

Seaside woman convicted of stealing from elderly partner

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

A 53-year-old Seaside woman was sentenced to more than six years in prison for stealing thousands of dollars from her 79-year-old live-in partner, who is suffering from dementia.

Deborah Lynn Reinhardt stole more than \$50,000 from the elderly man, along with his truck and his identity to access a Fidelity Investments account.

Reinhardt entered Alford pleas Tuesday at a sentencing hearing in Clatsop County Circuit Court to first-degree aggravated theft, first-degree theft, identity theft, driving under the influence of intoxicants and driving while her license was suspended. Other charges including criminal mistreatment, forgery and tampering



Deborah Lynn Reinhardt

with a witness were dismissed.

An Alford plea is a guilty plea from a defendant who proclaims their innocence, but admits the prosecution has enough evidence to prove they are guilty.

The incidents occurred between July 2014 and January 2015. The man's family was able to get a restraining order against

Reinhardt. She had to move out of the house she shared with the man off U.S. Highway 26 and could not use his 2008 Ford F350 truck. However, in January 2015, she went back to the property and took his truck. Reinhardt used the money she stole on shopping, gambling, eating out at restaurants and drinking in bars.

The drunken-driving conviction relates to an incident in November 2014 when she left a bar in Seaside, got into her vehicle and crashed into

another car. Her blood alcohol level was measured at 0.20 percent, according to police.

Reinhardt's defense lawyer Kirk Wintermute said alcohol abuse is the root of her problems. He described how she was having a good time with her partner trying to enjoy the last few years of the man's life. However, Reinhardt started spending money too quickly and things snowballed out of control.

"She was drinking more than she should," Wintermute

said. "She is a different person when she is not drinking."

As part of her 78-month prison sentence, Reinhardt is ordered to pay a \$30,000 fine to the man. She is also not allowed to have any contact with him or his family.

The victim's daughter, who aided in the law enforcement investigation, spoke at the sentencing hearing.

"She squandered away the health of my father, the time he had with family," the daughter said.

Cannon Beach narrows field for fire chief

Five candidates will be queried

By LYRA FONTAINE
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District has selected five top candidates for the fire chief position out of 20 applications received, interim Fire Chief Jim Stearns announced at the Monday board meeting.

The five candidates will come to Cannon Beach on April 23 for interviews, and will be narrowed down to three finalists. Community members are welcome to meet with the final three candidates, expected from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Cannon Beach fire station.

Stearns said he hopes the board will reach a hiring decision by May so that the chief can begin working in June.

The district seeks an experienced fire chief who will be "an active, involved part of the community, work effectively with the five-member board of directors, demonstrate strong fiscal accountability and provide

fair, honest, effective leadership to the paid staff and 26 volunteers," the job description states.

Salary for the chief's job is \$67,500 to \$75,000, depending on qualifications.

Stearns suggested that the board help to create and implement a strategic plan.

"I think it's really important to have a strategic plan that we all buy into," he said. "As we look at hiring people, it's nice for them to be able to walk into the organization and say, organizationally, this is what the values are, this is where we're going."

The board is seeking to replace former Fire Chief Mike Balzer, who was fired in October. Balzer has since filed a lawsuit against the fire district claiming wrongful dismissal.

Community member Mary Peterson commented that with the lawsuit pending, hiring a new chief was a mistake.

The lawsuit could bring his reinstatement.

It would be "fiscally irresponsible for this board to gamble with citizens' money to have to buy out a new chief's contract, if in fact Mike Balzer is successful in his lawsuit," she

said. "It would be fine if you were gambling with your own money, but you're not."

Three fire board members turned back a recall election last week. The recall effort stemmed from frustration among some residents over the board's handling of Balzer's firing.

"I would like to compliment the entire board for the grace and professionalism with which you have handled yourselves over the last several months and to congratulate the three of you who stood for recall and were successful in defeating it," community member Marty Schwab Harris said of board members Sharon Clyde, Garry Smith and Linda Beck-Sweeney. "If the issue of fiduciary responsibility is to be brought up at this time, I would like to suggest that perhaps those who initiated the recall would like to reimburse the fire district for the cost of the recall, which will fall to the district's budget and therefore consume funds that could otherwise be used for training, fire equipment and other much-needed goods and services."

Downsized school library rankles some in Warrenton

Space could be converted to PE classes

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — A plan by Warrenton-Hammond School District to convert more than half of the existing library at Warrenton Grade School into a multipurpose space for physical education classes by next school year has some worried the gathering space is being curtailed.

The district recently announced plans to take the high-ceiling portion of the grade school's library — colloquially referred to as "The Pit" and largely filled with tables, chairs and shelving for books — and turn it into a multipurpose space, largely for PE and recess. The space represents about 60 percent of the library, which will be consolidated into the remaining space.

Superintendent Mark Jeffery said the change is driven by the lack of space and overcrowding in gym classes at the grade school, which houses approximately 750 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. He said the district is currently getting bids on the work to convert the space.

Currently there are no set requirements for PE instruction per day. But a law passed in 2007 by the state Legislature requires that by the 2017-18 school year, students in



Submitted Photo

The Warrenton Grade School Library may undergo some changes soon.

kindergarten through eighth grade receive year-round PE instruction, including at least 150 minutes per week for elementary schoolers and 225 minutes per week for middle schoolers.

Community members decried the potential loss of space for the many events held in the grade school library.

Kathleen Merritt, a long-time librarian and teacher in the district, asked the district to delay the decision and give the community more time to find other options to expand PE space without disrupting the library.

Jennifer Rasmussen, an adviser at Warrenton with the federal Talent Search student support program, said the district should be thinking about how to transform the library into a learning commons to better support academics.

Jeffery said that while

district will consolidate the library's physical collection into a smaller space, it will try to expand students' access to digital content. He added that the new multipurpose space could be used for many of the same events the library's high-ceilinged section is now.

During a recent tour of the grade school library, he said the district has some money set aside in the budget to buy e-readers, along with some community members willing to donate money. The district would like to start out next year with about 100 of the devices, he said, while providing access to online catalogs and potentially letting students check devices out.

"This isn't the death knell for the library by any means," Jeffery told the audience at Tuesday's board meeting. "This is an opportunity to modernize it and move it forward."

Oregon jobless rate drops to 4.5 percent, lowest since 1976

By STEVEN DUBOIS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Oregon's unemployment rate tumbled to 4.5 percent in March — the lowest mark since comparable record-keeping began in 1976, figures released Tuesday show.

A total of 1.94 million Oregonians were employed in March, an increase from 1.84 million at this time last year when the jobless rate was 5.7 percent, the state Employment Department statistics indicate.

Meanwhile, the job gains led to rising wages, with the average pay rate for private sector payroll employees jumping to \$24.45 an hour last month, an increase of more than a dollar from a year ago.

"Businesses are raising wages to attract the help they need, and it's working because people are flocking to Oregon's labor force," said Nick Beleiciks, state employment economist.

The jobless rate has steadily dropped since reach-

ing a peak of nearly 12 percent in 2009. It's now a half-percentage point below the U.S. unemployment rate, a distinction Oregon last saw in 1995.

Oregon added 3,900 jobs last month, led by the health care and wholesale trade sectors, after a revised gain of 7,400 jobs in February.

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