

IN BRIEF

Astoria man charged in death of Salem woman

SALEM — An Astoria man is facing charges in connection with the murder of a Salem woman who went missing in March.

Gustavo Ochoa-Valadez was arrested and is being held without bail at the Marion County Jail in the death of 42-year-old Tonna Marie Purnell, The Statesman Journal reported.

Ochoa-Valadez, 35, was arraigned earlier this month on murder, kidnapping and unlawful use of a firearm charges.

The alleged crimes occurred on or about March 29 in Dayton and Salem, according to a probable cause statement and court records.

— Associated Press

Theater damaged by gunfire in Seaside

SEASIDE — Shots fired downtown on Thursday night damaged a high window at the Times Theatre & Public House on Broadway but did not injure anyone inside.

People reported hearing gunfire around 10 p.m. near S. Columbia Street and Avenue A.

People can call Sgt. Josh Gregory at 503-738-6311 to report information or provide surveillance video that captured the area or incident.

Federal grants to help rural fire departments

Rural fire departments in Clatsop County will receive more than \$1.2 million in federal grants to buy new tools and resources that are in compliance with the National Fire Protection Association, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici announced.

Warrenton will receive \$160,952. Knappa will receive \$200,000. Cannon Beach will receive grants of \$574,571 and \$46,380. Hamlet will receive grants of \$268,571 and \$44,761.

The money comes from the Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program, part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

County expands virus testing after getting more supplies

People who have been in quarantine for COVID-19 exposure for a week can now schedule a virus test from the Clatsop County Public Health Department.

A negative result will allow them to return to activities such as work or school.

The county has been focusing testing supplies on people showing symptoms. The new option is made possible by an increase in supplies from the state.

Drive-thru testing is available at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center in Warrenton from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday.

— The Astorian

DEATHS

Sept. 22, 2021
SIEWERT, William, 70, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements. Please sign the online obituary at hughesransom.com/obituaries.

Sept. 21, 2021
GROSHONG, Spencer, 33, of Tillamook, died in Tillamook. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

TAYLOR, Mary Kay, 70, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

Sept. 18, 2021
HALBROOK, Harvey, 59, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

Sept. 20, 2021
SVIDISH, Geoffrey, 68, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIALS

Sunday, Oct. 3
FORNEY, Norman R. Jr. — Celebration of life at 1 p.m., Warrenton Community Center, 170 S.W. Third St. in Warrenton.

ON THE RECORD

DUII
• Camden R. Morey, 24, of Warrenton, was arrested on Wednesday on E. Harbor Drive in Warrenton for driving under the influence of intoxicants and reckless driving.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY
Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board, 5:15 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside.
Astoria Planning Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.
Seaside Airport Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.
Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.
Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., special meeting, (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:
800-781-3214
Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

ADVERTISING OWNERSHIP
All advertising copy and illustrations
prepared by The Astorian become the
property of The Astorian and may not
be reproduced for any use without
explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT ©
Entire contents © Copyright,
2021 by The Astorian.

Printed on
recycled paper

Subscription rates
Effective January 12, 2021

MAIL

EZpay (per month).....\$10.75
13 weeks in advance.....\$37.00
26 weeks in advance.....\$71.00
52 weeks in advance.....\$135.00

DIGITAL

EZpay (per month).....\$8.25



Don Morris, of Gresham, digs for razor clams this month in Seaview. Luke Whittaker/Chinook Observer

Ambulance, fire service strained as overcrowded hospitals cause delays

By TOM BANSE
Northwest News Network

Overcrowded hospitals are having ripple effects in the Northwest — some you could predict and some which are a little more startling. Take for example a fire that gutted a house in Ocean Shores, expensive airlifts from Leavenworth, Washington, and slow response times for ambulance transports in Portland.

There is no private ambulance service in coastal Grays Harbor County. So, when someone in Ocean Shores calls 911 with cardiac symptoms, a bad leg break or head injury, the fire department takes them to the hospital. Firefighter and emergency medical technician Kara McDermott said typically, the closest available hospital is about 30 minutes away in Aberdeen.

“From the time we get dispatched to the time we roll our apparatus back into the bay, it’d be about two hours,” McDermott said. “That means the time to respond, the time on scene, the time it takes to transport them to the hospital.”

But starting early this summer, the close-by hospitals in the county would routinely be “on divert.” That means the emergency room staff tells incoming ambulances to find someplace else to go because they cannot accommodate anymore patients aside from last-gasp traumas.

“If we have to travel farther afield — we have to go to Elma, we have to go to Olympia — the transport times balloon significantly, which means we have a crew and an apparatus out of the city for three, four, five, even six hours,” McDermott explained with obvious frustration in her voice.

One evening in June, all the firefighters on duty in Ocean Shores were stuck on ambulance trips out of town. Then a fire broke out in a two-story house.

“That is just our worst nightmare,” McDermott said. “There was a sort of a cobbled-together response, but not the quick, efficient professional response that we train and take so much pride in.”

Ocean Shores Fire Chief Mike Thuirer described how he was left to cover the city alone when the alarm sounded. Thuirer enlisted a retired chief to drive one fire truck with him to the scene, where they found a “fully involved” house fire. Several off-duty Ocean Shores firefighters rushed back to the station to bring a second fire truck about ten minutes later. When further help eventually came from a neighboring rural fire district, the responders were able to contain the blaze to the house in which it started.

Thuirer said the homeowners were away at the time, but their two dogs perished from smoke inhalation,



A new accessory in Ocean Shores ambulances is a telephone tree of distant hospital emergency rooms for Kara McDermott to dial if her rig is turned away in nearby Aberdeen.

‘AS WE’RE DOING A GREAT JOB OF FINDING BEDS ACROSS THE STATE FOR PATIENTS, IT’S PUTTING MORE OF A STRAIN ON THE TRANSPORT RESOURCES. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THEY ARE NOT AS AVAILABLE.’

Diane Blake | Cascade Medical Center CEO

one at the scene and one at a pet hospital later.

This predicament is not limited to the Washington state coast. Ambulance crews across the Pacific Northwest are being stretched by longer trips and diversions. The reasons given are similar everywhere: it’s trickle-down from hospitals being full or short on nurses and coping with too many COVID-19 patients.

In July, Thurston County, Washington, notified residents to be prepared for potentially lengthy waits for non-critical ambulance transports. Medic units were being held up at the emergency departments for long durations awaiting a bed to become available. The resulting backlog of patient offloads prevented ambulances from returning to service promptly for new 911 calls.

“We’re not out of the woods yet,” Thurston County Medic One ALS Program Manager Ben Miller-Todd said after noting recent improvement in the availability of ambulances. He said the county’s primary hospital had streamlined some processes to speed up throughput in the emergency room, which helped. In addition, more staff on the ambulance side were hired.

The same ambulance turnaround delays are now cropping up in the Portland region. In a statement, private ambulance company AMR said its crews are often being kept waiting with their patients at emergency room doors. AMR Operations Manager for Multnomah County Rob McDonald said this is happening multiple times per

day because of “an unprecedented number of patients” hospitals are receiving.

In Leavenworth, the scarcity of ambulances has had costly consequences for families and their insurers when patients needed to be transferred to Seattle for higher level care.

“Twice in (early September) we’ve actually had to transport patients by air,” said Cascade Medical Center CEO Diane Blake. “Typically, air transport is reserved for those really most urgent, dire cases. These weren’t that, but we didn’t have ground transport.”

Blake added that such helicopter airlifts are “of course, really expensive” and not what the service is meant for. She attributed the shortage in ground transport to ambulances driving long distances to transfer patients, say from Leavenworth to Spokane instead of to the much closer Wenatchee hospital, which is full.

“As we’re doing a great job of finding beds across the state for patients, it’s putting more of a strain on the transport resources. There are times when they are not as available,” Blake said.

People searching for solutions are focusing at the beginning of the trickle-down chain. So said Dr. Steve Mitchell, who monitors hospital capacity statewide at the Washington Medical Coordi-

nation Center in Seattle.

“Our opinion has been the best way to get those ambulances back in the streets is to try to offload all of the hospitals which are severely impacted,” Mitchell said.

Mitchell said one way his coordination center is trying to reduce the overload is by helping overburdened hospitals more quickly move patients who are suitable to receive further treatment in the community at places such as long-term care facilities. Separately, labor unions for nurses said hospital management should consider retention bonuses and better pay for long hours to ensure adequate caregiver staffing.

Mitchell also echoed the familiar guidance that everyone can do their part to help by continuing to wear their mask and get vaccinated, if not already.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee sent a letter to the federal government last week requesting 1,200 Defense Department clinical and hospital support personnel be sent to Washington state to temporarily shore up staffing in overwhelmed medical centers. The governor’s spokesman said the state had not yet received a response.

During a briefing hosted by the Washington State Hospital Association on Monday, Mitchell said he thought the stress on the medical system was easing slightly after observing a modest dip in new hospitalizations, but that conditions still posed a significant problem especially along the border with Idaho.

The Oregon House Health Care Committee had scheduled a meeting on Thursday to discuss the health care “workforce crisis” with testimony to be provided by the Oregon Nurses Association and Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems.

WANTED

Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber

Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA

Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500