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Hope House to close

A place of counseling for children and families

By **ABBEY McDONALD**
The Astorian

In 1992, former school counselor Marian Soderberg was among a small group seeking resources for children dealing with grief and family separation. She picked up the phone to recruit Lutheran Community Services Northwest to the community.

Together, they eventually established Hope House in a donated space next door to Peace First Lutheran Church in Uppertown. Over three decades, it became a resource for children and families to get counseling, meet for supervised visits, get parental training and reconnect with each other.

The service will close by the end of June due to a lack of funding.

Lutheran Community Services Northwest will be using Hope House's network to establish its first Santa for Seniors program outside of Washington state.

"I'm a person who embraces change, but does not ignore the pain of separating from something you've known for such a long time," Soderberg said. "I am pleased that we're transitioning to the program for seniors."

'WE HAD 30 GREAT YEARS OF WORKING WITH KIDS AND FAMILIES, AND NOW WE'LL BE WORKING WITH SENIORS.'

David Duea | president and CEO of Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Hope House was previously funded by a combination of grants, trusts, community fundraisers and contracts with an annual budget of around \$300,000. This past year, it lost a third of its budget when state contracts were not renewed.

"The Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division contracted Hope House for enhanced visitation services for families touched by foster care. However, due to budget constraints we had to discontinue that partnership," Jake Sunderland, a spokesman for the department, said in an email to *The Astorian*.

"The Hope House was a valued partner in supporting families in the community and the Hope House helped families in Clatsop get strong and helped reunite children (experiencing) foster care with their families."

Soderberg said losing the ability to host in-person fundraisers and their annual banquet during the coronavirus pandemic also had an impact.

See Hope House, Page A6



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Judge Cindee Matyas is retiring after more than 15 years on the Circuit Court bench.

Judge Matyas left her mark with treatment court

Circuit Court judge to retire this month

By **ERICK BENGEL**
The Astorian

The young man had become a terror. He would slip into schizophrenic episodes, damage property, create traffic hazards. He was a familiar presence in Circuit Court.

"And we said, 'Hey, we need to start a mental health court — now,'" Judge Cindee Matyas recalled.

Founded by Matyas in 2009, the mental health court, now called treatment court, seeks to reduce recidivism and divert people from a life in the criminal justice system.

Matyas will retire this month after more than 15 years on the bench.

Gov. Kate Brown will appoint her replacement. The candidates are Senior Deputy District Attorney Scott McCracken, Astoria defense attorney Kirk Wintermute and Seaside attorney A.J. Wahl.

Elected in 2006, Matyas is serving her third six-year term. She will continue to cover the court until the vacancy is filled. The next election for the seat takes place in 2024.

Matyas presides over the mental

health treatment court and adult drug court. She also led the child support court, which has been suspended during the coronavirus pandemic.

Her treatment court is for offenders with chronic mental health issues — perhaps an illness or disorder, brain trauma or developmental disability — who don't qualify for involuntarily commitment. Drugs and alcohol may have induced or worsened their condition.

Participants attend weekly court hearings and work with treatment providers. A team counsels them on staying sober, taking medications, addressing their health, getting housed, looking for work, managing their finances, possibly pursuing their education and other recovery skills.

The idea had been on Matyas' mind since her first campaign. Other Oregon counties had set up mental health courts, and advocates had urged Matyas to start one.

Darla Aho, Matyas' judicial assistant, estimates that an average of four people graduate every year from treatment court.

Matyas is also involved in a statewide committee that looks at the intersection of behavioral health and criminal justice.

"We know her as a star in your

own community, but we as a state recognize her as a star in our statewide system," Martha Walters, the chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, said at the investiture this month for Circuit Court Judge Beau Peterson.

Hardest to shake off

Before becoming a Circuit Court judge, Matyas served as the county's chief deputy district attorney and as a Municipal Court judge. She also ran a private practice.

At the Circuit Court, Matyas has presided over some of the North Coast's most high-profile criminal cases.

In 2016, she sentenced Jessica Smith, the Goldendale, Washington, woman who drugged and drowned her toddler and slashed her older daughter at a Cannon Beach hotel. In 2019, she oversaw the trial of a couple who beat a Newport man to death, stole his RV and dumped his body off U.S. Highway 30.

The cases involving injuries and sex abuse — the ones where the victim is still alive — are the hardest to shake off. "Those are the tough ones," the judge said, "because that pain and suffering is right there."

See Matyas, Page A6

JUDGE CINDEE MATYAS IS KNOWN FOR HER KINDNESS AND PATIENCE. SHE SPEAKS WITH THE BRIGHT, ENCOURAGING TONE OF A SCHOOLTEACHER. SHE WANTS HER COURTROOM TO BE A COMFORTABLE SETTING FOR PEOPLE, VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS, TRAPPED IN FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT. SHE WANTS THEM TO FEEL SUPPORTED BY THE SYSTEM RATHER THAN RIPPED APART BY IT.



Gary Henley/The Astorian

Boomer Bjaranson, right, puts the tag on ex-Warrior Michael Davis in one of the recent Warrenton baseball alumni games.

Alumni game part of Bjaranson's love of baseball

An assistant coach in Warrenton

By **GARY HENLEY**
The Astorian

WARRENTON — He's been "Boomer" Bjaranson for so long and to so many people, his real first name — Ryan — has become more of a nickname.

"I've always gone by Boomer," said the 1993 Warrenton graduate and longtime assistant baseball coach at Warrenton High School. "If anyone yells, 'Ryan!' I wouldn't even look."

Bjaranson is in his 14th season as an assistant to Warrenton head coach Lennie Wolfe, and in the past served as an assistant boys basketball coach. "Boomer," and



the Bjaranson family in general, is well known in all circles of the community.

His current project — and one he's been in charge of for years, is organizing and running Warrenton's annual alumni baseball game, which is getting to be a big deal for the small town.

"I anticipate 20 to 30 guys showing up this year," Bjaranson said of the ninth alumni game, set for July 3 at the high school. "Last year was a smaller turnout, but I'm putting some pressure on people to come

this year. Michelle (Wolfe) will be doing her barbecue, all families and friends are welcome, and it will be Fourth of July weekend, so I'm hoping for a good turnout."

There's no charge for fans to attend the alumni game. A suggested \$20 donation for Warrenton graduates to play in the game goes to the Warrenton baseball summer program.

The event is "kind of established now, so people know about it," Bjaranson said. "But it's still a challenge for guys to overcome their fear of pulling a hamstring,

See Bjaranson, Page A6

