



Chasing Dark is an ongoing series looking at heroin and other types of drug abuse in Keizer. Be sure to pick up next week's paper for the next installment.

Lies heroin tells him

Editor's note: The names of the people in this story have been changed to protect their privacy. This article also contains adult language and content that is not suitable for children.

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Spencer has felt like a god lately. "I've lost three friends to heroin overdoses in the last eight months, but it doesn't scare me. I feel like I can't die and I've always felt that way when one of them goes," said Spencer, 24. What he mostly feels, when he gets news of another overdose, is anger. "I've had to breathe for many people by doing CPR and that is something that sticks with me, but I'm more angry that they didn't know their limits," he said. The lie of invincibility is just one of many the drug has whispered in his ears since he was 18 years old.

Unlike those who have sought the refuge of heroin after a supply of pain-killing opiates dried up at the doctor's office, Spencer's first dances with heroin came while doing the drug circuit as a student at McNary High School. He started with marijuana but doesn't believe it's a gateway drug, instead it was one spoke on a wheel of changing tastes for certain students. "It wasn't like we moved from weed to other drugs, we just messed around a lot with a lot of different drugs. There were groups that smoked pot, some that drank and others that did

meth and heroin. We would switch off every couple of weeks. We found what we liked and just stuck," Spencer said. "Heroin isn't even my drug of choice, it's just the one that grabbed me by the balls and got me in trouble." Spencer's mother, Beth, wasn't overly concerned with Spencer's use of marijuana as a teen, but her eyes grow wide and she expresses shock at learning his next stop on the circuit was methamphetamine. "This whole experience has been a roller coaster and you just don't let go," Beth said. Spencer said he started smoking

pot out of desires to escape problems, but he became more addicted to the party scene and the people living in it. He met one acquaintance, former McNary student Brandon Crist, as a result. "We had German class together and we were misfits. We hung around the same circle. We hung out and smoked pot a bunch together, but he was never like a best friend," Spencer said. In late September, Crist was found dead of an overdose in Salem. Spencer had seen him at a Salem methadone clinic mere hours before Crist took his lethal dose. "He wanted me to get him something (heroin). And I knew it was the wrong place and wrong time. He tongued his medicine and spit it out to sell for money to buy heroin. Most of us have done something like that," Spencer said. Tonguing medicine is the act of slipping pills under the tongue or in the cheek and pretending to swallow them. Please see LIES, Page A2

How transit payroll tax works elsewhere

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

Having a payroll tax help pay for transit costs has long been done both north and south of the Salem-Keizer area. The idea of implementing a 0.21 percent payroll tax for increased Salem-Keizer Transit District bus service is on the Nov. 3 ballot. The tax, if passed, would bring in about \$5 million and restore week-end service, extended week-night service and fund student bus passes. Comparing a transit system in the Salem-Keizer area to the TriMet system in Portland isn't exactly an apples-to-apples comparison due to factors such as size differences between the two areas. A more apt comparison comes when looking at the Lane Transit District, the transit system in the Eugene-Springfield area. In Eugene, a payroll tax has been used since 1970 to help bring in funding. According to the LTD website, the transit district serves a rider-

ship of about 300,000 people. By comparison, Salem-Keizer Transit serves a ridership of about 400,000 people. Given LTD's history with the payroll tax, the Keizertimes reached out to Andy Vobora, director of Customer Services and Planning, to learn more about the payroll tax and what services it's helped provide in the Eugene-Springfield area over the decades. Vobora has been with LTD since 1983. According to Vobora, LTD started with a .6 percent payroll tax in 1970. After the state enacted a cap of .8 percent back in 2009, the LTD board of directors recently approved the phasing up to that level to start in 2016. In the early 1990s, a self-employment tax was added. Slides shown by Salem-Keizer Transit officials at last week's Keizer City Council work session showed LTD collects \$31.5 million a year via the payroll tax. Vobora confirmed those numbers are accurate. "We collect just over \$30 million a year in the payroll



A Lane Transit District EmX bus waits for passengers during the opening day of EmX service in the Gateway area of Springfield in January 2011. LTD gets about \$31 million a year from Eugene-Springfield area payroll taxes. Craig Murphy file photo tax, plus \$1.7 million for the self-employed tax," he said. The effort to enact a payroll tax in Salem-Keizer is being met with fierce opposition from the Chambers of Commerce in both Salem and Keizer, which have organized several sign-waiving rallies against the idea, run TV ads and adopted the mantra "It's simply unfair." Vobora said the picture seems to be a bit different about an hour to the south. "It's always been mixed," Vobora said of the business reaction in Eugene-Springfield. "The business community (in the 1960s) said we need tran-

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