



Photo by Scott Newton

Barn loses roof

A fire Monday night took the roof off a barn located in the woods behind Pop Rannow Stadium. There was no livestock being kept at the barn. Investigators had not

determined a cause of the blaze as of Tuesday morning. Firefighters were credited with doing a good job in saving the ground level. See story on Page 1.

Teacher strike dates similar

District officials say they fear coordinated strikes

by SUSAN ROMANITIS
Post writer

Some area school administrators say teachers unions are attempting to coordinate strike dates in several school districts to put pressure on districts with which they are negotiating labor contracts.

If teachers in several districts were to strike at the same time, the districts might not be able to find enough substitutes to keep schools open, the administrators say.

The fact that some potential strike dates fall close to each other also has not gone unnoticed by the unions, but union leaders say they are not orchestrating an overall strike plan.

The Sandy Elementary District and both Gresham school districts are among a number of school districts around the state in the midst of negotiating contracts with their teachers.

The earliest date Gresham Grade and Gresham Union High teachers could strike is Feb. 6.

Sandy's "cooling off" period, the 30 days following the publishing of a fact-finding report, ended Jan. 9. That means the school board now may make the district's last offer. The teachers must give 10 days notice before a strike.

"Hopefully, there (will be) more bargaining now," said Miriam Mann, president of the Sandy Elementary Teachers Association. "Hopefully, we meet and we find a settlement."

A team, which includes some members of the teachers bargaining team, will spend the next few days questioning teachers before deciding the next move, according to Mann.

"We don't want to do that (choose to take a strike vote)," Mann said. "We do not want to strike."

Sandy Superintendent Rex Hunsaker says the district plans to "do everything we can" to steer clear of a strike, but is preparing for a strike.

"We're going to try and do everything we can to avoid one, with the exception of giving in to things we can't afford," Hunsaker said.

Hunsaker said he thinks the East County Bargaining Council, an exclusive bargaining agent representing six districts, including Sandy Elementary and both Gresham districts, is the roadblock to any agreement in Sandy.

"I believe that we could settle with our teachers if the East Multnomah County Bargaining Council was not calling the shots," he said.

"Obviously they're better off striking three or four of us at once, as far as closing schools, than if they just

'Obviously they're better off striking three or four districts at once, as far as closing schools, than if they just struck one of us.'

— Rex Hunsaker

struck one of us at once," Hunsaker said. "I do not have any knowledge that that's what they're planning on doing. My guess is anything done here will be reflected in Gresham."

But Mann says the teachers, not the bargaining council, will determine whether a strike will take place.

"It's all up to our teachers; they make the decision. We don't tell our teachers what to do," she said. "We're bargaining for them. We're not bargaining for ECBC. No, they are not telling us what to do. They are lending support."

Gresham Superintendent Jim Jenkins said he has heard that the Oregon Education Association was "orchestrating" events at both Gresham districts, Sandy Elementary, the McMinnville district and the Lincoln County district in an effort to get strike dates to fall on the same day.

"Our information says they are coordinating their strike dates with these five districts," Jenkins said.

And that, Jenkins said, would make it more difficult for school districts to find substitute teachers and keep schools open.

But Don Robertson, union negotiator and Oregon Education Association employee, denied Jenkins' charge.

"I'm not an orchestra leader,"

Robertson said.

Robertson said local teachers determine whether a strike will take place by voting to strike. The OEA cannot arrange strikes or groups of strikes, he said.

The Gresham grade district probably would be required to replace about 200 of its estimated 241 teachers initially, he said. A higher percentage of the 180 teachers in the high school district would have to be replaced, Jenkins said.

"It's easier" to get substitute teachers if the district has the whole state from which to draw them, he said. The district was able to find three qualified substitutes for every position open during the last strike, Jenkins said.

"I think the whole concept of going to strike is ludicrous," he said. "It's a no-win situation. I'm still optimistic that both sides can get to the table and resolve this before a strike occurs."

Robertson said he thought strikes by several groups of teachers at one time "would put pressure on finding replacement teachers." There are "only so many," he said.

"If you can't find replacement teachers, schools close," Robertson said. "Not all strikes close schools. Some do, some don't."

When asked whether he thought strikes by several groups of teachers at once would be beneficial to the union's efforts, Robertson said, "yes and no."

"I don't know if we have the resources to cover that many strikes," he said. "Within the limits

of our resources, I guess the more teachers out, the better it is for us."

"To get what you want in bargaining, it is going to take the collective strength of your members," Robertson added. "Unity and determination — that's our strength."

Robertson said he was remaining optimistic about the chances of settlement prior to any strike. The state has 183 school districts and the OEA has been involved in collective bargaining since 1973, Robertson said. Twelve strikes have taken place since that time, he said.

"It's not that many," Robertson said. "That's less than one a year."

The Gresham District Education Association and the high school district's negotiating team are scheduled to meet at a bargaining session Thursday afternoon.

"My concern is that (East County Bargaining Council) will not allow any of its districts to settle because that would jeopardize the bargaining strength of one of its other districts," said Chuck Carpenter, Gresham's assistant superintendent in charge of personnel.

East Multnomah County Bargaining Council President Carolyn Menegas said the union "did not fail to notice" that a number of districts were near each other in the negotiating process, but, she added, "We did not cause it." If the associations benefit because strike dates fall close to each other, she said, the unions will be "capitalizing on good fortune," not celebrating because some "plan" worked.

Church wants to know all of the latest excuses

A panel of judges will select winners at the "Why I Don't Attend Church Sunday" services at the Aims Community Church on Sunday.

The service will provide a humorous look at the reasons people fail to attend church from time to time, said Pastor Richard Bryson, who will be preaching on the subject of why people ought to attend church

services.

The service will be at 11 a.m. on Jan. 18. The church is at 44510 S.E. Connett Road in Corbett.

Prizes will be awarded for the most original excuse, the most common excuse and the funniest excuse. People may wear costumes to demonstrate an excuse for skipping church.



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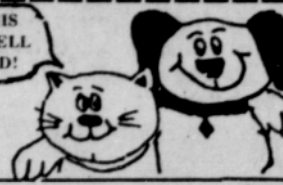
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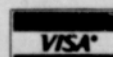
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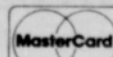
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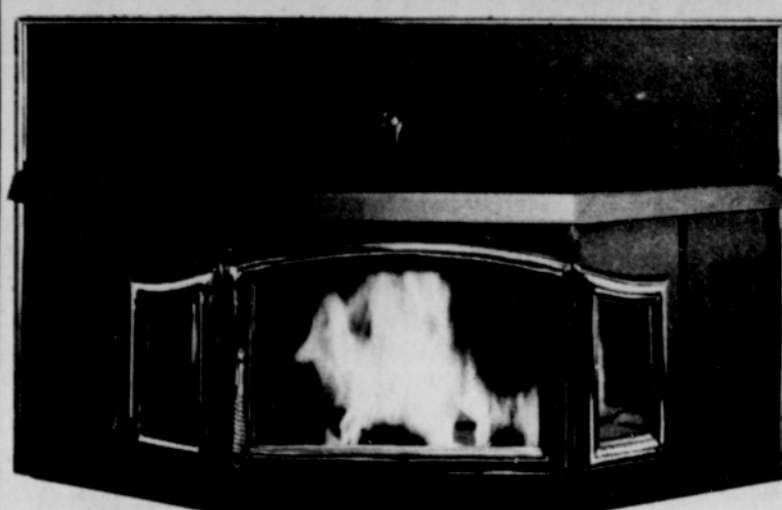


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