

Lawsuit: ‘I tried doing it the right way, and I was blown off’

Continued from Page A1

According to Lenz's complaint, filed in Circuit Court in December, she had reached a "breaking point" in fall 2018 with a male supervisor who "subjected her to constant harassment on the basis of her gender."

"This occurred on every single call where they both responded, which happened on at least a weekly basis," the complaint said. He also harassed her "in front of

(fire district) cadets, volunteers, and other officers. None of the witnesses ever intervened."

The supervisor allegedly called her demeaning and sexist names, which included references to her weight. He allegedly voiced the view, to both Lenz and a female colleague, that women "do not belong in the fire service, that women are too stupid, and that women cannot do the job like men can," the complaint said.

According to both the state report and the complaint, Lenz repeatedly told then-Chief Paul Olheiser about her supervisor's behavior, but the chief did not take corrective action. Meanwhile, Lenz's supervisor did not let up. At one point, the fire district brought in an attorney to discuss topics like harassment, reporting and retaliation with Lenz's supervisor, Olheiser, the board and volunteers, the complaint said, but the board did not attend.

Lenz said in an interview with The Astorian that she sought help through the channels available to her at the fire district. "I tried doing it the right way, and I was blown off," she said.

In addition, Lenz said she was denied opportunities for career advancement that were extended to men, a claim backed up by the state report.

According to fire district policy, Lenz should have been promoted to the rank of lieutenant when she became

an emergency medical services officer in 2005. All of Knappa's male officers had received rankings.

Lenz requested an executive session with the fire district's board in March 2019 to discuss her ongoing concerns about safety issues and her supervisor's behavior. During a heated exchange between Lenz and Olheiser, the complaint said, the chief said he would punish her for her role in dysfunction that allegedly occurred when Knappa crew

were deployed to the Camp fire in Paradise, California, in 2018.

The fire district soon suspended Lenz from conflagration fires, then replaced her as emergency medical services officer without notifying her, the Bureau of Labor and Industries report said.

Fire Chief Kurt Donaldson, who stepped into the role when Olheiser retired in 2019, said the fire district does not comment on pending litigation.

COVID-19: ‘I want to thank everybody for everything that they have done’

Continued from Page A1

Grateful

There's a lot to be grateful for, Thompson said. She can walk a little bit and can dress herself. And she has hope that her health will improve with time.

"That experience with COVID, that actually changed my life for the better," Thompson said. "I have a better outlook on certain things, and I always try to keep a positive attitude."

Thompson, who is 72 years old, was discharged from Providence Seaside on Dec. 15 after several months of treatment for the virus. She exited the hospital in "Rocky" themed attire, wearing boxing gloves, an American flag and a nasal cannula.

The hospital staff lined up and clapped, some teary-eyed, as they said goodbye to the long-haul COVID patient.

Two days later, Thompson sat at home after her nurse left for the evening. Her cat, "Amara," which will have her 22nd birthday in March, sat on Thompson's lap as she told her story over the phone.

"She just won't leave me alone. She has to sleep on me and keep touching me to make sure I'm still there," Thompson said.

Being back home has been an adjustment. When she first arrived, her husband, her son and a neighbor had to carry her wheelchair up the stairs to the front door. They're looking for first-floor apartments, but finding few options.

She can't make dinner anymore, and for now has resigned to observing and critiquing her husband's work in the kitchen.

"I'm doing OK. It's time-consuming, that's what healing is," Thompson said. Her statements were sometimes punctuated by brief coughing fits.

Thompson's daughter, Carol Dickeson, said she is amazed her mom got through her battle with COVID.

"She had one foot in the grave there, and that scared us," Dickeson said.

She talked to the hospital daily for updates on her mom, calling from her home in Colorado.

"Just the thought of los-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Gigi Thompson was hospitalized for 122 days with COVID-19-related health issues.

'THERE'S STILL THINGS THAT I WANT TO DO, AND THINGS I WANT TO SEE. I'VE BEEN A FISH FILLETER FOR OVER 40 YEARS. I DID A LITTLE BIT OF LOGGING FOR THREE YEARS, AND RAISED MY CHILDREN BEFORE ALL THAT. LIFE HAS BEEN ALRIGHT, YOU KNOW, IT'S LIKE A ROLLER COASTER.'

Gigi Thompson | was hospitalized for 122 days with COVID-19-related health issues

ing her? Oh man, that was — it really, really scared me," Dickeson said. "She's a feisty woman. She's very, very feisty and she's a fighter. She won't let nothing keep her down."

Thompson worked in the fishing industry her whole life, from shrimp picking in Gold Beach to Pacific Seafood in Warrenton, and up to Alaska for a time. She retired in her 50s after an on-the-job shoulder injury while hauling 35-pound crab buckets.

Dickeson described her mom as selfless, and said she always had a place at her table for neighborhood kids. She said her fried chicken recipe was so good that her siblings would ask her to make extra just so they could share it at school.

"With my mom, she's always ..." Dickeson said,

before getting emotional. "There's not enough time to say enough good about my mom. She always — always — is looking to help other people."

A struggle to get vaccinated

Prior to her hospitalization, Dickeson and her siblings had struggled to convince their mom to get vaccinated.

"Now that she's had this COVID, and went face to face with that. She's taking it seriously now," Dickeson said. "So I'm glad she went through this to realize that it's not funny or anything, and I'm glad that she survived it. I'm happy that my mom's still with us, and we get to put up with her wittiness."

Now Thompson can assure them that she received

two vaccine doses during her stay at Seaside, having changed her mind after dealing with the virus firsthand. She plans on getting the booster as soon as she is eligible.

"I thought I would never get it, and boy was I wrong. It smacked me down like nothing. And I'm glad I got those two shots," Thompson said.

Thompson is a mother of eight, including two stepchildren and an adopted daughter. She described the support of her family and her faith as her strengths.

"With my strength in the Lord, and my kids and my husband, we all got together. And so many people — people I didn't even know — were texting my phone and saying, 'God bless you Gigi. We're so happy you made it. You've been through the wringer.' And I said, 'I have literally been at hell's door and came back,'" she said.

She thanked the hospital staff for their work and said that she's glad to be alive.

"There's still things that I want to do, and things I want to see. I've been a fish filleter for over 40 years. I did a little bit of logging for three years, and raised my children before all that. Life has been alright, you know, it's like a roller coaster," she said. "I'm here and I'm so grateful that I am here, and I want to thank everybody for everything that they have done."

Salmon: If conditions hold, it could boost high returns

Continued from Page A1

This year, it's mostly green lights all the way down the list — a far cry from the sea of red researchers and fishery managers saw beginning in 2014 when a marine heat wave struck the West Coast. The heat wave, known as "the Blob," threw the ecosystem into flux for several years. West Coast fisheries weathered large and persistent harmful algal blooms and saw warm-water species in new places, as well as longer-term impacts on salmon returns.

Now researchers say they are cautiously optimistic

about the outlook in the coming months.

The last time they saw ocean conditions this productive was in 2008. That year was the most productive year in the 24 years ocean condition information has been collected for the indicators list — 2021 is next in line.

But while the green lights on the list this year translate to good feeding conditions for species like salmon, there are some caveats.

Jennifer Fisher, a faculty research assistant with NOAA Fisheries, said the ocean environment is highly variable and the relationship between the indicators on

the list and salmon can shift over time. With a changing climate it is difficult to know what will hold, she added. Nor does the list capture all of the processes that could impact salmon survival.

"The ocean indicators might point towards good feeding conditions for juvenile salmon," Fisher said, "but these conditions might also be good for predators."

Still, if current conditions hold, it could boost high returns of salmon in the years to come.

In the near term, Fisher and others will be watching winter ocean conditions.

"Winter storms are import-

ant for mixing the upper ocean and setting the stage for larval fish and zooplankton development the following spring," Fisher said.

La Nina conditions are forecast to remain during the winter and into the spring. The climate pattern typically makes for colder waters in the Pacific Ocean, so cool, productive conditions are likely to continue.

"However," Fisher said, "things can change, so it is good to remain watchful and cautious."

This story is part of a collaboration between The Astorian and Coast Community Radio.

School: ‘We wish the new owner great success in their development’

Continued from Page A1

the property," said Mark Popkin, a real estate agent representing the buyers.

At the school district's December meeting, Brian Taylor, the school board chairman, said the sale comes after almost three years on the market. The high school and other district schools closed and were put up for sale as the school district built a new, bond-financed campus outside the tsunami inundation zone.

"We're very excited," Taylor said in granting Superintendent Susan Penrod the authority to negotiate and execute the sale.

"We are happy to complete the sale of the district's former high school," Penrod said. "We wish the new owner great success in their development of the property."

The 102,000-square-foot high school building sits on 12 acres on N. Holladay Drive. The medium-density single-family zone allows 10 homes per acre, with some multifamily homes. Outright permitted uses for the property include homes, gardens, family

care, residential home care and day care, among others. Churches, schools, parks, utilities and government buildings are allowed subject to a conditional use permit.

Three additional ocean view parcels with about 32,500 square feet zoned for medium-density residential are located on N. Holladay Drive by the estuary. The school district authorized a purchase once before, in 2020, but the deal didn't go through.

In 2021, the city received several acres at the north end of the former high school campus, referred to as the "North 40." The land will remain fields and parkland.

"We have moved all school materials and equipment out of the building," Penrod said. "The buyer purchased the remaining materials."

City Planning Director Kevin Cupples said earlier this month that there have been no plans submitted yet for development of the high school property. A prior interested party had discussed a development plan, but "that concept is dead as far as I know," he said.

White: ‘Every single fire department needs volunteers’

Continued from Page A1

in recent memory, Chief Marc Reckmann said. The fire district hopes to hire one with the revenue from the food tax that voters narrowly approved in fall.

Earlier this month, White and her crew responded to an electrical fire at a downtown business. An employee had seen the flames and extinguished them, containing the fire to the code-violating multiplug outlet, which had melted and blackened. The circuit had been overloaded by a space heater.

"It frustrated me, it disappointed me, and it made me scared all at the same time," she said, imagining the danger to employees and customers.

White's job, one of four administrative positions, is funded by a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Her role, which involves attracting new volunteers and keeping them, is becoming crucial at fire departments nationwide as fewer volunteers sign up. Roughly 80% of fire departments are either all-volunteer or mostly volunteer, according to 2018 figures from the National Fire Protection Association.

White has to learn what motivates her recruits, what

they need in their lives to stay on. In her case, while she and T.J. felt a lifetime with the Marines was not conducive to having a family, the fire service is conducive to it, she said. They recently bought a house in Seaside, the town where White grew up. T.J., also a lieutenant, is the Cannon Beach department's emergency medical services coordinator.

"If people are thinking about volunteering, or they're intimidated by a fire department, don't be. Reach out to them ... Every single fire department needs volunteers," she said.

Many of Cannon Beach's volunteers arrive as young adults without much life experience. The 31-year-old White said the best part of her job involves working with the volunteers to help them grow, not just as firefighters, but as human beings.

"My goal is, if they leave here and they go and work for Portland Fire, some big company, they're better than when they came here. That's how I want them to leave," she said.

White has had recruits tell her, "My goal is to be better than you." In her eyes, that would be a win. "I'm like, 'I hope so. I really hope so,'" she said.

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