

Couple, pooch honored as heroes

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The last thing Dan and Linda Garcher were thinking about on the morning of March 3rd was themselves, which is why Keizer Fire District felt the need to properly honor them six months later.

At the KFD board meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 17, Dan and Linda, as well as their dog, Tobias, were presented with the Bob Wickman Award For Heroism in Saving The Life of Another, for their actions during a fire that took place at the Rainbow Gardens Mobile Village.

“Risking life and limb and their own safety, they rushed to help their neighbors in a time of crisis,” said Keizer Fire Chief Jeff Cowan during the presentation.

Dan and Linda were both emotional upon receiving the award.

“To tell you the truth, I was really nervous, because it brings everything back to the surface. All the thoughts and the feelings. But when they asked us, we were very honored. We didn’t expect it, it just kind of came out of the blue and we kind appreciate it a lot.” Linda said. “I don’t recall even thinking about to be honest. It was our neighbor. We had to go help.”

It was just after 5 a.m. on Sunday, March 3, when Dan and Linda were awoken by loud barking by Tobias. After getting up to see what the commotion was about, they saw that their neighbor’s home was engulfed in flames.

Immediately, Dan and Linda ran over to the house to attempt to save their neighbors,



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings
A devastating fatal fire struck the Rainbow Garden Mobile Village in March.

Mate and Maria Mezei.

“(Tobias) knew that something was up,” Linda said. “It was just one of those things where you react.”

While the couple was unable to get Mate out of the burning building, Jeff and Linda were able to save Maria’s life by getting her out of the house.

Linda was able to get out of the fire relatively unscathed, but Dan and Maria weren’t as fortunate. Dan was burned badly all over his back, shoulders head and arms and both

he and Maria were rushed to the hospital.

“With the adrenaline going, you don’t really think about it, but by the time I got out, I started feeling it. I knew I had gotten cooked pretty good,” said Dan.

Dan and Maria each spent nearly three weeks in the hospital. Even after returning home, Dan still had to be treated for his wounds. But all things considered, Dan still feels pretty lucky.

“The healing process that

have you go through was pretty fast and easy. There are a lot of people who aren’t as fortunate,” Dan said.

Though this experience has been incredibly traumatic, it has given Dan a new lease on life.

“It gives you a lot more humility every day. Now, I’m happy to get up and go to work,” Dan said.

Dan and Linda have also become a lot closer with Maria, who now lives with her daughter, Imola.

“The unity since then has been amazing. We see each other and talk to each other as much as we can,” Linda said.

People at Rainbow

Dan and Linda Garcher with plaques presented to them by the Keizer Fire District for their heroic efforts to save the lives of their neighbors.

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Gardens Park rallied around the Garcher’s upon Dan’s return home, showering the couple with hot meals and well wishes, as well as finding a newfound respect for their brave neighbors.

“Dan was dressed in shorts running into a burning building with total disregard to what is happening around



YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

No stranger to change

Young woman seeks stability after tumultuous home life

BY LAUREN MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

Editor’s note: the name of the individual in this story has been changed to protect their identity.

There are many reasons teens become homeless: unhealthy family dynamics, illness that makes it difficult or impossible to work, and inability to access resources are just a few. All three directly impacted Grace on her journey to the shelter where she is staying.

She moved around a lot growing up, so she’s no stranger to change.

She was kicked out at age 19 for coming out to her parents, “Idaho (where she was living at the time) is one of the worst places for LGBTQ+ people,” she said. “So is eastern Washington, I lived there, too.”

“They basically told me you can either live a normal life or you can just leave,” she said.

“Being attracted to the same sex shouldn’t be a not normal thing,” Grace said with a large sigh, as if it were a battle she was tired of fighting.

And she knows a thing or two about fighting as she struggles with: lupus, anxiety and potentially narcolepsy everyday.

“It’s really hard to keep a job when you have anxiety,” she said.

Before coming to a Salem shelter, she was living in Silvertown with two roommates. She was doing well, and working a stable job, when the joint pain started.

“At first we thought it was arthritis,” she said, which would have been odd considering she’s only 21. After a stay in the emergency room she got her diagnosis – lupus, which is an inflammatory disease where the immune system attacks its own tissue. It is treatable, but not curable.

“They wanted to put me on amino suppressants but they’re like \$10,000-\$15,000 a year, I can’t afford that,” she said.

Because of her pain and condition she was unable to work. When her roommates moved out she was homeless once more.

“I was living in my car,” she said.

She is planning to move up to Seattle with her partner, who is working on getting an apartment.

She and her partner met on Discord and have known



each other for about two years.

Discord is an application that is designed for communication between members of the video gaming community.

Grace wants to be an animator and is already exercising her creativity.

“Technically, I’m a published author,” she said. Her work was published after she won a national poetry competition.

She is also working on her first novel, based off her narcolepsy-induced nightmares. She wrote it in the science fiction-horror genre.

The novel took her eight years to write, but for the last three years she has had her publisher, advisor and printing company lined up.

Writing a novel is an impressive feat in and of itself, but Grace can only type about 36 words a minute due to her medical issues.

“Typing it down is a long process; especially when your hands don’t work so well,” she said.

Girl’s Night



The Keizer Network of Women (KNOW), a Keizer Chamber of Commerce group, held its annual Percey Presents fund raising event on Thursday, Sept. 19, at the Keizer Civic Center.

Attendees got into the spirit of the event’s theme, Girl’s Night In-Pajama Party, including Fay de Meyer’s Teddy Bear slippers (above).

Proceeds will benefit KNOW’s Christmas Giving Basket program aiding in-need families with food and gifts.

Caitlyn Davis and Brenda Wright both won a raffle for a Coach bag while Marsha Stallings won a Michael Kors bag.

Keizer-area school teachers were honored with dinner and tables sponsored by local businesses.



KEIZERTIMES/Lyndon A. Zaitz

A: McVay’s PJ Party (from left): Barbie Anderson, April McVay, Holly Bedingfield, Michelle McElhaney, Donna Murray, Ruth Weathers, Stephanie Eakin and Lori Nepstad. B: The team from Willamette Valley Bank (from left) Bailey Payne, Crystal Tyndall, Rebecca Downes, Jane Lowery, Mandi Stephens, Kennedy Traeger, Shannon Shore and Kourtnee Butler. C: Crystal Posterick (left) and Chrystal Patson. D: Three city councilors (from left) Marlene Parsons, Laura Reid and Elizabeth Smith with Mayor Cathy Clark.