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The Sandy Post

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Vet's tale is tragedy with a twist

By SCOTT NEWTON
Staff writer

Conrad Jerry Goodwin knows a tragic story with such a happy twist that people can't help but laugh.

It's about a mix-up with the Veterans Administration that began when his wife of 27 years died on Feb. 27. She was buried in Willamette National Cemetery.

The first of March, he didn't receive a small pension check Goodwin, 86, says his wife with his Social Security check and hope groceries with his pension check.

Wondering what was wrong, he called the Veterans Administration. "The guy said, Mr. Goodwin, we had a reported you died and was buried."

After warning of the mistake, the VA representative said it would be three to four months before it could be corrected.

Goodwin had a hard time understanding that the check had been stopped in three or four days time.

A call to U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield's office, however, got the timetable moved up considerably. Goodwin is expecting a check, retroactive to March, as the first of May.

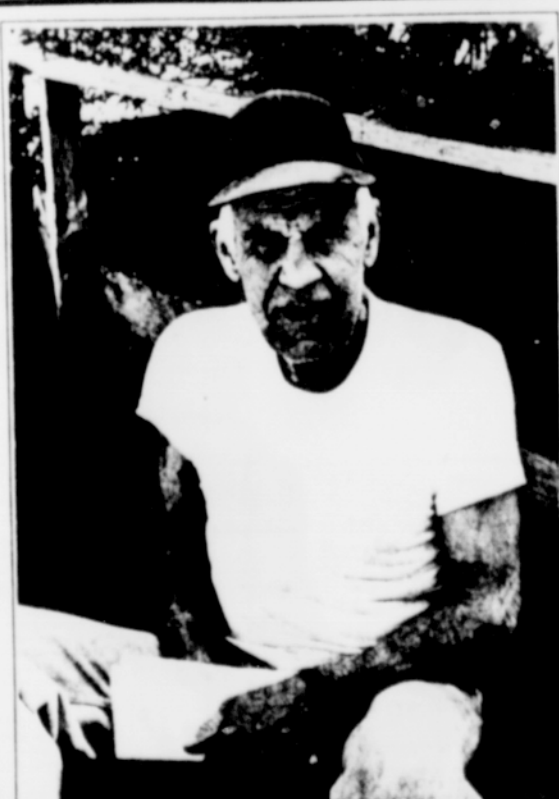
Sally Bratcher, staff assistant for Hatfield, said there are seven people in the Portland office who help people solve problems they have with federal agencies. She had no trouble remembering Goodwin's case. "I've never had anyone declared dead on me before," she said.

The delay did not cause a great inconvenience as Goodwin transferred some money from savings into a checking account.

But he has to chuckle over the mail he has received. A few days after talking to Bratcher, Goodwin received two nearly identical letters from the VA saying everything had been taken care of.

"One hadn't even know what the other's doing up there," he said.

The next week Goodwin received was the VA's.



Goodwin is sitting outdoors, wearing a light-colored t-shirt and a dark cap. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is slightly blurred, showing some foliage.

City considers defying law

Sandy's city manager is considering flouting a state law that he says is costing taxpayers money.

An administrator with the Bureau of Labor and Industries is sure the city would lose a lawsuit if it came to that.

Tim Rader, city manager, claims Oregon's Little Davis Bacon Act, modeled after the federal Davis Bacon Act, forces municipalities to pay higher wages than private businesses for construction projects.

Local metal fabrication firms that normally would pay workers \$10 an hour plus benefits, were forced to prepare bids at \$18 an hour plus benefits on a 1986 construction project at the sewage treatment plant, Rader said.

Little Davis Bacon requires employers to pay employees a prevailing wage, which is determined by the state Bureau of Labor and Industries.

Rader does not think the Bureau of Labor's prevailing wages match the free market.

At the April 28 City Council meeting, Rader mentioned to the council that the city might choose to ignore Little Davis Bacon and save some money. There were some tentative nods of approval by council members.

Rader said the council there was a possibility it could be used for such an action, and that the city's legal counsel had advised against such an action.

Rader said The Post the city would have to look at the consequences before deciding to take such an action. If the fines were greater than the amount of money it would save, that would be an incentive to comply with the law.

Rader also acknowledged that such an action could bring on a lawsuit by the state. He said he knew that in such

What would they sue us for?" Rader said. "Suing the taxpayers money. What are the damages?"

According to Christine Hammond, deputy administrator for the wage and hour division of the Bureau of Labor, the damages would be in the form of lost wages.

The city, or public contracting agency, would be held responsible if the contractor was not required to pay the prevailing wage.

Hammond said the bureau has never sued a public contracting agency, but it has collected wages from a public contracting agency.

The Oregon Davis Bacon Act has not cost the city of Sandy a great deal of money, Rader said. But one architect tells him it adds 10 to 20 percent on building projects, and contractors have told him it may cost even more than that.

In a paper prepared for the League of Oregon Cities, Rader points out the savings from repeal of the law would be spent on additional public works projects or for hiring additional employees, allowing municipalities to accomplish more with less.

Rader urged city managers to take the fight to state legislators. He asked them to document the added cost to projects for use in lobbying legislators to vote against the law.

A spokesman for Rep. Bob Shogren, D-Beavercreek, said the Associated General Contractors bring the issue up every session. Rader said Davis Bacon generates extra paper work for contractors.

Rader is not sure when, or if, they might challenge Little Davis Bacon, though there are some road improvement projects to be bid soon.

Hammond said Rader would be better off fighting Davis Bacon in the Oregon legislature. The law is not