

Extreme poverty persists in Oregon despite broader recovery

Some areas have been left behind in revival

By NATASHA RAUSCH
The Oregonian

KLAMATH FALLS — Misti Scott and a dozen others show up each Wednesday for a two-hour parenting class at the Faith Tabernacle church.

Scott can't stay long after class to chat. As a 38-year-old single mother, she has three teenage boys to tend to.

"Do you want one?" she asks jokingly.

The class is required if she wants to continue to receive two years of help with rent payments.

Her two years is up in March, though. That scares her.

Her rental home is in the Mills Addition neighborhood of Klamath Falls. The southern Oregon county that once boasted dozens of lumber and paper mills now has three. In addition to the decline of its largest industry, the county suffers from a lack of housing availability, an aging population, an influx of alcoholism and drugs and a shortage of jobs. Compounding the problems, the county lost two grocery stores and a major employer last year.

Scott's neighborhood, where 35 percent of residents live below the poverty line, reflects the repeated blows.

Mills Addition is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Oregon. Its houses have been scooped up on the cheap by landlords who rent to low-wage workers. The homes are unkempt, grass overgrown, and for every few occupied houses, one is abandoned.

The community is a stark reminder that even as the state enjoys historic job growth and low unemployment, pockets of deep poverty are untouched by

the economic recovery.

Communities like Mills Addition are the flipside of gentrified neighborhoods. Instead of a relatively rapid transformation to development and affluence, these areas tend to slide into abject poverty over decades. Because it's a slow change, people often overlook the changes.

In Oregon, the state has designated 112 "high poverty hotspots," where 20 percent or more of the residents are at or below the poverty line.

Nearly half are located in rural counties. In Klamath County, there are four.

Fifth-worst poverty spot in Oregon

Each hotspot has a ranking, and Mills Addition is fifth-worst of Oregon's 112. This particular hotspot has the second-highest per capita participation in the state's low-income food program and nearly one-third of households are run by a single parent, according to a May 2015 state report. Mills Addition also has the seventh-highest rate of involvement by state child welfare case workers, reflected by the lines at the local Department of Human Services office just a mile away.

"Ninety-six," a clerk calls on a summer afternoon, and the next client makes her way to the counter.

District manager Jeremy Player said no one wants to be here, to need the services the agency can help provide.

"It's a last resort," he said. "I see a lot of pain and suffering walk through that door."

A man with curly blond hair walks in and back out of the lobby door several times, hesitating.

The fourth time, he lingers. "I can't do this," he finally shouts. "It's too much for my anxiety."

He exits and doesn't come back.

"Ninety-seven."

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One man asks another, "Do you know what time it is?"

The man shakes his head. Others in the room look around for a clock; no one has a watch or a smartphone with the time. "12:51," a reporter tells him.

He runs out without being helped. Another woman walks in and takes a number.

"Ninety-eight."

No degree, no job

Player said when the timber industry was the largest employer it was easy to drop out of school, work for a lumber mill and still provide for a family.

But that's not the case anymore — and he's trying to change that mentality. Still, last year only 72 percent of Klamath County students graduated high school in four years.

Player and his coworkers knock on the doors of chronically absent kids and see how they can help get them to school. They have passed out diplomas and even shaken the hands of middle-aged people who went back to get a degree.

Just a month ago, Klamath even held a first-ever graduation parade for graduates of all levels of school, even kindergartners. The hope is for it to become an annual event.

Scott said she never got her college degree. Right now, she doesn't have a job because it's too hard to find one with three boys at home.

Before moving to the Mills a year ago, she was homeless for a little over a year, couch surfing or staying in hotels most nights. She sent her boys to live with her brother in Medford. She stayed behind, with nothing but a car that had

no license or registration. And she had a lot on her mind after escaping a bad relationship.

"It was emotionally draining," she said.

Housing is tough to find in a county where there's only 2 percent vacancy, and some vacant homes aren't fit for living.

But the local Klamath and Lake County Action Services action services helped find her a spot to rent. The only downside was the location, in Mills Addition.

Scott calls it the ghetto. "But I'm ghetto fabulous," she said.

Paul Stewart, chief executive of Sky Lakes Medical Center, said the answer to poverty is to create living-wage jobs. There aren't nearly enough of them in Klamath County right now, he says.

"Work is not just a source of income; it's a source of self-value and self-esteem," he said. "It makes you more functional and more healthy."

Stewart came to Klamath Falls 30 years ago and planned on staying a few years before moving to a bigger market. But he and his family fell in love with the town.

These days, he even has six grandkids in the area.

"Now I'm personally invested in this community thriving," he said.

No full recovery until 2024

Klamath, like most other rural Oregon counties, still hasn't recovered from the Great Recession.

In fact, it's still 8.8 percent below its peak pre-recession employment levels. The Oregon Employment Department

predicts it won't be out of the hole until 2024.

The fastest growing industry in the county, however, is health care, and that's something Stewart knows well.

His latest endeavor is Klamath Works, designed as a place where a community of services for those in poverty will come together on a single campus. The campus is scheduled to be finished in five years, and once that happens, it will offer a one-stop shop for access to housing, jobs, mental and physical health, food and government services.

Kent Berry, executive director of the Gospel Mission in Klamath Falls, is another one of the masterminds behind the plan.

He's already raised nearly \$1 million to fund three new buildings on the campus. One will be housing for men, another one will be housing for women and the third will be for serving meals.

Berry was a pastor in Texas for 30 years before coming to the current Gospel Mission location in downtown Klamath Falls. He kept his southern drawl.

Berry said he's giving hope to once hopeless people.

Among them is 38-year-old Marshall Johnson, who was staying at the mission until he can get back on his feet. He grew up in Los Angeles, but 11 years ago his dad gave him money to move to Klamath Falls to start a new life after getting caught up in alcohol and methamphetamines. He said his biggest regret is doing that first line of meth as an 18-year-old.

He lived at the Rivers Inn hotel until his money ran out. Then he came to the mission.

Young people leave

Kelley Minty Morris, chair of the Klamath County Board of Commissioners, is also trying to turn the tide.

Morris, also a trustee at the Oregon Institute of Technology, believes having the college in town is a potential game-changer for the area. But only if some of the graduates stick around when they're done with school.

The problem, though, is that educated young people tend to leave.

"We all sit around tables all the time asking, 'How do we get our grads to stay here?'" she said.

Klamath County's population is aging. Residents 65 and over increased 12.1 percent from 2012 to 2015, while all other age groups declined, according to Portland State University Population Research Center.

Two Oregon Tech graduates did a study for their final project to determine how many college graduates are leaving and why.

Of the 634 students surveyed, the study found 82 percent of graduates are not likely to stay in Klamath County after graduation. The study showed the students don't feel connected to the community and don't see a lot of local opportunity, so they leave.

Morris said the community as a whole needs to make an effort to connect graduates with the area, so they want to stay after graduation. That way their business ideas and their education and training stay in the county, too.

"If we could leverage Oregon Tech," she said, "then that's our biggest opportunity to improve our economy."

The community is a stark reminder that even as the state enjoys historic job growth and low unemployment, pockets of deep poverty are untouched by the economic recovery.

Astoria woman sentenced five years for theft, forgery

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

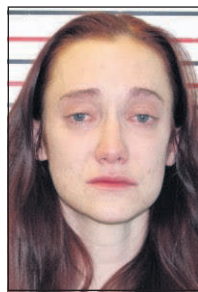
An Astoria woman who counterfeited money and committed theft and attempted robbery with her boyfriend was sentenced to five years in prison.

Robyn Joyce Spear, 28, pleaded no contest Friday in Clatsop County Circuit Court to charges of first-degree theft, first-degree forgery and attempted second-degree robbery.

The crime spree occurred between October 2015 and January.

In October, Spear and her boyfriend, Cameron James McKey, 25, of Astoria, each attempted to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill at the Astoria Mini Mart on two separate occasions.

In December, Spear and McKey stole crab pots, ani-



Robyn Joyce Spear

mal traps, camping gear, parts of an antique grandfather clock, dishes and other items from two storage units in Warrenton.

Later that month, they stole more than \$1,000 worth of tools from Englund Marine & Industrial Supply. In January, they attempted to rob a woman in Astoria.

During the four-month time

frame, Spear also forged a check at Columbia Bank, and stole jewelry and other personal items from another local woman.

Overall, Spear is ordered to pay more than \$13,500 in restitution to the victims. She is also ordered to have no contact with the victims, and not associate with McKey.

McKey received a five-year prison sentence in June after pleading guilty to the similar charges.

Woman sentenced for setting fires at college

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

A former part-time employee at Clatsop Community College, who was arrested twice for arson at the college last winter, was sentenced to 18 months probation.

Erin Jaynel Engelson, 38, of Naselle, Washington, entered Alford guilty pleas to two counts of reckless burning, a Class A misdemeanor, Friday in Clatsop County Circuit Court.

She was originally charged with arson, burglary and criminal trespass. The charges were dropped through the plea agreement.

Astoria Police originally arrested Engelson in December after fire damage, estimated at \$250, was found on the floor of the college's science lab.

While out of jail on a release agreement, Engelson was arrested in January for attempting to start another bonfire outside the art building on the college campus. She reportedly used pieces of wood pallets,

wood shavings and other items to try to start the fire.

Kris Kaino, Engelson's defense lawyer, said in court Friday that she never intended to burn the buildings down. She wanted to start the fires for personal reasons, as a ritual to cleanse her soul, Kaino said.

"She was not trying to burn something down," Kaino said.

In January, Judge Cindee Matyas found Engelson unable to aid and assist in her criminal case. The judge ordered Engelson to be sent to the Oregon State Hospital, where she was treated for about two months.

Engelson suffers from mental health issues, but is receiving proper medication. She was able to plead to her crimes in court Friday.

As part of her probation, she is ordered to take all prescribed medications as directed by her physician and comply with her mental health counseling program.

In addition, she is to have no contact with the college.



Erin Jaynel Engelson

Ailing Korean shipper Hanjin moves to resolve cargo chaos

By YOUKYUNG LEE
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Moving to unsnarl the chaos in its container cargo after it filed for bankruptcy protection, Hanjin Shipping Co. will seek stay orders

in dozens of countries, the Financial Services Commission said Monday.

Hanjin, South Korea's largest ocean container shipper, will seek bankruptcy protection in 43 countries, including Canada, Germany and Britain, and the government said it would urge those countries to expedite the process.

Hanjin filed for bankruptcy in the U.S. and South Korea last week.

A company spokeswoman, Park Eun-hye, confirmed Hanjin was moving to protect its assets but refused to specify in how many countries, beyond the U.S. and South Korea.

Notifications sent following fishing license data breach

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Notices that personal information might have been compromised will be sent to hunting and fishing license holders in Idaho and Oregon following the breach of a vendor's computer system. They likely will be sent in Washington state, too.

Officials in Idaho and Oregon said Dallas-based Active Network will mail the notices to people in their states following the computer hack last week that shut down online license sales.

Washington officials said they're in contact with the

company and expect similar letters to be sent in their state, but that hadn't been finalized Friday. Officials say the number of records exposed could be in the millions.

Online license sales have been halted in all three states until the extent of the hack is fully understood.

"They've only been able to confirm that it was possible that personal information was accessed," Idaho Department of Fish and Game spokesman Mike Keckler said. "We do not know yet whether or not that actually occurred, and we may not ever know."

Hunting and fishing licenses can still be purchased at the states' wildlife offices or at

businesses that sell the licenses.

It's unclear when online sales might resume.

"I don't have an estimate," Bruce Botka of Washington's wildlife agency said. "Our most important concern is ensuring the security of that particular channel."

Officials in the three states said only about 20 percent of license sales occur online, with about 80 percent in person at state wildlife offices or businesses that sell the licenses.

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