

IN BRIEF

South Jetty work to close observation tower

Work on the South Jetty will temporarily close access to the observation tower in Fort Stevens State Park's Lot C beginning April 19.

The heavy equipment being used to repair the jetty near the tower poses a public safety risk, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is tasked with maintaining the jetty systems at the mouth of the Columbia River.

A portion of the Oregon Coast Trail that begins at the jetty and runs past the observation tower will also be closed as work continues landward. However, people can still access the trail from the state park's Lot B farther south.

Bathrooms at Lot C, the lot that provides access to South Jetty and the observation tower, will remain open.

The Columbia River jetty system, constructed between 1885 and 1939, allows for safer passage for vessels moving between the ocean and the river.

Trail Blazers, Moda Health assist Violet LaPlante Park

Every assist by the Portland Trail Blazers basketball team in the 2020-21 regular season means \$20 toward the effort to install an all-abilities playground at Violet LaPlante Park in Astoria.

The Moda Assist Program, a health initiative run by the basketball team and insurer Moda Health, chose the Astoria park over projects in St. Helens and Sandy after a yearlong voting campaign. The Trail Blazers had amassed 1,019 assists as of Wednesday with 22 games to go.

"Violet LaPlante Park is long overdue for new playground equipment to replace the few, very old items there now," Mayor Bruce Jones said in a statement. "This upgrade will offer a tremendous benefit to local families. I thank the Moda and Trail Blazers organizations for their generosity. I can't wait to see kids enjoying the new playground equipment."

The city campaigned for the park because of its centralized location for residents in eastern neighborhoods like Alderbrook, Uppertown and the Emerald Heights Apartments. The Parks and Recreation Department plans to install a natural-themed climbing and play system.

"Through this trying time during which we all have been reminded of the critical role that access to the outdoors plays in building healthy communities, we're reminded that playgrounds are key contributors to children's emotional and physical health," Dr. William Johnson, president of Moda Health, said in the statement.

After the regular season ends in May, the city will begin design and construction planning based on the funds available. The playground is anticipated to break ground in the fall and open in January.

— *The Astorian*

DEATHS

April 6, 2021

COMO, William Lee Jr., 64, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

April 5, 2021

KNUTINEN, Lee E., 81, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Ocean View

Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

WESTERLUND, Kay Marie, 63, of Knappa, died in Knappa. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

DUI

Seth Timothy Morgan, 26, of Astoria, was arrested Monday for driving under the influence of intoxicants, reckless driving, menacing, disorderly conduct in the second degree and unlawful use of a stun gun. An officer stopped Morgan at about 7:50 p.m. near W. Marine Drive and Hume Ave-

nue after observing him drive recklessly and lose control of his vehicle. While stopped, someone in the parking lot of the Astoria Mini Mart began heckling Morgan. Later, when the person drove out of the parking lot, Morgan reportedly ran toward the vehicle and activated a stun gun. The officer pulled his gun and restrained Morgan.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Seaside Civic and Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., Seaside Civic and Convention Center, 415 First Ave.
Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).
Warrenton Planning Commission, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

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Jury acquits former Chinook man accused of murder in second trial

By GARRETT ANDREWS
The Bulletin

REDMOND — First, he was called an accused murderer. Then, a convicted murderer and state prison inmate working on a life sentence.

On Monday, Luke Anton Wirkkala learned he'd earned a new title.

Free man.

"I'm just trying to take it all in," Wirkkala said minutes after emerging from the Deschutes County jail, a smile overtaking his face. "It feels a little surreal. Eight long years."

A half-hour earlier, a jury found Wirkkala, 40, not guilty in the death of David Andrew Ryder, a houseguest Wirkkala had shot at close range with a pump-action shotgun in 2013. Jurors also acquitted Wirkkala on lesser counts of first-degree manslaughter and second-degree manslaughter. They reached all verdicts by votes of 10 to 2.

Wirkkala is from Chinook, Washington, and moved to Bend in 2012.

It was Wirkkala's second murder trial for Ryder's death — he was convicted in 2014, but the Oregon Court of Appeals ordered a retrial because the original jury heard portions of a police interview after Wirkkala had invoked his right to an attorney.

The retrial in a makeshift courtroom at the Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center was a dry and, at times, emotional four-week affair.

The defense argued Wirkkala acted in self-defense when he shot Ryder.

The state, represented by the Oregon Department of Justice, asked jurors to convict because Wirkkala's account, as prosecutor Kristen Hoffmeyer said repeatedly, "simply could not be believed."

All 12 jurors declined requests to explain their votes. One said only the state hadn't made its case.

Representatives of Ryder's family also declined to comment.

Many of the witnesses were back from the first trial and offered, in large part, the same testimony, the facts of the case remaining essentially the same.

Wirkkala and Ryder were friends, though not good friends, having only hung out a handful of times. Wirk-



Garrett Andrews/The Bulletin

Luke Wirkkala greets supporters on Monday outside the Deschutes County jail.

'I TOLD MYSELF IF I DIDN'T COME OUT OF THIS EXPERIENCE A BETTER PERSON THAN WHEN I WENT IN, THEN I'VE FAILED. I FEEL LIKE I'VE BECOME A STRONGER PERSON BECAUSE OF THIS. AND I'LL NEVER TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED, THAT'S FOR ABSOLUTE SURE.'

Luke Wirkkala

kala and his then-girlfriend tried to wrangle friends to attend a Super Bowl party at the Hideaway Tavern in Bend, but in the end, everyone backed out except Ryder.

Wirkkala testified he drank throughout that day — before and throughout the game and then back at his house, where he and Ryder drank a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer.

Wirkkala's girlfriend, her son and her nephew went to bed between 10 and 10:30 p.m. Around 2:30 a.m. they were awoken by a shotgun blast in the living room.

Police arrived to find Ryder dead on the floor inside, Wirkkala sobbing nearby.

Then-Deschutes County District Attorney Patrick Flaherty charged Wirkkala with murder, and the case went to trial in 2014.

Wirkkala always said he

awoke that night to Ryder sexually assaulting him. He retrieved his shotgun from his bedroom, returned to the living room and ordered Ryder to leave. Wirkkala said he racked a shell to show Ryder he was serious but instead a "twisted smirk" crossed Ryder's face and he charged Wirkkala, forcing him to fire.

The original jury did not accept that explanation and voted to convict. In 2018, the Court of Appeals vacated his conviction.

It's customary for courtroom attendees to stand when a jury enters and exits a courtroom. On Monday, after Deschutes County Circuit Judge Randy Miller excused the jury from service, Wirkkala was first to stand. He steepled his fingers before his chest and rocked his hands back and forth, as if saying "thank you."

Miller told the onetime

defendant: "Mr. Wirkkala, you are free to go."

From there, guards took Wirkkala from Redmond back to the Deschutes County jail in Bend. They wheeled out a tub containing Wirkkala's belongings, including the flip phone seized when he was arrested in 2013.

Around a dozen well-wishers were there to greet him and take pictures. Many had supported him through his first trial. The party intended to caravan to Portland, where Wirkkala hoped to eat a "real" meal for dinner after years of jail food.

As for what's after that, Wirkkala said, "life begins at 40." He'd like to resume writing and photography, which he pursued prior to his conviction. He hopes to publish a book he started in prison about his experience being wrongfully accused.

He thanked God, his family and friends who supported him, his attorneys Thad Betz and Joel Wirtz, and the jury.

He said that while locked up, he committed to pursuing positive growth.

"I told myself if I didn't come out of this experience a better person than when I went in, then I've failed," he said. "I feel like I've become a stronger person because of this. And I'll never take anything for granted, that's for absolute sure."

Pesticide use falls but harms pollinators more

By SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

American farmers are using smaller amounts of better targeted pesticides, but these are harming pollinators, aquatic insects and some plants far more than decades ago, a new study finds.

Toxicity levels have more than doubled since 2005 for important species, including honeybees, mayflies and buttercup flowers, as the country switched to a new generation of pesticides. But dangerous chemical levels in birds and mammals have plummeted at the same time, according to a paper this month in the journal *Science*.

"The bottom line is that these pesticides, once believed to be relatively benign and so short-lived that they would not damage ecosystems, are anything but," said Dr. Lynn Goldman, a former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assistant administrator for toxic substances who wasn't part of the study and is now dean of George Washington University's school of public health.

German scientists examined 381 pesticides used in the United States between 1992 and 2016, combining EPA data that calculates toxic dosage effects for eight types of animals and plants with U.S. Geological Survey data on how much of the chemi-



Associated Press

A helicopter prepares to apply pesticides.

cals were used year by year for dozens of agricultural crops. The scientists calculated a new measurement they call total applied toxicity for the eight groupings of species and trends over time.

"Very often politicians, media, scientists just talk about amounts. They always argue, 'OK, the amount pesticides we use is reduced so things are getting better' and this is not necessarily true," said lead author Ralf Schulz, a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Kolenz-Landau. "It's sometimes true, but not always."

Industry keeps developing new pesticides and "very often these new compounds are more toxic," Schulz said. They include neonicot-

inoids, which have been connected to one of the many causes of dwindling honeybee numbers.

The newer pesticides are aimed more toward animals without backbones to spare birds and mammals, but this means insects such as pollinators get poisoned, Schulz said.

The same goes for some land plants and for aquatic invertebrates including dragonflies and mayflies, which birds and mammals eat, he said, adding that future studies should look at the harm higher up the food chain.

Chris Novak, president of the pesticide industry group CropLife America, said in an email that "it is critical to note that the study found

great reductions in acute toxicity have been achieved for humans and mammals over the past few decades."

Novak noted pesticides go through extensive studies and "only one in 10,000 discoveries make the 11-year journey from the lab to the market."

It's not surprising that newer generations of pesticides generally are more harmful to insects, which are undergoing a massive decline for many reasons, said University of Connecticut entomologist David Wagner, who wasn't part of the study. But Wagner said this newest research doesn't provide data needed to show "that pesticides are the major driver of insect declines."