

Illinois Valley News

Wednesday, December 27, 2017, 1 Section, Volume LXXX No. 40

Published weekly for the residents of the Illinois Valley

Wonder, love and awe!



(Photo by Laura Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Louie Douglas, 5, (right) told Santa his Christmas wishes at the Saturday, Dec. 23 Rotary Club of the Illinois Valley's Cookies and Cocoa with Santa toy give-away held at Lorna Byrne Middle School.

District addresses chronic student absenteeism

“School, for them, comes second or third or fourth or fifth in the priority list, because they have to get their basic needs met, whether through housing, food or taking care of their families.”

Casey Alderson, Three Rivers School District director of curriculum

Anita R. Savio

IVN Contributing Writer

Providing a range of support at the district level to school principals and other staff are Jessica Durant, director of curriculum and instruction for kindergarten through eighth grade and Casey Alderson, director of curriculum and instruction for ninth through 12th grade. In a joint interview with the *Illinois Valley News*, they addressed some of the key challenges faced by the Three Rivers School District, starting with the problem of chronic absenteeism among students, defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year. Chronic absenteeism in the three Illinois Valley schools averages out to almost 30 percent.

The two district-level administrators spoke of an aggressive push this year to address the problem. The effort relies on a combination of phone calls and letters. This year the district is using a new software technology, Attention2Attendance®, that automatically generates letters to parents. Durant and Alderson said that school districts throughout Southwestern Oregon are now utilizing this software, although

it is too soon to know how effective the system will be in Three Rivers. But the software company's website says that, over a three-year period, client schools saw a 27 percent drop in truancy, 30 percent drop in excessive excused absences and 50 percent drop in chronic absenteeism.

First, according to Alderson, comes the phone call: “If a student is absent, we make sure we get a phone call out to the parents early in the day, no later than third period,” said Alderson.

The next step is the letters. Alderson explained that the first letter, a truancy letter, goes out after four unexcused absences in a four-week period. This may be followed by up to three “excessive absences” letters. After the third of those, the parent gets a call.

Durant said: “Once you reach a certain stage, the letters ask the parents to come in and meet with the principal. That’s where the deep conversations happen. We want to find out what the barriers are to the student’s attendance, and then problem solve and make a plan. The letters have a two-fold purpose: to inform the parent, but also to build a partnership with the parent.”

Alderson added, “We’ve actually had a high success rate with parent-

school conferences. Parents are usually willing to come in and brainstorm on how to get kid to school and how to get them to believe in the value of attending school.”

Homelessness among students was the next challenge addressed in the interview. Homelessness encompasses the following situations, as defined by the Oregon Department of Education:

- Sheltered in public or private accommodations intended for use by homeless individuals and families, such as short term shelters or longer term transitional housing.
- Unsheltered and living in cars, trailers, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings not designed as a regular sleeping accommodation.
- Doubled-up: sharing the housing of others, whether relatives or friends, due to loss of housing, economic hardship, domestic violence or similar reason.
- Hotel/Motel: temporary commercial accommodations due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reason.

SEE ABSENT ON A-10

Not everyone is happy with new grocery store location

Jason McMillen

IVN Contributing Writer

Illinois Valley grocery stores may be confronted with stiff competition in the future because Grocery Outlet is eyeing Cave Junction for a new location. The popular discount grocery chain sources its inventory from overstocks, closeouts and products past their “best if used by” date. Best if used by dates, not being a strict indicator of spoilage, usually only denote when the product’s quality can no longer be guaranteed by the manufacturer.

Grocery Outlet recently submitted a pre-application to the city of Cave Junction which is requesting permission to construct an 18,000 square foot building in the vacant lot between Shop Smart and the Junction Inn. Filing the pre-application requires half of the total application cost to be paid up front, indicating that the chain is serious and committed to the prospect.

A public hearing is scheduled Jan. 8, 2018, at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. During the meeting, representatives of the business will speak, public comment will be taken and then the city council will vote to either approve or disapprove of the plans. The meeting also provides the opportunity for the city council to outline stipulations for their approval, should it be necessary.

The 1.99 acre plot in question, currently part of the Junction Inn’s property, must be partitioned before plans can move forward. The partition will be discussed alongside the Commercial Site Plan Review at the Jan. 8 meeting.

Mayor Daniel Dalegowski thinks that the market would be a good addition to the community but, armed with advice given to him by the I.V. Community Development Organization (IVCDO), doesn’t think that the location is ideal for a grocery market. The IVCDO rejects the idea of partitioning the property, holding that a larger property would be more attractive to a potential developer who could come in, tear down the Junction Inn and build a sprawling single story hotel rather than a more expensive multi-levelled one.

SEE GROCERY ON A-10

County looks to replace dial-up with broadband

Jason McMillen

IVN Contributing Writer

Community development director Julie Schmelzer, armed with an Economic Development Strategy Plan approved spring 2017, is spearheading an effort to upgrade the broadband internet infrastructure of Josephine County. Schmelzer is supported by a broadband subcommittee within the Collaborative Economic Development Committee (CEDC), a group which was formed to carry out the plan.

According to Schmelzer’s letter of interest, which was submitted to the state arguing for a chance to apply for a grant, 19,000 people in Josephine

County, one in four of its total population, don’t have access to 24 mbps wired broadband. Additionally, the letter claims that many people outside of Cave Junction and Grants Pass are still relying on archaic dial up technology for internet access. Lastly, it adds that no one in the entire county has access to fiber optic broadband to the home.

Schmelzer’s research, which cited broadbandnow.com, revealed that average download speeds in Cave Junction are 1,182.8 percent slower than the state average while Selma, not being much better, is 839.8 percent slower than the state average.

SEE INTERNET ON A-10

Relive the past year with the 2017 Year in Review

Starting on A-2