Army during World War I.

Her husband was a U.S. Navy fighter pilot during World War II.

One son served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam era. Another flew combat missions for the U.S. Air Force during the Persian Gulf War. A grandson is an Air Force pilot on active duty.

Chris Schiess is proud of their military service, although she downplays her role in the family's legacy. She served in WWII, too, in the Navy.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Eleanor Jean Christiansen was a Link Trainer operator with the WAVES — Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.

She still has her tailor-made dress blue uniform jacket, faintly stamped E.J. Christiansen on the lining. She didn't like her given name and went by Chris in the Navy, and it stuck.

The Link Trainer was a flight simulator — often called the "Blue Box" — used to train pilots and other airmen for instrument flying conditions. It was key to the Allied victory during World War II, with more than 500,000 U.S. pilots trained on Link simulators.

"I had the most interesting job in the Navy," the 95-year-old Salem resident said, "especially for how young I was."

She was 20 when she enlisted, one of about 84,000 WAVES who volunteered for duty. They didn't serve overseas, but they were heroines on the homefront.

They made combat victories possible, rigging parachutes, operating control towers, working on aircraft engines, deciphering code and producing munitions.

Chris trained pilots, including her future husband.

Hard-to-get assignment

Her parents ran a mom-and-pop grocery store in Redfield, South Dakota. Chris had plans to go to college nearby, but then the war broke out and "there was nobody left in South Dakota," she said.

She took a government job placement test after graduating from high school, then went to work for the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. Among the highlights of her stay was standing on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial while it was under construction.

The woman she worked for joined the WAVES, but Chris wasn't old enough.

She returned home around the time her brother-in-law, stationed at a naval air base in Minnesota, was killed in a flight training accident.

Through other Navy pilots who came to pay their respects, she learned more about the WAVES and about the Link Trainer.

"I knew then that was what I wanted to get into," she said. "It was the best billet and one of the hardest to get."

A recruitment brochure described it this way: "This WAVE instructs an Aviation Cadet in a Link Trainer. Today, he's flying on instruments in a plane that never leaves the ground. Tomorrow, this instruction will bring him back alive."

The minimum age to enlist was 20. Once old

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Chris Schiess is settled in the cockpit of a 1942 Stearman and ready for a flight courtesy of the Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation. COURTESY OF BONAVENTURE AND GIBSON CREEK

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Vol. 138, No. 29

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880
A Unique Edition of the Statesman Journal



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