

## Director says Cannon Beach fire chief's firing 'business, not personal'

### Records request delivers fire district minutes

By R.J. MARX  
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Meeting minutes from the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection Board shed little light on the firing of Mike Balzer as fire chief.



Mike Balzer

"This is strictly business, not personal," Director Garry Smith said at the board's October meeting.

After reasons for the chief's dismissal were not immediately released and the board minutes were withheld, the firing resulted in outrage from those who felt the announcement was "in poor taste."

After the Cannon Beach Gazette submitted a state public records request, all 2015 meeting minutes were delivered last week.

According to the Oct. 12 meeting minutes, in announcing the dismissal of the chief, Smith said, "There was an expectation that (Balzer) would learn the job and improve and follow through in working with the board as a partner, not a manager."

Members voted 4-1 to terminate Balzer's employment as of that night, based on his "lack of improved performance for his job over the last three years."

President Sharon Clyde said there "has been fric-

tion" between Balzer and firefighters.

Board members Linda Beck-Sweeney, Mark Mekenas, Smith and Clyde voted for the dismissal.

In voting to maintain Balzer, board member Bob Cerelli said "he has not seen" any problems with Balzer and the other firefighters.

Board members asked Balzer to return his keys and the fire district's phone once he retrieved information he needed from it.

The next morning, Balzer was locked out of his office. At the board's November meeting, members of the public took the board to task for Balzer's firing.

Community member Erik Meyer said the board should have placed Balzer on administrative leave for transparency and given him a chance "to save face."

"He has been a respected member of this fire department for more years than any of us can remember," community member Alaina Giguere said. "And, truly, for you guys to terminate him in the manner that you did is disgusting and disrespectful and reprehensible. And I think you owe him and all of us a complete apology."

Smith said Balzer was given the chance to resign or retire. The board gave Balzer multiple opportunities and presented him with a time frame in June, "so he wasn't just suddenly ousted out of the fire department," Smith said.

Assistant Chief Frank Swedenborg was initially appointed interim chief, but Swedenborg, who is ready to retire, stepped aside for an outside interim appointee, Jim Stearns.

Stearns, of Hermiston, spent 31 years — 20 as chief — with Hermiston Fire and Emergency Services.

# Shooting suspect charged with attempted murder

By KYLE SPURR  
The Daily Astorian

The man considered "armed and dangerous" earlier this month after a reported shooting in Rockaway Beach has been charged with attempted murder.

Nolan Seth Otey, 21, of Eagle Creek, was arraigned in Tillamook County Circuit Court last week on a grand jury indictment.

Otey is being charged with



Nolan Seth Otey

attempted murder, first-degree robbery, second-degree

robbery, second-degree attempted assault, strangulation and attempted unauthorized use of a vehicle.

The charges stem from Otey allegedly threatening, robbing and injuring another man early in the morning of Dec. 3 in Rockaway Beach. Otey also attempted to steal the man's 1987 Toyota Tercel, according to the indictment.

After the incident, law enforcement spent the morning searching for Otey.

The Neah-Kah-Nie School District closed schools for the day as a precaution, and residents were ordered to shelter-in-place until Otey was found.

Officers found and arrested Otey about six hours after the incident.

He remains in custody in Tillamook County Jail.

A release hearing is scheduled Wednesday, and a pretrial conference is scheduled in February.

## Pacific County woman charged in child sex case

By NATALIE ST. JOHN  
EO Media Group

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — A Pacific County woman is accused of allowing a known sex offender to have access to a child.

According to a Pacific County Sheriff's Office incident report, deputies on

Dec. 14 arrested Mariah Lee McLaughlin on a warrant. McLaughlin, 28, is charged with first-degree child molestation, first-degree rape of a child, and three counts of leaving a child with a sex offender, according to Pacific County Jail records.

County Prosecutor Mark McClain confirmed that the

allegations stem from an investigation of her brother, Christopher Scott McLaughlin, who in June pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a young child, and was recently sentenced to 35 years in prison.

McClain said Mariah McLaughlin is suspected of allowing her brother to be

alone with the child, even though she allegedly knew that he was a convicted sex offender in Oregon, and allegedly knew that it was a violation of Washington state law to do so.

McClain declined to provide further details about the case, citing the need to protect the victim's privacy.

## Washington to issue more retail marijuana licenses

EO Media Group

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Based on an estimate of how much medical marijuana is sold in Pacific County, the county will qualify for at least one additional retail marijuana license under new rules announced by the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board.

Statewide, the number of retail marijuana stores will rise from the current cap of 334 to a new cap of 556.

"Our goal was clear; to ensure medical patients have access to the products they need," said Board Director Rick Garza. "There will be more storefronts for patients going forward than are available today. In addition, qualified patients

can grow their own or join a four-member cooperative."

State contractor BOTEC Analysis Corp. estimated there were 2,225 "past-month users" in Pacific County in 2013, who spent \$400,000 on medical marijuana. Statewide, 610,000 users spent \$480 million.

Counties and jurisdictions, including Pacific County, not in the top 10 for medical sales

will receive an increase of the number of licenses by 75 percent. There are currently two licenses in the county, so depending on whether the state rounds up or down, there will be either one or two new licenses.

The methodology for the cap will be part of emergency rules which will be announced Jan. 6.

## City will restore hours at Astoria Aquatic Center

By DERRICK DePLEDGE  
The Daily Astorian

The pools will again be open on weekday afternoons at the Astoria Aquatic Center after the city solved a lifeguard shortage.

The city had reduced afternoon hours in late September because of a lack of certified

lifeguards. But the City Council agreed to a pay raise for lifeguards and higher fees that will help offset the cost of the raises.

Regular weekday operational hours will be restored on Friday. The city will also switch to monthly passes, instead of quarterly passes, and raise fees by about 12 percent.

The last fee update was in 2009.

The city spent \$250,000 this year in capital improve-

ment fund money to make the most extensive repairs to the Aquatic Center since the facility opened in 1998.

## Coast Guard rescues injured teen near Tillamook Saturday

Associated Press

TILLAMOOK — A teen is recovering from his injuries after he got stuck on a rock ledge in the ocean near Tillamook and was rescued by the Coast Guard.

KATU-TV reported that 18-year-old Chris Henley says he and his friends had finished hiking at Cape Lookout Saturday when he climbed down near the water and was pulled in by the tide. Henley says he suffered multiple cuts to his legs as he struggled to stay afloat.

The teen was eventually able to grab onto a rock ledge, where he stayed until firefight-

ers used jet skis to reach him.

Henley was taken to calmer water and the Coast Guard hoisted him up to a MH-60

Jayhawk helicopter.

The Astoria-based Jayhawk crew had been in the area for a training exercise.

## Movies coming soon to PDX

Associated Press

PORTLAND — A movie theater is expected to open at Portland International Airport by late spring.

The Oregonian reported that Hollywood Theatre in northeast Portland plans to open a miniature annex at PDX. The theater will seat 18 with standing room for another 10 to 20 people.

Hollywood Theater Executive Director Doug Whyte says the PDX location will screen short films of one to five minutes. It will focus on Portland artists and films about the city and the state of Oregon.

Whyte has been planning the annex since seeing a newspaper article about a theater in a Tokyo airport two years ago.

Major airports in Asia have added movie theaters, but it's still uncommon in American airports. The Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, however, put in a screening room last year.

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