CRIST, continued from Page A1

when asked to describe her only son. "He was always smiling when not using drugs. Anyone who met him liked him. Any rehab place we took him to, they said he was awesome. He had a great heart. He was a good kid."

Jeff said Brandon's charm was apparent to all who got to know him.

"All of our friends liked him," Jeff said.

Troubles started in eighth grade. After going to a private Christian school in Salem previously, Brandon decided to start attending Whiteaker Middle School.

"In eighth grade it started with alcohol and pot," Hollie said. "He didn't feel like he fit in. He didn't have a group to gravitate to. The kids who were experimenting (with drugs), he was gravitating to them.'

Police reports obtained by the Keizertimes show a history of a young man in trouble with the law, mainly for drugs and behavioral issues, dating back to when Brandon was 13.

Things progressed when Brandon entered McNary High School. He started running away and doing other drugs like ecstasy. At age 15 the Crists sent Brandon to a boarding school in Costa Rica.

"He was skipping school, running away, being defiant," Hollie said. "It was good for a while when he came back. Then it went downhill again. He lied about who he was seeing. He probably started doing heroin at 17." Hollie said Brandon eventually admitted to doing her-

oin, cocaine and speedballs, a mixture of the two.

"He and his friends wanted to try all the drugs," Hollie said. "Heroin was the one that hooked him."

Over the course of several years, Brandon was in and out of detox centers. He went to one in Portland three separate times – two weeks each time - but didn't finish the third time. There was a week spent in a Eugene detox center. He got a diploma for completing 45 days at a detox center in Klamath Falls.

"The arrest was the best thing that happened to him. We had him back for a year."

- Hollie Crist

"He was just a troubled kid," Jeff said. "I don't know what to think. He was a good boy before all of this. You never think it will happen to you, or to your kid."

In July 2013 Brandon was arrested by Detective Chris Nelson of the KPD for unlawful possession and delivery of heroin.

"Brandon said when Chris Nelson pulled the gun on him

time, that's when he decided to get clean," Hollie said. "The arrest was the best thing that happened to him. We had him

back for a year." As mentioned in a previous Chasing Dark story, Brandon entered a detox center and then transitioned to a longterm rehab center. He talked with Nelson about once a month.

"He showed interest when he got out of the treatment center about talking to kids about the dangers of drug use, particularly heroin, and the devastation it hails on individuals and families," Nelson said. "Brandon fought hard against the dark and evil addiction to heroin. He gave himself a glimpse of freedom and you could hear energy and excitement in his voice when he was drug-free. Unfortunately, he relapsed after treatment and the addiction to heroin ended his life."

Hollie also noted the change in her son.

"He was clean for 11 months," she said. "He was pumped about it. He was happy. He was going to be a drug and alcohol counselor. He found a friend in Bend. He was going to live in a youth shelter, then a Sober Living house in Bend."

In an Oxford House, recovering addicts live together in transitional housing, support each other and go to Narcotics Anonymous meetings together. In short, it's a large support

"He was always going to meetings," Jeff said. "He knew exactly how many days he'd been clean."

Suddenly, things fell apart.

"We're not really sure what happened," Hollie said. "He called, crying and said he was going to move out. He said he was going to have a drink. He was struggling with step four of the recovery, which is coming to terms with who you've hurt. He moved out but didn't have a place to live. I think it was to use heroin. I have no idea what happened, no clue. I thought he was doing fine."

Brandon came back to Keizer, but continued using drugs. He didn't want to go to Narcotics Anonymous meetings, since he wanted to go to bars with friends.

Hollie said it became clear when Brandon was on heroin.

"He was negative when using," Hollie said. "The poor pitiful me thing. Everyone was out to get him. He wasn't nice. He didn't smile a lot and was always unhappy. When he was clean he was smiling, happy, outgoing, family oriented. But he missed my birthday and Mother's Day five years in a

In addition, Brandon would come home late, constantly be tired and nodding off.

"He alienated himself," Hollie said. "He was definitely nodding off with the heroin. He looked bad. He was very thin, had lost a lot of weight, had dark circles under the eves. He wouldn't shower. His nails would be dirty. He used black tar heroin, which would be under his fingernails. He was washing his clothes all the time. There was a real personality change. They'll get very defensive when you confront

Jeff said parents suspecting drug use need to trust their instincts.

"If you think there's something wrong, there's something wrong," Jeff said. "Don't doubt it."

Hollie said nothing else could have been done to help Brandon.

"We tried everything," she said. "We did everything. He had every opportunity to get clean. The times he went to detox, he just did it for us. It's an internal thing. It has always been his choice (to get clean). We loved him to death and would have done anything,

but it had to be his choice to get clean."

After bouncing between Keizer and the Bend area, Brandon came back to Keizer in October 2014. He had trouble finding work due to his felony history, but in September – just two weeks before his passing – Brandon got a job at a call center.

"He told them before being hired about the felony," Hollie said. "I do human resources, so I told him to tell them right off the bat. They knew about it and they hired him. He was so excited about it. Three days in, he got a tap on the shoulder and was terminated. He was devastated. I wonder if that's the excuse for what set him over."

Hollie still feels anger.

"I get mad at Brandon for doing it again and for leaving me," she said. "I know he wouldn't want me to see him using. I'm mad at myself for not catching it. I'm mad at myself and at him."

"If you think there's something wrong, there's something wrong. Don't doubt it."

Jeff Crist

Hollie said her son didn't want to be remembered for his addiction.

"He never wanted to be known as a junkie," Hollie said. "He would hate that. But that's how people are remembering him. He would just be devastated. He had a lot of shame and guilt in being an addict.

"He was the addict," she added later. "He chose to do it. He couldn't get out of it. It's a disease. People don't choose to get cancer, but he chose to do drugs. I don't think he knew what he was getting himself

The pain can be felt in Brandon's obituary, which in-

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cludes this line: "Brandon put up a good fight with his addiction, but sadly lost the battle. He is finally at peace and will be deeply missed."

Hollie recalled one Christ-

mas gift from Brandon. "He had stolen our camera," Hollie said. "So he brought us a camera, which he'd probably stolen from someone. It was just a box and a camera, nothing else. I know he had guilt about stealing. He wasn't stealing, it was the drugs. He would rather sell drugs than get money from stealing things."

Now it's Jeff and Hollie thinking about their son's life being stolen away.

"A lot of friends have helped us through it," Jeff said. "I think about it every day. I'll drive somewhere and I'll remember Brandon. It could be places we would go, or I'll see a white van. I think about it every day, all the time."

Hollie still hasn't completely processed the loss of her son.

"I'm more numb still," she said. "I sleep with his coat. We haven't touched anything in his room. He was the love of my life. I just adored him. I told him I would lay down in the road and die for him in order for him to be clean. That drug just got him really bad. It's just the most awful thing ever."

At Brandon's memorial service, a mom wrote in the service book her son was going down the same path Brandon had. She asked for Hollie to call her.

Hollie tearfully said last week she hasn't made the call

"Right now I don't know how to help somebody," Hollie said. "I didn't even know how to help my own son. We did everything we possibly could. I hope this story helps one kid. That's what Brandon would have wanted. His message would have been don't ever start."

Ideally, Hollie would love for more than one addict to be saved after hearing Brandon's story. But even if that happened, it wouldn't replace the hole in her life.

"It would feel good, but it wouldn't make his death any easier," she said.

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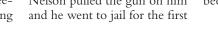
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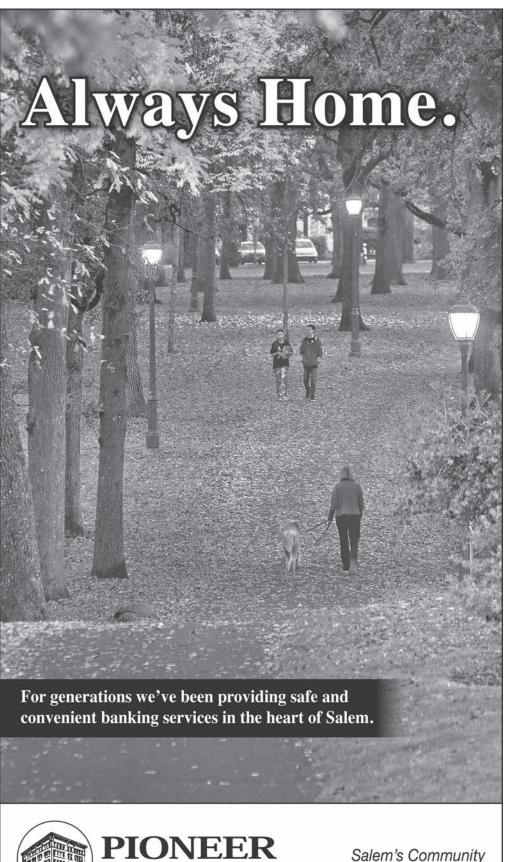
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