

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2020 | SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Electric system 'suspect' in fires

Why all power wasn't shut off in Santiam Canyon

Claire Withycombe
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

As one of the most dangerous fire weather events in Oregon's history swept down the Cascade Range on Labor Day, bringing hurricane-force dry winds, Portland General Electric shut off power to 5,000 homes near Mount Hood.

"The outage is a last resort to help protect people, property and the environment in the face of extreme fire danger conditions and high winds forecast for the

area," the company said of the decision to turn off power at about 7:30 p.m. that night.

But not every utility took the same step. Consumers Power Inc. shut off power in the Santiam Canyon at about 7 p.m. But the lines remained live for Bonneville Power Administration and Pacific Power.

In the Santiam Canyon, fire officials blamed downed power lines for igniting 13 wildfires that kicked up on high winds and became a firestorm that burned from Detroit to Lyons.

At least four people died in the Beachie Creek Fire and a still-unknown number of homes were lost.

Pacific Gas & Electric Company began implement-

See **ELECTRIC**, Page 4A



Workers continue to repair the power system after flames from the Beachie Creek Fire burned through Fishermen's Bend Recreation Site east of Salem. The wildfire caused the evacuation of 40,000 residents, killing four people and one is still missing. ROB SCHUMACHER/STATESMAN JOURNAL VIA USA TODAY NETWORK



Don Myron poses for a photo at his mother's home in Woodburn on Tuesday. Myron escaped his home on North Folk Rd and sheltered himself overnight from the Beachie Creek Fire with a plastic lawn chair on the Little North Santiam River. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Man survives raging wildfires

Shelters on river, fends off embers with plastic chair

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The chair was green and plastic, the kind you might find in a patio set or along the edge of a creek.

But for one night, Don Myron used it as a shield from embers of the Beachie Creek Fire, as he sheltered from raging flames on a rock in the middle of the Little North Santiam River.

"Everything around me was on fire," said Myron, 56, who has lived in the Elkhorn Woods community in the Little North Canyon for the past 11 years. "That chair helped save my butt."

Myron's story is just one coming out of the Little North Canyon, one of the areas hit hardest during the Labor Day wildfires.

Much of the Little North has been torched. Four

people in the canyon have been killed. A majority of homes in the Elkhorn community area have been destroyed.

Myron's story helps explain why. Trapped in the canyon by downed trees and flames roaring on 70 mph winds, he survived with a combination of guile and luck, finding an ideal rock in the middle of the river where he could stay until the worst of the firestorm passed.

"If there's anybody who can survive that situation, it's my dad," said Chris Myron, Don's son. "He's smart, can think on his feet and is very resourceful."

A getaway from the city

For years, Myron lived in Tigard and commuted to Salem where he worked for the Office of Private Health Partnerships.

Once his two sons graduated and moved out, he was ready to escape the city life. He'd never been up the Little North Fork previously, but loved it from the

See **SURVIVE**, Page 3A

Salem to get new career tech school

Willamette Career Academy expected to open in fall of 2021

Natalie Pate
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Design work is underway at the former Toys R Us building on Lancaster Drive in Salem, soon to become Oregon's newest career and technical education center.

The Willamette Career Academy will establish regional partnerships and provide hands-on education needed for jobs in local workforces, similar to Salem-Keizer's Career Technical Education Center, known as CTEC.

Cosmetology, diesel mechanics and health services are among offerings expected in the initial year — opening fall 2021 — with programs such as construction and information technology to be added in

2022.

In the first year, the school will serve nearly 300 students from 11 districts across Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, and grow to about 600 students in year two.

The idea and initial funding for the center resulted from a private-public partnership between Mountain West Investment Corporation, a Salem real estate development company, and the Willamette Education Service District, or WESD.

Mountain West also supports and helped create Salem-Keizer Public Schools' CTEC.

As reported last year, the total capital project budget for CTEC was \$17 million, with Mountain West contributing \$9 million, and \$8 million given from the public sector, foundations, individuals and businesses.

"Smaller rural districts often can't provide the options of programs we are planning to offer," Michael

See **CAREER**, Page 3A

\$100,000 raised in four days for Santiam Canyon

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

After Cindy and Brian Chauran's house in Gates burned down in the Santiam Fire, a family member started an online fundraiser to help and it quickly raised \$1,800.

They have insurance on their home and recreational vehicles to stay in, but the Chaurans wanted to do something for their community.

Cindy coordinated with the Santiam Service Integration Team and in days established the Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund under that umbrella organization and put those donations toward the fund.

In four days, that fund has raised \$100,000 for Santiam Canyon residents including those in Gates, Mill City, Lyons, Mehama, Detroit and Idanha impacted by the wildfires.

"They weren't overwhelmed in the moment by their immediate loss," said Deana Freres, a neighbor of Chauran and a board member administrating the fund.

Santiam Hospital's SIT was established in 2017 and for the past six months has done things like bringing people prescription medications and groceries during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This model afforded us the opportunity to be mobile," said Maggie Hudson, director of operations and finance of Santiam Hospital.

The existing structure through Santiam Hospital allows the funds to fall under the existing 501(c)3 non-profit status, and the hospital is taking on any administrative costs associated with the funds.

Freres said the SIT is focusing on meeting the immediate needs of evacuees, including short-term housing, food and clothing for those who were forced to evacuate before moving on to longer-term recovery efforts.

"We've had hundreds of inquiries," Hudson said. "Hopefully those who have lost their homes are insured and it fills that void. We want to get to the rebuild and help facilitate that."

Chauran is one of the board members along with people involved with schools, financial institutions and non-profits in the area.

Hudson said the fund raised \$100,000 as of Monday, including a \$30,000 donation from Saalfeld Griggs Law Firm in Salem where the staff donated money and the firm matched the donations. The Foothills Church in Stayton also donated \$10,000.

"We really wanted to be sure if we're asking people to support our area, we want to be staunch stewards to make sure the fund goes to individuals and families that are vetted across many services and they get wraparound services," Freres said.

"It's not just come pick up a package of diapers, it's, 'Do you need counseling and PTSD from having lost your home? Do you have gas money for your car?'"

Some who have been placed in short-term hotels have already exhausted their funding from the Red Cross for their stays, Freres said.

She said after meeting immediate needs of the evacuees, the next phase will focus on longer-term recovery efforts.

"What's wonderful is to see when small towns

See **SANTIAM CANYON**, Page 2A



Kraig Arndt of Mill City takes photos of a friend's home that burned to the ground during the Santiam Fire on Wednesday in Mill City.

ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Online at SilvertonAppeal.com

News updates: ● Breaking news ● Get updates from the Silverton area

Photos: ● Photo galleries

Vol. 139, No. 40

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



©2020 50 cents
Printed on recycled paper