

Hope House: A small operation that had a sizable impact

Continued from Page A1

David Duea, the president and CEO of Lutheran Community Services Northwest, said they realized funding for Hope House would be unsustainable around six months ago.

“We were trying to hang on, and as we were doing our new budget cycle there was just no sustainable revenue coming in. And so we had to make the painful decision,” Duea said. “We had 30 great years of working with kids and families, and now we’ll be working with seniors.”

Hope House was a small operation, but had a sizable impact. Since 2018, it has hosted over 500 sessions of therapy and other services, including supervised parental visits with foster children.

“We’re trusting that those services to children and families will be picked up by other community members,” Duea said.

Sheryl Redburn, Hope House’s lead counselor and program manager, said the space allowed her to adjust her methods to each child. Kids could make art or play basketball to get more comfortable during sessions.

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Hope House has operated in a donated space next door to Peace First Lutheran Church.

we were like a miracle or anything, because we were always small, but I always felt excited about what we had because we could offer not just sitting there with a child but playing and doing. “We already have a hard time having enough counseling for kids here. Not like

and hope that there’s more in the community.”

Redburn said she’ll miss the family kinship placement program for people aging out of foster care. Working with Hope House, the foster youth would decide if they wanted to fully reconnect or just get access to names and family

medical history. The service would research their connections and vet them before making contact.

One client was excited to have found people to sit on her side of the aisle during her wedding, Redburn said.

Hope House will be spending the rest of the

month working to connect their remaining clients with family before the program shuts down.

Redburn has accepted a job at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, where she will apply what she learned about trauma and addiction during her decade with Hope House.

Staff are hopeful that other counseling programs and services will expand to fill the gap Hope House leaves for children and family care.

Lutheran Community Services Northwest will remain in the community at a different capacity by launching a Santa for Seniors program. The service organizes volunteers to visit isolated and homebound seniors, especially during holidays and birthdays, and served over 4,000 seniors in Washington state last year.

The organization seeks to expand to a national level, and has chosen Astoria as its first location outside of Washington. The expansion is funded by a \$15 million donation from the Seattle-based William A. Looney Family Foundation.

“Lutheran Community Services Northwest has been there for over 30 years. And with closing Hope House, as painful as that was because we just didn’t have any funding for it, it just made sense,” Duea said. He added that he hopes to bring in more churches and faiths to the program.

“We love Astoria. We’ve had a presence there and with the closing of Hope House it just seemed like a natural progression,” he said.

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Judge Cindee Matyas

Matyas: Retirement represents a big loss

Continued from Page A1

Matyas said she won’t miss witnessing “the petty, angry, mean, hateful, evil things people do to each other.” Or the divorces “where even the dog isn’t spared,” Aho added.

But she will miss being part of a system that helps people as they get married or divorced, adopt kids, settle lawsuits or put a criminal case behind them. “You’re helping people move things along,” Matyas said, “and it feels like really important work to help people resolve their issues.”

Judge Dawn McIntosh, the presiding judge of the Circuit Court, said, “It is going to be difficult to replace the knowledge that she has, particularly the relationships she’s developed and the systems she’s put in place to address really significant problems within our community and through the court system.”

Matyas and McIntosh served with former presiding Judge Paula Brownhill. For a time, Clatsop County had the only court in Oregon whose judges were all women. Brownhill retired in 2019.

When Matyas announced her retirement, McIntosh said, “I’m absolutely going to miss her. We all will.”

As a prosecutor, Matyas remembers being yelled at by judges in courtrooms and in their chambers. “I didn’t want to be that kind of a judge,” she said.

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, she said.

The late local attorney Pat Lavis advised her: “Leave people with something. Even if you take everything away, leave them with something —

either their self-respect or their integrity or something. You may not be able to give them the answer they want, but don’t take everything away from them,” she said.

District Attorney Ron Brown said Matyas’ retirement represents a big loss. “You don’t run into too many more conscientious people than her,” he said.

‘You Did It!’

Earlier this month, Matyas’ courtroom hosted a graduation for three treatment court participants. The event marked the end of their probation. A banner with “CONGRATS GRAD” hung from the bench. The space was filled with graduation cap and diploma decorations and other festooning.

One graduate was Kayla Heinzman. Years ago, when she was living in the Columbia Gorge area, her grandfather asked the police to check on her; he hadn’t heard from her in a while. She was found wandering the street in a drug-deranged state. Her time in treatment court began in January 2020; her recovery spanned the pandemic.

When it was Heinzman’s turn to be recognized by the treatment court team, Wintermute told her, “I was worried for you, honestly. You were in a dark place.”

Heinzman joined Matyas at a podium in the well of the courtroom and thanked the team for helping her and her fellow alums: “It gave (us) a chance to learn and a place to grow.”

Heinzman had 499 days of continuous documented sobriety. She has a job and lives in a sober living house. She wants to become a mentor for the program.

Matyas presented Heinzman with certificates, including a “You Did It!” award for embracing her independence. As the judge listed her achievements, Heinzman leaned over to Matyas and hugged her.

Morrow County declares emergency over high nitrate levels in wells

Port was fined by the state

By MONICA SAMAYOA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Morrow County has declared a local state of emergency after private well testing showed high levels of nitrate contamination.

During a special meeting, Morrow County commissioners voted 3 to 0 on Thursday in favor of the measure, which will allow the county to take immediate action to protect drinking water. It’s the first time an Oregon county has declared a state of emergency because of water quality issues.

The county will start distributing bottled water and will be setting up water distribution trailers in Boardman so residents can fill large containers.

Groundwater is the primary drinking source for county residents. But that groundwater has been plagued by high levels of nitrates.

The state designated Morrow and Umatilla counties as groundwater management



Monica Samayoa/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Silvia Hernandez’s private well in the outskirts of Boardman.

areas more than 30 years ago. A committee was formed to address the issue and identify activities that contribute to the contamination.

But state data shows the nitrate problem has only gotten worse.

“It’s been an ongoing issue,” Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty, the board chairman, said. “It’s not something that just hit us in the last week, and we’ve been approaching it from lots of different angles.”

Drinking high levels of nitrate can lead to respiratory infections, thyroid dysfunction and stomach or bladder cancer. It can also cause “blue baby syndrome,” which decreases the blood’s capacity to carry oxygen, especially in infants drinking baby formula mixed with

contaminated water. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, nitrate levels exceeding 10 milligrams per liter can cause serious health effects.

Earlier this year, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality fined the Port of Morrow \$1.3 million for overapplying 165 tons of nitrogen-rich wastewater onto agricultural fields over a four-year period and failing to monitor the nitrate contamination.

The Port of Morrow released a statement on Thursday saying it’s considering millions of dollars in upgrades to reduce pollution and is eager to play a role in finding workable solutions.

Doherty said the fine brought this issue back to light and hopes the declara-

tion will open doors to get funding for more testing in homes. Doherty has been going door-to-door with the local health department to test tap water for residents outside of Boardman’s city limits.

So far, he said they’ve tested about 70 wells that were “high enough to cause some pretty severe health issues.” He also found some households were not aware their drinking water was unsafe.

Paul Gray, Morrow County’s emergency manager, said he is now working with the state to help residents get immediate clean water while planning for long-term solutions.

Gray said he wants to do more testing to identify affected locations and get filters in those homes in the next couple of months. But he said the planning process just started and his immediate concern is to provide clean drinking water and continue to educate the public about health concerns. He said he’s asked the Oregon Health Authority to provide a bilingual public information officer to reach Spanish speakers.

Bjaranson: A big concern is always bringing in a former catcher or two. In other words, someone with good knees

Continued from Page A1

or getting in the batter’s box after a decade or more of not playing.”

A big concern is always bringing in a former catcher or two. In other words, someone with good knees.

“My biggest fear is that we won’t have any catchers show up,” he said.

The process for the game itself is like a sandlot game. “We pick a couple captains and let them select who they want. Guys can play first base, shortstop ... wherever they want,” he said. “They can just take one at-bat or move around in the middle of an inning. There’s no rules. It’s just a good time.”

There’s also a home run derby. At the end of the day, “everybody’s smiling and having a great time,” Bjaranson said. “It’s more of an ‘old timers’ game. It’s about family bonding and reconnecting with your old teammates. I know it’s real enjoyable for coach Wolfe to see his former players.”

The Warrenton coach since 1992, Wolfe is now

‘I LOVE BASEBALL, AND THIS IS MY CHANCE TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY. JUST A WAY FOR ME TO BE AROUND THE GAME I LOVE, AND HOPEFULLY HAVE AN IMPACT ON KIDS.’

Ryan ‘Boomer’ Bjaranson

coaching the children of former players.

“He’s a Hall of Fame coach, won a lot of games, and Lennie is obviously more than just the baseball coach here. He’s really helping kids along the way, developing the facilities and much more.”

“Boomer” was a nickname “my mom and grandmother gave me when I was little,” Bjaranson said. “I’d pound on the wall when I was a little baby, and when I’d wake up, they’d just hear ‘boom, boom, boom’ on the wall. And the name stuck.”

Boomer’s four siblings all attended Warrenton: Brothers Jeff, Jason (Jay) and

Adam, and Boomer’s twin sister, Missy.

Bjaranson sells for a real estate franchise, working remotely for a company out of Utah. Adam Bjaranson is a television sports announcer for KOIN 6 in Portland, well known by followers of the Portland Trail Blazers and Oregon Sports.

The family was stunned by the death of Jay Bjaranson in 2012 — one of four who died when the fishing boat Lady Cecelia sank 20 miles west of Leadbetter Point, Washington.

“We try to honor Jay and his memory in any way we can,” Boomer said. “Two of my brothers were fisher-

men. We have friends who are in the fishing industry, so we know things like that can happen, and unfortunately it did.

“It’s still a little surreal looking back. Jay and I were close. He graduated in ‘91. He was a wrestler. He was a fisherman, loyal to his family and friends ... just a tough loss.”

As for the alumni game, the coronavirus pandemic kept participation down the past two years, so Bjaranson is hoping the alumni contest will bring some happiness back to the community.

Bjaranson’s ultimate goal is to have an alumni tournament for the county, with former players from Astoria, Seaside, Warrenton and Knappa meeting on the field to decide who’s really the king of baseball. Wherever it’s held, a one-day tournament would surely bring out the fans.

“I love baseball, and this is my chance to give back to the community,” he said. “Just a way for me to be around the game I love, and hopefully have an impact on kids.”