

BLAMING MENTAL ILLNESS CREATES STIGMA

As the city of Roseburg and the community around Umpqua Community College try to process and recover from the Oct. 1 mass shooting that killed nine people and injured nine more, Oregon and the nation are seeking answers for why the shooter, who also died, would bring six guns to campus and seek to murder his writing class.

Oregon State Rep. Val Hoyle (D-West Eugene, Junction City) and Sen. Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis) say laying the blame at the feet of mental illness just increases the stigma faced by those who suffer from it, who are actually more likely to be victims of violence than attackers.

“In the vast majority of these mass shootings, we know these [shooters] tend to be white, male, angry and having a gun,” Gelser says. She points out that “being an angry person with violent intentions is not a subcategory of mental illness.”

Hoyle says we need to do a better job of understanding the symptoms of mental illness the way we do those of a stroke or heart attack. She has worked hard to not read about the shooter, she says, but points out that like the killer at Sandy Hook and Kip Kinkel at Thurston High School, “they all displayed symptoms that they were suffering from something, some kind of depression or break. Things were going on, but the people around them didn’t recognize it, didn’t do anything, didn’t get them the treatment they needed.”

She asks, “Is that because there’s a stigma around mental illness or is it because the treatment isn’t there?”

Hoyle says Oregon’s gun laws wouldn’t have stopped UCC shooter Chris Harper-Mercer from getting his 14 weapons, but recent changes to the laws in the 2015 legislative session mean that Cheryl Kidd, the woman who shot Eugene police officer Chris Kil-

cullen, wouldn’t have been able to get her weapon. SB 941 calls for universal background checks and for judges who have ordered someone to undergo outpatient mental health treatment to rule on whether that person should have her gun rights suspended during that treatment.

Douglas County Sheriff John Hanlin testified against SB 941.

Hoyle says Kidd “was very clearly and obviously suffering from severe mental illness, paranoid delusions and hallucinating and was able to purchase a firearm.” She also says she had a friend who was able to walk into a gun shop, purchase a gun and use it to commit suicide. We need to protect civil liberties and private health information, she says, but we do need to raise a flag when someone needs help.

Pointing to online 4Chan postings the shooter allegedly made warning of the attack, Hoyle asks, “What’s wrong with us as a society that no one said, ‘I’m going to stop this’?”

She says we need to identify people like that as well as those who could hurt themselves. “If you saw someone on the ground with a broken leg, you’d call an ambulance, but who do you call for mental illness?” she asks.

Gelser is currently traveling the state with the Oregon Health Authority conducting behavioral health town hall meetings, reaching out to those who have had difficulties accessing mental health and substance use disorder treatment in Oregon. There is no Eugene meeting scheduled, but Gelser says there are plans for a virtual town hall that can be called into from anywhere.

More than 100 people showed up to the first two meetings in Klamath Falls and La Grande, and a big issue is stigma, she says. “Mainstream media is saying the main reason is because the shooter was mentally ill,” Gelser says, and that’s “hurtful and harmful and creates another barrier” for those who need access to mental health care.

For a list of the OHA behavioral health town halls, go to [wkly.ws/0](#). — *Camilla Mortensen*



PeaceHealth Medical Group (PMG) has a **new anti-marijuana policy** that was posted about the same time recreational marijuana become legal for adults in Oregon. The policy reads, “Our doctors are not able to sign Oregon State attending physician’s statements for medical marijuana, even though some of our providers have signed the forms in the past.” The memo was signed by Robin Virgin, M.D. of Vancouver, Washington, who is the medical director of primary care at PMG. This new policy “has engendered at lot of internal discussion by physicians,” according to an anonymous source in a note mailed to EW. “It was enacted without input from practicing physicians.” The source goes on to speculate that “as a billion-dollar corporation, they could not risk the problems associated with the federal inconsistency with state law in Oregon and Washington.” When asked if doctors had any input into this policy, local PeaceHealth spokesman Jim Godbold said, “I don’t have any additional information to share on the subject.” PeaceHealth has net revenues in excess of \$1 billion a year and operates hospitals and medical practices in Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

We asked the competing **Oregon Medical Group** in Lane County if it has a similar policy regarding medical marijuana and did not receive a response by press time.

S.A.R.A.’s Treasures has expanded its gift and thrift shop and held a grand opening last weekend at 871 River Road. The Shelter Animal Resource Alliance is a nonprofit dedicated to removing animals facing euthanasia from shelters and finding them homes. The shop accepts donations and volunteers, but not animals. See [sarasavesanimals.org](#) or call 607-8892.

October is **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, and the local Womenspace is organizing a series of trainings, events and fundraisers throughout the month. Supporting businesses include Pappy’s Pizza, Track Town Pizza, Hop Valley Brewery, Plank Town and Red Barn. For more information, call 485-8232.

On a related note, we hear a **new women’s shelter** in Springfield is being organized and meetings are being held that include homeless people. The group is “assessing needs such as transitional housing, medical, legal, trauma healing, nutritional needs, pets, clothes and above all a safe place to heal and grow while transitioning back into society,” according to a flyer. Call Pastor June Fathergill of Ebbert Church, 746-3513, to get involved.

David Minor Theater is celebrating its seventh anniversary in October. The movie theater and pub at 180 East 5th Ave. has a new digital projection system and in November plans to become a first-run theater, according to owner and manager Josh Goldfarb. “As always, we will be serving many local beverages on tap,” he says. Call 762-1700.

The **Spencer Creek Community Growers Market** in Lorane is wrapping up its sixth season and has two events coming up. The first is a Harvest Fair from 10 am to 4 pm Saturday, Oct. 10, with live music, cider pressing, crafts and food. The next is a members-only, end-of-the-year meeting and potluck Sunday, Oct. 25. To become a member, email [cookieconscious@gmail.com](#).

Marijuana and hemp advocates are gathering in Portland Oct. 10-11 for the third annual Oregon Hemp Convention at the Portland Expo Center. More than 4,000 attended last year, and a record crowd is expected this year. Admission is \$10. No cannabis products will be sold at the event. See [oregonhempconvention.com](#).

Falling Sky Brewing is hosting the second annual **World’s Shortest Bike Race**, only 13.05 feet long, at 3 pm Sunday, Oct. 11, at the brewery, 1334 Oak Alley. Falling Sky introduced its own free bike-sharing program last year.



ELAW VOLUNTEERS WRESTLE AN OLD TV UP THE RIVERBANK

ANNUAL RIVER CLEANUP DRAWS RECORD TURNOUT

The seventh annual Great Willamette Clean Up Saturday, Oct. 3, saw a record turnout of 400 volunteers in Lane County to haul truckloads of trash, tires and abandoned household and camping items from the river shallows, riparian areas and islands. Another 400 volunteers were involved along the Willamette in other counties all the way to Scappoose Bay north of Portland. Kayaks, canoes and drift boats provided access to areas not accessible by foot.

The event, organized by Willamette Riverkeeper, is timed to take advantage of low water and keep tons of toxic trash from washing into the river. The Willamette provides not only valuable habitat for fish and other wildlife but also drinking water for communities downstream.

Joining the river enthusiasts locally this year for the first time were members of the OURS homeless camp in Eugene. OURS stands for Our Universal Right to Serenity, Safety & Sleep, and the group tries to not only keep its own camp tidy and sanitary, but is now encouraging other campers to move off the riverbanks, says Michelle Emmons of Willamette Riverkeeper.

One of the worst sites in the Eugene area was a riverside homeless camp on Union Pacific Railroad land near Franklin Boulevard and Walnut Station. EWEB Commissioner John Brown says this site was “just as bad this year” as it was last year when he and others organized a major cleanup involving a Lane County Sheriff’s

Office work crew. Keeping this site clean over the years has been a challenge, Brown says, because it’s on private railroad property and out of sight.

Emmons says another bad site had four stacks of old roofing shingles, along with construction debris, all below the high-water line. “Needles were found throughout the urban waterfront, with larger stashes collected off the south banks near Skinner’s Park and the Franklin Boulevard bike path entry,” she says. “Mattresses, cardboard, office chairs, recliners, paint cans, propane bottles, gas cans, broken lawn mowers and all manner of bicycle parts were among some of the trash removed.”

More than 285 large bags were filled, along with 59 yards of trash. Waste Free Oregon sorted through the trash pulling out reusable items and recyclables, reducing the landfill burden by about 50 percent.

Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW) based in Eugene turned out a crew this year, and the volunteers pulled many bags of trash out of the riverbanks, along with a TV set and a shopping cart.

The well-publicized event also inspired many individuals to clean up parks, boat landings and other public and private lands in communities along the river.

The mayors of Eugene, Springfield and Oakridge all spoke at the volunteer thank-you party held after the event and hip hop artist Lafa Taylor performed for the crowd. Numerous local government agencies, nonprofits, clubs and local businesses participated this year. — *Ted Taylor*