

Neighbors: 'It comes down to caring for others'

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Washington State University and going into sales, where he quickly realized his interests didn't lie.

He went back to school, earned bachelor's and master's degrees in education with a focus on language arts, and spent a decade as an English and theater teacher at Fort Vancouver High School.

Fort Vancouver had a reputation as a diverse, low-income, tough school, but he loved working with the kids there, and he loved every minute of it, he said.

Wanting to be an advocate for theater and the other extracurriculars that help keep kids interested in school, O'Malley turned toward administration. He interned at Fort Vancouver and applied to be a principal at Brookings-Harbor High School, but was offered a position as vice principal of neighboring Azalea Middle School.

"It was my first time in a middle school since I had attended one," he said.

O'Malley grew to like working with kids during the transitive period of middle school, with one foot each in childhood and adolescence, he said. But eventually, he felt the pull to be near his family and started looking at positions in the Portland metro region.

O'Malley is the third principal at Warrenton Grade School, a quickly growing K-8 campus with a student body of nearly 800. He focuses on fourth

through sixth grade, while his fellow Vice Principal Robbie Porter covers kindergarten through third grade. Head Principal Tom Rogozinski oversees the academics at all levels, including the district's on-campus preschool program.

Still fresh in his position, O'Malley is focused on building the Warrior Way, an identity of self-responsibility and compassion, he said.

"I think it comes down to caring for others, having each others' backs and being relentless," he said.

Two of the most important transitions for students come at third grade, when they switch from learning to read to reading to learn, and in ninth grade, where those who stay on track are twice as likely to graduate.

"We've been working to make sure there's a sense of support at the grade school," O'Malley said. "When we send kids off to the high school, we don't want to just let them figure it out for themselves."

The move from Brookings was a sacrifice for O'Malley's wife, Tessa, who ran a successful bakery business, Sweet O'Malley's, which she had to put on hold for the move north.

The school was short some staff to start the year, and she transitioned into an educational assistant position in kindergarten.

The entire O'Malley family now spends their days at the grade school, including 4-year-old preschooler Nora and 6-year-old first-grader Emmett.

Dinner: Falker found her home at the Legion



Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian
American Legion Auxiliary member Marilyn Falker helps guests at Christmas dinner choose a knitted hat.

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different churches and groups, looking for a sense of community.

With her husband's service as a connection, she found her home at the Legion.

"This is the place that said 'you can give what you have,'" Falker said. "Reaching out to other people whose story we don't know is so important. We're blessed to be able to give, whether it's a smile or some yarn."

Her volunteer work has

continued to be an outlet. Between the loss of her husband and acting as a full-time caretaker for her two disabled sons, the work she does is as much a benefit to herself as it is to the community it serves, she said.

"This is my escape," she said, running over to open a door for an outgoing dinner guest.

"When you help, you just stop thinking about the things you're going through, because 99 percent of the time, you know what? They're not that bad."

Bus provider: Funding going to be a 'game-changer'

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Sunset Empire recently announced the expansion of service in South County, including four connections with Tillamook County buses in Cannon Beach. The agency hopes to expand service throughout the region, including weekend service on buses running through Hammond and Warrenton to the large Emerald Heights Apartment complex on the eastern edge of Astoria, Hazen said.

"We're adding a more robust circulator route in Warrenton and Hammond, so that Route 101 can stay on 101," he said.

Sunset Empire nearly collapsed in 2010, when former Director Cindy Howe left amid accusations of theft



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Steve Smith, left, makes a stop on his route with Sunset Empire as a passenger boards the bus.

and official misconduct. The district was in near financial ruin, laying off staff and cutting service at one point to only two routes to stay afloat.

Howe pleaded guilty in 2013 to two counts of first-degree theft and official misconduct.

Jay Flint helped rebuild the district from 2011 until

leaving in 2014 for a job at a Seaside law firm. Hazen took over from interim director Diana Bartolotta in 2014 after she also left for another position.

Hazen recently applied and was a finalist for another transportation director's position in Lewis County, Washington. The move was about a higher salary, along with the ability to take part in building a new transit center for Lewis County, he said.

He owns a home in Westport and said he has no interest in moving.

"I'm happy I'm staying here, because I'm excited about the challenge and opportunity of this new funding source," he said. "What a game-changer it's going to be."

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