

# Drug crisis sparks lifesaving efforts around the region

Some deputies will carry an opioid antidote

By AMY NILE  
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Washington state and Oregon leaders are rolling out programs in and around Pacific County that aim to slow the spread of disease through drug use and curb the rising overdose death toll.

Law enforcement leaders and medical experts are expanding access across the county to a lifesaving antidote that can reverse an overdose of heroin, oxycodone or other opioids, natural and synthetic pain-relieving drugs that are derived from the opium poppy.

Public health officials in Clatsop County are working to reduce harm caused by addiction by opening two sites where dirty needles can be exchanged for clean ones.

Overdoses now kill more people than traffic collisions.

The National Safety Council counts 567 traffic fatalities across Washington state in 2015. Annual data from the state Department of Health show 718 people died from opioid overdoses.

Nationwide, deaths involving the use of the pain-relieving drugs have quadrupled since 1999, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Opioids, such as fentanyl and morphine, were involved in 33,091 fatal overdoses in 2015. Preliminary data indicate an increase to about 60,000 in 2016.

The CDC found the amount of painkillers prescribed during the year was enough for every American to be medicated around the clock for three weeks.

## Stopping the spread of disease

A syphilis outbreak spurred Clatsop County officials to start working on ways to reduce the spread of diseases through the sharing of syringes, Public Health Director Michael McNickle said. Two needle exchanges are expected to open on Aug. 31, one in downtown Astoria and another in the Knappa area.

Nurses at the sites will pass out a clean syringe for every used one they collect. Specific times and locations have not been released.

McNickle said not all authorities agree with the idea of providing clean syringes for illegal drug use, but law enforcement has agreed not to interfere by busting people at the exchanges. However, he said, they will shut them down if they see drug use or paraphernalia other than syringes at the sites.

"None of us want anyone to be addicted," McNickle said. "We're resigning to the fact that this is necessary."

A \$50,000 donation from Friends of Columbia Community Health will pay for the first six months of the program. The needles will be counted to help determine whether it's possible to continue the exchanges, which will be the first to open on the North Coast, McNickle said.

There are 17 others in Washington state and nine in Oregon, according to the North American Syringe Exchange Network. However, the program closest to the peninsula is run on Friday afternoons in Kelso, almost a two-hour drive from downtown Long Beach.

## A lifesaving antidote

Peninsula Pharmacies co-owner Tom Sutherland said he can sell syringes without a prescription but he usually doesn't. He isn't comfortable supplying them for illegal drug use.

Sutherland said his six stores will take used needles and syringes and dispose of them safely. But he leaves it up to each pharmacist to decide whether to sell them to people who don't have a condition that requires medication injections, such as diabetes.

The pharmacist since 1985 is working on another way to reduce harm caused by addiction. He's rolling out a program to expand local access to naloxone, a drug that can reverse an opioid overdose if it is given quickly.

The most dire consequences of addiction can be prevented by making the lifesaving antidote available when and where it's needed, Sutherland said.

"Our goal is to get it into the hands of the family members and caregivers," who are dealing with drug users, he said.

**Demand drives drug prices**  
The Federal Drug Admin-

istration has approved three forms of naloxone, an injectable liquid, a nasal spray and an EpiPen-like device that can be used to deliver a dose by people who don't have medical training.

Pharmacists in Washington state can now dispense naloxone to anyone who wants to have it on hand. Sutherland is working to help educate people about the three forms of drug that are available and show them how to use the one that best suits their needs.

"They're all on the expensive side. That's kind of typical when you have something that's needed," Sutherland said. "The good news is I am seeing more insurance companies willing to pay for the medicine."

The retail price is about \$170 for Narcan, naloxone that comes in kits of two pre-filled doses that can be sprayed into the drug user's nostril to stop an overdose fatality.

## Living with a 'death sentence'

Pacific County Sheriff Scott Johnson got a grant that will allow deputies to start carrying the pricey antidote soon. He expects the money from the National Sheriff's Institute to cover the cost of the Narcan kits for about two years.

With the lack of local treatment options for substance abuse and mental illnesses, law enforcement officers are often left to handle problems caused by those who are struggling with addiction.

"It's almost like a long-term death sentence," Johnson said. "Just like we see with mental health, they don't get the help they need."

The county has responded to 53 calls to 911 for possible overdoses since January 2016, coordinator Tim Martindale Jr. said. That count does not include those that were determined by emergency responders after arriving on scene to help with a call for someone who was having trouble breathing, or was found unconscious or dead.

Although medical-aid crews usually show up before law enforcement, Johnson said, training deputies to quickly spot signs of an overdose and stop it with the antidote could make a difference.

"If we can save even one life, it's worth it," he said.

# A US veteran returns a dead Japanese soldier's flag to kin

Astoria-based nonprofit was the inspiration

By MARI YAMAGUCHI  
Associated Press

HIGASHISHIRAKAWA, Japan — Tatsuya Yasue buried his face into the flag and smelled it. Then he held the 93-year-old hands that brought this treasure home, and kissed them.

Marvin Strombo, who had taken the calligraphy-covered Japanese flag from a dead soldier on a World War II island battlefield 73 years ago, returned it Tuesday to the family of Sadao Yasue. They had never received any of his remains or belongings — until that moment.

The soldier's sister, Sayoko Furuta, 93, sitting in her wheelchair, covered her face with both hands and wept silently as Tatsuya placed the flag on her lap. Strombo reached out and gently rubbed her shoulder.

"I was so happy that I

returned the flag," Strombo said. "I can see how much the flag meant to her. That almost made me cry ... It meant everything in the world to her."

The flag's white back-ground is filled with signatures of 180 friends and neighbors in this tea-growing mountain village of Higashishirakawa, wishing for Yasue's safe return. The signatures helped Strombo find the flag's rightful owners.

"Good luck forever at the battlefield," a message on it reads. Looking at the names and their handwriting, Tatsuya Yasue clearly recalls their faces and friendship with his older brother.

The smell of the flag immediately brought back childhood memories. "It smelled like my good old big brother, and it smelled like our mother's home cooking we ate together," Tatsuya Yasue said. "The flag will be our treasure."

The return of the flag brings closure, the 89-year-old farmer told The Associated Press at his 400-year-old

house. "It's like the war has finally ended and my brother can come out of limbo."

Strombo said he originally wanted the flag as a souvenir from the war, but he felt guilty taking it, so he never sold it and vowed to one day return it.

He had the flag hung in a glass-fronted gun cabinet in his home in Montana for years, a topic of conversation for visitors. A U.S. Marine, he was in the battles of Saipan, Tarawa and Tinian, which chipped away at Japan's control of islands in the Pacific and paved the way for U.S. victory.

In 2012, he was connected to the Obon Society, an Astoria-based nonprofit that helps U.S. veterans and their descendants return Japanese flags to the families of fallen soldiers. The group's research traced it to the village of 2,300 people in central Japan by analyzing family names.

Tuesday's handover meant a closure for Strombo too. "It means so much to me and the family to get the flag back and move on," he said.

# Corvallis groups ask county to opt out of timber lawsuit

Associated Press

CORVALLIS — Several Corvallis groups are asking the Benton County Board of Commissioners to abandon a \$1.4 billion timber lawsuit against the state of Oregon filed on behalf of several counties.

Linn County and others claim state forest management policies cost them money because they blocked possible logging revenues, the Gazette-Times reported. Benton County could be awarded about \$30 million if the lawsuit is successful.

Fifteen local environmental, outdoor, community and progressive organizations

signed a letter that was read to the board at its Tuesday meeting. The letter argued that if the counties won the lawsuit, it could hurt state forests, contribute to global warming and affect the state's budget for schools, social services and county funding.

"If you sue an owner of a forest for undercutting and you win, it's pretty clear what the consequences will be," said Dave Toler, a Corvallis resident and former Josephine County commissioner, at the meeting.

The board decided in a 2-1 vote in January to stay as a defendant in the lawsuit. County Commissioner Anne Schuster, who voted in favor

of staying in the lawsuit, said if the counties won, the outcome of the lawsuit would not increase logging in the state.

The letter by the groups referenced Clatsop Community College, which was withdrawn from the lawsuit after the opting-out period had already passed. The community college was allowed to do so because it was not able to hold a meeting with a quorum of its board members before the deadline, said Vance Crony, the county's counsel. Crony does not think the court would allow Benton to leave the lawsuit.

Clatsop County commissioners voted in January to opt out of the lawsuit.

Clatsop Post 12  
**BBQ Pork Rib Dinner**  
with Baked Beans, Corn on the Cob, Salad and Cornbread  
**Friday Aug. 18th**  
4 pm until gone  
**\$8.00**  
6PM  
"Karaoke Dave"  
ASTORIA  
AMERICAN LEGION  
Clatsop Post 12  
1132 Exchange Street  
525-5771

**WANTED**  
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber  
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA  
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

**VENDOR FAIR**  
Saturday, August 19th • 10AM to 3PM  
**COME & SHOP**  
Local Direct Sale Businesses  
in One Convenient Location  
In The Loft at **SUZANNE ELISE**  
101 Forest Dr., Seaside, OR  
Call **503-738-0307** if you have any questions

  
**ENGLUND MARINE & INDUSTRIAL SUPPLY**  
95 Hamburg Ave, Astoria OR • 503-325-4341

**ANNUAL DOCK SALE**  
August 18th & 19th  
Fri 7:30am - 5:30pm / Sat 7:30am - 5:00pm

**SAVE 10-50%**

Deep discounts on thousands of items under the tents!  
Tackle • Rods/Reels • Crab Gear  
Clothing • Boat Maintenance • Trailer Parts • VHF Radios  
Safety Equipment • Life Jackets  
Boat Accessories • Smokers  
Knives & Sharpeners • Crab Pots  
And More!

**- - SHOP TO FISH - -**

**BIG 5 SPORTING GOODS**  
**NOW HIRING PART-TIME SALES & CASHIERS**  
**We offer:**  
• Terrific Work Environment  
• Product Training  
• Flexible Scheduling  
• Merchandise Discounts  
For career-minded individuals, we offer a fully outlined **MANAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM.**  
Apply online at [www.big5.com/careers](http://www.big5.com/careers)  
Contact the store for more details.  
180 SE Neptune Drive, 503-861-0722.  
BIG 5 CORP IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER