

MIRACLE,

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Sherwood Park – dressed in white, full-body coveralls – had to tell her, “No.”

It was tough to hold back, but there were many reasons to celebrate. Nikki beat COVID-19 despite complications that had Jill contemplating funeral services a few weeks ago.

“Two of her doctors told me she was an absolute miracle,” Jill said. Nikki’s father is the late Marty Matiskainen and Nikki was a regular volunteer at Jill’s Gubser classroom for years.

Nikki, 42, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at 19. Complications from the disease had become harder to manage and she planned to begin living at The Oaks after returning from a surgery in early March.

“The staff here were wonderful and she already knew some of the younger residents. We came in and decorated her room with wolves before she went in for the surgery,” Jill said.

Nikki checked in to Silverton Hospital for the surgery in early March and returned to The Oaks without issue. Two days later, she was taken to the emergency room after a fever spiked and her breathing became labored. Forty-eight hours later, Nikki was tested for COVID-19 and the posi-



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD

Friends and family turned out to welcome Nikki Matiskainen home Monday, April 13.

Results were returned three days after that.

Nikki spent the next 16 days on a ventilator in the intensive care unit at Salem Health.

“It got very, very bad,” Jill said. “She was on dialysis and her liver was failing. We didn’t think she would make it.”

Nikki’s condition continued to deteriorate, but then her body started, unexpectedly, fighting back.

As her condition improved, Nikki was moved to a regular room where she continued to recuperate. She was met by friends and family in The Oaks’ parking lot when she returned Monday. They held

signs and balloons and shouted greetings.

Nikki was still weak, but managed to hold her own in a brief conversation with relatives.

The Oaks staff are contending with one of Oregon’s largest outbreaks of COVID-19 in a long-term care facility. The Oregon Department of Human Services revealed on April 11 that The Oaks was sixth on the list of nine facilities with five or more confirmed COVID-19 cases. It currently has 14 ongoing cases of the virus, but it is not known if Nikki contracted the virus at The Oaks or sometime during her

hospital stay for surgery.

Regardless of where Nikki contracted the illness, Jill was overwhelmed to have reached the opposite shore in a long, emotionally draining journey.

“Just being here today, waiting for her to arrive, is such a relief. When she was in the ICU, when she was very weak and could barely talk,” Jill said. “It’s been such a rollercoaster of good days and bad days, and Nikki is just the sweetest person in the world. Knowing I will be able to talk to her soon – knowing she is going to make it – is amazing.”

Contact the reporter at editor@keizertimes.com.

Keizer church is donation site for needed crisis items

St. Edward Catholic Church is now a public donation site gathering food and household necessities for community members, as well as items for community partners that provide assistance to individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

Items will be distributed directly to service providers or community members from the Health & Human Services food pantry established as the COVID-19 outbreak began.

Donations will be accepted Mondays and Tuesdays each week on a continuing basis from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to help meet community needs. The church is located at 5303 River Road N, in Keizer.

The donation site is accepting the following new, unopened and unexpired items:

- Food (peanut butter, tuna, canned fruit and veggies, oatmeal, pasta, spaghetti sauce, soups, rice and beans)
- Toilet paper
- Diapers/pull-ups/wipes
- Cleaning supplies (hand soap, dish soap, disinfectant spray, paper towels, garbage bags and laundry detergent)
- Personal items (feminine hygiene products, body soap, shampoo, and socks)
- Pet food (dog and/or cat)
- Packaged digital thermometers
- Cloth masks (clean homemade cloth masks are acceptable)

The drive-thru process has been designed with social distancing measures for the safety of volunteers and the donating public. Please load items for donation in the back seat or trunk of your vehicle. Volunteers can then unload the items without making physical contact with drivers.

For more information, please Marion County at: Health_Donations@co.marion.or.us.

FORUM: Testimony via teleconference available

(Continued from Page A1) would require candidates to arise from the areas in the city where they live.

• Changing the way councilors are elected from a head-to-head contests to an alternative method such as ranked choice voting. In a ranked choice system, voters would rank candidates in order of preference with the top overall picks filling the vacancies.

• Changing the term of city councilors from four years to two years.

• Changing how council vacancies are approved. Currently if a council office becomes vacant, the vacancy is filled by appointment and finishes out the remainder of the previous councilor’s term. Alternately, the council could send the matter back to voters in a special election. Salem’s city council requires a special election if the

remaining term of the vacating councilor is more than a year.

Those wishing to provide testimony can speak on all those questions or whichever ones they choose.

CLUB: ‘Everyone is facing a unique set of obstacles’

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The club’s Facebook account features staff-made video lessons, one of which is Freeborn leading breathing exercises to help manage stress. Other tips from Freeborn on stress management include, staying connected, understanding that your best does not look the same as someone else’s best, take the crisis day by day and continue to do the things that make you happy and are important to you.

One stressor for parents and kids alike is distance learning. Most everyone’s work schedule has been changed because of COVID-19, some parents are working more than ever and some are not working at all.

“Everyone is facing a unique set of obstacles,” Freeborn said.

The club has been doing its best to provide for their families. In addition to creating supplemental work for the children, staff members delivered Chromebooks and dropped off packets with school material and supplies to families of first responders as well as others in need.

When the initial shut down of the schools was announced, most students were expecting to return to the classroom and left all their supplies there. School supplies are now needed by families and the Boys & Girls Club is accepting donations to help meet that need.

Freeborn wanted the kids of the Boys & Girls Club to know they she and the rest of the staff miss them.

“We really miss them and we really care about them and we can’t wait to see them when the club opens. We’re here for them, whether it’s by phone, email, Facebook, however they want to get ahold of us,” she said.

Those interested in donating can contact Freeborn at mfreeborn@bgc-salem.com.

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