



Photos from Courtney Mattila

Other drivers helped rescue four men injured in a crash on U.S. Highway 26 in June.

After crash, a helping hand

Drivers stopped to save men on Highway 26

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

When Kris Johnston noticed a car veering toward him on U.S. Highway 26 in June, he made a common assumption.

"I thought, 'Oh, he'll stop.' You've just got to assume they're going to," he said.

But the car didn't stop.

The driver crossed the centerline on a remote stretch of highway east of Elsie and smashed into Johnston's truck at high speed. Four men were trapped in the two vehicles with critical injuries as flames erupted.

What could have been a tragedy, though, was averted by more than a dozen people who pulled over to help and saved the men from danger.

"If they weren't out in that split second of time, they were dead," said Gearhart Volunteer Fire Lt. Jason Kraushaar, who was off duty and helped lead the rescue. "In all the accidents I've seen, I cannot believe there were not multiple fatalities."

'You feel helpless'

Johnston, 53, was driving westbound in a white Ford F-150 with a trailer. His son, Eric Allen Johnston, 33, was in the passenger seat. They were heading home to Seaside from Portland.

When Johnston saw the dark blue Subaru Legacy crossing over into his lane, his first instinct was to jerk the steering wheel to the right toward the



Wreckage from the crash.

ditch. But the Subaru kept aiming left until it reached the shoulder of the westbound lane.

"You feel helpless," Johnston said. "You just don't know where to go."

The driver of the Subaru — Howard Kanelakos, 73, of Houston — did not

recall the moments before the crash, Oregon State Police Sgt. DeAnn Rzewnicki said. The accident report is not yet complete, but police and others who were at the scene believe Kanelakos fell asleep.

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Housing authority's deputy under investigation

Sims was placed on paid leave in May

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

A top administrator for the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority is on paid leave pending the results of an investigation.

Deputy Director Teresa Sims was put on administrative leave in May after the agency began looking into complaints from several staff members, according to Todd Johnston, the housing authority's executive director.

Johnston would not provide details about the complaints against Sims, but said she is aware of the investigation, which began in April.

Sims could not be reached for comment Thursday.

She will remain on leave until the investigation, which is being conducted by an outside firm, is completed. Johnston expected to have a final report Tuesday, but said it has been delayed by a few weeks.

"It is a cost," Johnston said of the review, "but we felt it was important because the allegations were pretty serious."

The housing authority provides rental assistance and owns and manages low-income housing in Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties.

Sims oversees human resources and the day-to-day operations of the federal housing choice voucher program staff. Other staff members have pitched in to take over Sims' duties in the meantime.

"It's definitely a challenge," Johnston said, adding, "We're hoping that the investigation is resolved soon so we can move forward."

"The job's getting done and staff morale is positive," said Scott Lee, the chairman of the housing authority's board, who also serves as the chairman of the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners. "I haven't noticed and the board has not noticed any lack of service."

He said he could not provide further details until the investigation concludes.

"Things will come to light at that time," he said, "and then we'll see what happens."

Sims has been with the housing authority for many years, predating Johnston's tenure.

She was on staff in 2009 when leaders admitted they had inadvertently given out more rent assistance than the agency could support, triggering a budget crisis that threatened to put over 200 families at risk of eviction. The housing authority received emergency funds and dug into savings to cover the rent subsidies. Carol Snell was executive director of the agency at the time.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The deputy director of the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority is on leave pending an investigation.

BALLOT INITIATIVE

Reading, writing, rifles?

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gun rights advocates want sixth-graders at Oregon public schools to take a mandatory firearms safety class.

Initiative Petition 6 was filed Wednesday by Ston McDaniel of Prineville and Jerrad Robison of Redmond for the November 2020 ballot.

Schools would be required to provide a gun safety class in the sixth grade taught by a certified firearms instructor.

The curriculum would cover how to respond to an unsecured firearm and how to safely secure a firearm if an adult is absent. It would also teach safe muzzle direction, the importance of never touching a trigger and how semi-automatic weapons function. No live ammunition would be used in class.

The initiative would also ban any material encouraging or discouraging firearms possession or purchase.

"A person does not have to support firearms ownership to recognize that there is always

the possibility that a child might encounter a firearm in an unsupervised setting," Kevin Starrett, founder of the Oregon Firearms Federation, said in an email. "We want to make sure that young people have every tool to stay safe in such a situation. It seems obvious that a child who has had the opportunity to learn how to respond to this kind of event will be safer."

"We believe denying young people this knowledge is irresponsible."

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Pamplin Media Group

Gun rights advocates have filed an initiative petition to make firearms safety instruction mandatory in the sixth grade in Oregon public schools.