

IN BRIEF

Olympia man drowns off Cape Disappointment

LONG BEACH, Wash. — A 23-year-old man from the Olympia area drowned after being swept into the ocean at Benson Beach inside Cape Disappointment State Park on Saturday.

A 911 call was received by the Pacific County Communications Center at about 4:20 p.m. regarding a person in distress in the ocean waters off of Benson Beach.

Numerous agencies responded to the call, including South Pacific County Technical Rescue watercraft, a Long Beach Fire Department truck and a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter and rescue boats, as well as ambulances.

A jet ski was launched into the water at 4:46 p.m. from the Beards Hollow area, and the body was removed from the water at Benson Beach 10 minutes later, according to Cape Disappointment State Park Ranger Derek Thompson.

Third virus death reported in Pacific County

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — Pacific County Health and Human Services received confirmation Tuesday that a Pacific County resident who tested positive for COVID-19 has died as a result of the virus.

Due to age and underlying conditions, the individual was considered high risk.

This is the third COVID-19 death attributed to Pacific County.

“Public health officials, including the public health nurse for this case, Lori Craig Ashley, would like to extend heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of this individual during this time of loss,” the county said in a press release Tuesday evening.

The county reported 60 virus cases as of Monday.

— Chinook Observer

Seaside firefighters have close call in California

SEASIDE — Firefighters from Seaside in the thick of California wildfires survived a close call Saturday morning when a tree hit their brush truck while patrolling the fireline.

The truck was in motion and all three crew members were inside, Fire Chief Joey Daniels said.

The truck’s light bar “probably saved us from injury and prevented the tree from going through the cab roof,” Seaside firefighter Katie Bulleset said.

The brush truck is out of service and under damage assessment, but the Seaside crew continues to work with the rest of the 17 member Clatsop County Task Force to assist with firefighting efforts on a fire near Sonoma Lake, northwest of Santa Rosa.

Cal Fire asked to have another vehicle sent down from Clatsop County, City Manager Mark Winstanley said.

“Two other firefighters drove that vehicle down to California overnight then turned around and came back,” he said. “Because they’re not currently assigned to the fire, they drove down a vehicle so that vehicle could be replaced.

“Not only do we have firemen that are down there, but we have firemen who are willing to drive all the way to California and back just to make sure they have the right equipment.”

Seaside park district fills board vacancies

SEASIDE — Two new board members took the oath of office at the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District’s meeting earlier this month.

Celeste Bodner and Erika Marshall, who participated remotely, joined board members Katharine Parker, Mike Hinton and Su Coddington to fill the board after the July resignations of former board president Jeremy Mills and board member John Chapman.

Bodner assumes Position 2 and Marshall Position 4. Both terms will expire next year.

Bodner is the founder and executive director of the Seaside-based FosterClub.

Marshall is interim director of global human resources for Mercy Corps.

— The Astorian

ON THE RECORD

Harassment

• Edward Frederick Gates, 41, of Astoria, was arrested Saturday on W. Marine Drive in Astoria for harassment.

Disorderly conduct

• Levi Trent Smith, 33, was arrested Monday on W. Marine Drive in Astoria for disorderly conduct in the second degree.

Misuse of 911

• Raymond Scott Behnoud, 48, of Astoria, was arrested Sunday in Astoria for misuse of 911.

DUII

• Robert John Harwager, 31, of Longview, Washington, was arrested Monday on Franklin Avenue and Marine Drive in Astoria for driving under the influence of intoxicants and reckless driving.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Sunset Empire Transportation District Board, 9 a.m., (electronic meeting).

theAstorian

Established July 1, 1873 (USPS 035-000)
Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com
MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number: 503-325-3211
Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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R.J. Marx/The Astorian

Members of the Seaside chapter of the American Association of University Women are shown at Seaside City Hall dressed in period clothing to celebrate 100 years of women’s suffrage.

Willapa: ‘Communication is the foundation of safety’

Continued from Page A1

Three new members were brought on board, all from Oregon, including Norm Stutznegger, the new board chairman.

The Observer made repeated attempts to speak with Marquis, who refused to set up a time to talk by phone. The newspaper sent questions by email to Marquis, who did not respond.

The newspaper also attempted to reach the agency’s board. Stutznegger did not respond to the Observer’s emails.

New model of care

Willapa Behavioral Health is a nonprofit organization that began operating in Pacific County in 1986. The agency provides mental health services, substance use disorder treatment and, in 2019, began offering psychiatrically sensitive primary care.

To lead the new model, Marquis hired Cundiff as a primary care physician.

To help people understand what he does, Cundiff asks them to remember a time when they were in severe pain. Then, he asks them to remember how it felt when they were told the pain was not life-threatening. He poses the question, how did that change how they thought about the pain?

Every physical pain comes with a mental and emotional interpretation, which is different for every person, Cundiff said. What his model of primary care did was treat physical symptoms, in consultation with mental health counselors and psychiatrists.

Not all of his patients sought treatment for mental health-related physical concerns, Cundiff said. But the ones who did often had past traumas. Many were nervous about seeing a new provider. This meant initial visits often took time, Cundiff said. It could take up to a half hour for patients to feel comfortable with Cundiff, and even longer for them to open up about their physical concerns, he said.

When Cundiff began working at Willapa Behavioral Health, he scheduled new patients for two-hour appointments and booked 30-minute follow-up appointments. This gave him time to listen to his patients. However, insurance doesn’t reward doctors who take their time.

“Communication is the foundation of safety, and nobody pays for it,” Cundiff said.

In July, Cundiff said, Marquis demanded he shorten his appointments. New patient appointments would be 30 minutes, and follow-ups would be no more than 15 minutes. Cundiff said he did not want to shorten appoint-

ments. Marquis asked him to try it for a day and, without consulting Cundiff, ordered the appointment times changed, Cundiff said.

Cundiff refused to see patients under the new appointment times.

“I was terrified,” Cundiff said in an interview with the Observer. “We weren’t ready for safe care at that speed. We also weren’t ready to deliver a quality patient experience at that speed.”

The 15-minute appointment is not unusual in a primary care setting. The federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services reimburse a primary care doctor the same for a 10-minute visit as they do for a 25-minute visit, according to the 2019 Medicare physician fee schedule. It is more profitable for a doctor to see three patients for 10 minutes each than one patient for a 30-minute visit. Many private insurers mimic this model.

‘WE’RE A HOUSE OF CARDS, WE’RE NOT ON A SOLID FOUNDATION.’

Anonymous Willapa Behavioral Health employee

But Cundiff wasn’t supposed to be operating under a normal primary care model, he said. Willapa Behavioral Health was trying something new. At minimum, it required Cundiff to take more time with patients.

“The quality of the patient’s experience is a foundation for effective care,” Cundiff said. “We can’t help patients much unless they trust us. Patients won’t trust us if they don’t feel cared for. That is important for every patient, and it’s especially important for patients who come to us traumatized and scared.”

Cundiff continues to worry about his patients, he said. Because of how his termination was handled, he said, there wasn’t time to give his patients adequate notice of the change in care.

Cundiff’s contract was set to expire next July, according to a copy of the contract he provided to the Observer. In the contract, it does establish a productivity requirement for Cundiff of 60% billable hours with clients. In Marquis’ email terminating his contract, Marquis mentioned an alternative model was presented to Cundiff for a flat-fee reimbursement per patient. This alternative, Cundiff believed, would have made him an island in the agency, working without the collaboration of the mental health providers.

Cundiff didn’t believe the alternative was offered in good faith. He lost trust in Marquis, he said. Cundiff

also offered his own alternative, which would have reduced his salary until primary care became profitable. Marquis did not accept this proposal.

Profit pressure

Prior to Marquis joining the organization, Willapa’s finances appeared stable, according to IRS filings. The agency showed an average net revenue of about \$200,000 for the years 2015 and 2016.

Marquis joined the agency in July 2017. That year, net revenue dropped to \$35,000. In 2018, Marquis’ first full year as the agency’s CEO, the agency had a net loss of \$100,000.

When Marquis joined the agency, he expanded services, opened new locations and hired more staff. IRS filings show in 2016 the agency had 66 employees. By 2018, the agency employed 84 people.

familiar with the situation.

Marquis did eventually accept a scaled down operation of mobile outreach. He rented an RV and a staff member went around the community signing people up for Medicaid.

“He has good ideas, he just doesn’t get how to do the follow-through appropriately,” the employee said. “And he doesn’t include the people who would know how to do it appropriately.”

Low morale for some

The former and current employees who volunteered information about what it was like to work for Willapa Behavioral Health under Marquis acknowledged there are some employees who do not feel strongly about removing the CEO. There is a lot of turnover at the agency, they said. Many people have not “marinated” in the place long enough to be concerned about his leadership, one employee said.

However, in 10 separate interviews, each reported a similar pattern of bullying and unpredictable behavior by Marquis.

Several reported seeing co-workers leave in tears after being confronted by Marquis. Sometimes these confrontations would happen in front of the employee’s peers. One employee said the best way to describe Marquis’ body language when he got angry was “seething.” One employee said Marquis would later apologize, but would excuse his behavior by saying his anxiety got the better of him.

Several of the employees had more than 10 years of experience in the behavioral health field. These employees said they’d never been treated the way Marquis treats them.

Every employee who spoke to the newspaper stressed how much they enjoyed their work. One called the work they do essential to the community.

Because of how essential it is, one employee said it is concerning that Marquis doesn’t focus on details and is placing the agency in a precarious position.

“We’re a house of cards, we’re not on a solid foundation,” the employee said.

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