

Appeal Tribune

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No fireworks at Oregon Garden for 2020

Christena Brooks
Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Silverton's annual fireworks show and celebration at The Oregon Garden is canceled for July 3, 2020.

Leaders at the garden and its foundation said the cancellation is a result of the state's social distancing measures surrounding COVID-19. "This was a really difficult decision to make, but the health and safety of our visitors is the most important thing," said Delen Kitchen, assistant general manager. "We were anticipating about 10,000 people, and there is really no way to ensure appropriate social distancing and sanitizing with a crowd that size."

Without a clear picture of future restrictions on large gatherings, staff at the garden, the foundation

and the City of Silverton agreed that canceling the event was the most responsible decision.

"Like all of you, I grieve that this pandemic has now taken (this celebration), but despite the fact that there will be no fireworks, it's more important than ever to remember that the Fourth of July is a great time to reflect on what we are capable of as a society," said Kyle Palmer, mayor of Silverton.

Shana Schacher, event administrator at the garden is still looking forward to future events.

"We love bringing the community together and celebrating the start of summer," she said. "Right now, we're looking at ways to responsibly continue our other summer events, like Movies in the Garden, to give everyone something fun to look forward to."

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Hundreds gather for a fireworks display at the Oregon Garden in Silverton on July 3, 2019.

ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Parents of Salem baby sue hospital



Blaize Wheeldon shortly before he died from bacterial meningitis on May 11, 2018. SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Wrongful death lawsuit comes two years after baby's death

Whitney Woodworth
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The parents of a 7-month-old baby who died from meningitis shortly after he was released from Silverton Medical Center are suing the hospital for \$6.3 million.

The wrongful death lawsuit filed Friday comes two years after the death of Blaize Wheeldon and accuses hospital staff of medical negligence and the negligent infliction of emotional distress.

It names a Silverton hospital emergency room doctor and Legacy Health, which operates the

hospital, as defendants.

Blaize's mother, Summer Poff, spoke with the Statesman Journal shortly after her son's death.

At the time, she was distraught that his illness wasn't recognized the first time Blaize was taken to the hospital. She wanted to raise awareness for the deadly condition that took her son from a happy, smiling baby to being in a coma within hours.

Poff said she knew something was wrong with Blaize early in the morning of May 11, 2018.

He was fussy, feverish and wouldn't go to sleep.

Poff and Blaize's father, Jubal Wheeldon, tried to soothe the baby and gave him Tylenol, but at 3 a.m. they knew he needed to be taken to the ER.

Wheeldon took him to Silverton Medical Center, where Blaize was treated with Tylenol.

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Marion County approves \$500K in tax breaks

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The company that purchased the former NORPAC vegetable processing facility in Brooks will receive an estimated \$537,205 in property tax exemptions from Marion County over the next three years to make \$15 million in improvements at the 43,000 square foot facility and hire 300 new employees by the end of the year.

PNW Vegco, which is owned by farm entrepreneur Frank Tiegs, purchased the facility on Brooklake Road and 1,000 acres of farmland Jan. 31 for \$13,549,311, according to Marion County Tax Assessor records.

The tax breaks are part of a 2016 state law that al-

lows three years of taxes to be exempted on improvements between \$1 million and \$25 million on rural industrial property to encourage employment in rural areas.

"This was initiated as a result of one of our popular wineries here in (Salem) that did a very large expansion and they immediately got an increase in their property tax bill within months of the work is done," Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron said. "They said we need some time to get some revenues up to pay their expense."

PNW Vegco, which is based in Pasco, Wash., has 90 days from Wednesday's approval from the Marion County Commissioners to receive support from other

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Forward This

Capi Lynn
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Wounds heal, scars remain

Officer Michelle Pratt back on patrol after being shot

Salem Police Officer Michelle Pratt's on her first patrol shift back, and her husband a sergeant is tagging along.

He requested the assignment because he needs to be there as much as she needs him, a twinge of guilt still gnawing at him for what happened last May.

Jake Pratt couldn't have changed the outcome. No one could have.

But Officer Pratt could dictate how she returns to the line of duty after being shot four times during a traffic stop.

The wounds are long healed. It's the scars they can't see that the couple are concerned about during the first shift back on Dec. 2, 2019.

She tries to avoid possible psychological triggers as she makes that first traffic stop, pulling over a different model and make of vehicle and choosing a different location.

But still, her heart's racing.

She forgets to call in the license plate number. She gets tangled in her seat belt. Her flashlight comes unclipped from her utility belt.

As she approaches the driver's side window — facing "a little old lady who doesn't have insurance" — Pratt is literally shaking.

Then the flashback comes. She hears the loud pops and feels the sting in her arm, her legs, then her back.

Jake helps her refocus and recompose, both realizing this will be her toughest hurdle. The next traffic stop goes better and so does the next.

But during each, she has a flashback.

"I was mentally exhausted," Michelle Pratt said. "That night, after the first shift, was the best night of sleep I had since the shooting. Not just because of exhaustion but being back at work."

Corralling preschoolers, then criminals

Pratt took an unconventional route to a career in law enforcement. She didn't grow up wanting to be a cop.

She graduated from Canby High School and what is now Corban University, got married, had children and taught preschool for 18 years.

Curiously, she finds similarities between preschoolers and criminals and how they both need to be handled.

"Same skill set, different consequences, different age group," Pratt said during a candid interview at her home just before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. "You let them both know what's going on, what you expect, and what's going to happen if they don't do it."

Her introduction to Salem Police was as a volunteer advocate on the department's Domestic Violence Response Team, which provides 24-hour on-scene crisis intervention and was the first program of its kind in Oregon.

She accompanied police officers on domestic violence calls, offering emotional support to victims, explaining the law and arrest procedures, and connecting them to resources.

About the time her kids were graduating from high school, she had an epiphany: "I don't think being a preschool teacher is going to be satisfying."

Pratt was 41 when she was hired part-time as a Salem Police Community Service officer, helping assist sworn officers with complaints where enforcement or arrest powers aren't required. But to be perfectly honest, there just wasn't enough chaos. She wanted more.

At 43, she graduated from the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training and was hired as a Salem Police officer. She was the oldest in her police academy class and jokes she may have been the oldest to ever graduate.

Today, she's one of 183 sworn officers in the department and one of 17 females.

"Best decision I made — even going through all of this," Pratt said.

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