

Seaside man sentenced for sex abuse

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

A Seaside man was sentenced to nine years in prison for sexually abusing a 5-year-old girl in January 2021.

Manuel Cecilio Lopez Cruz, 38, pleaded guilty in Circuit Court on Tuesday to two counts of first-degree sex abuse.

Prosecutors said he touched the victim's vagina and anus while he babysat

her and her 1-year-old brother at a Seaside residence.

When the mother came home, the girl told her what Lopez Cruz had done.

The mother took her Providence Seaside Hospital, then to Randall Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland, Dawn Buzzard, the chief deputy district attorney who prosecuted Lopez Cruz, recounted in an email.

The defendant "first hid from police,

then admitted that he was the only one who had been watching the children," Buzzard wrote.

Lopez Cruz entered an Alford plea on each count, meaning that, although he realized a jury would likely find him guilty, he maintained his innocence.

"I, personally, was very impressed with the mom, who negotiated the medical and justice system when English wasn't her first language," Buzzard wrote.

College: Welding and automotive programs benefit

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of Speed donation and the kindness of that organization reaching out to us," Kristen Wilkin, the dean of workforce education and training for the college, said.

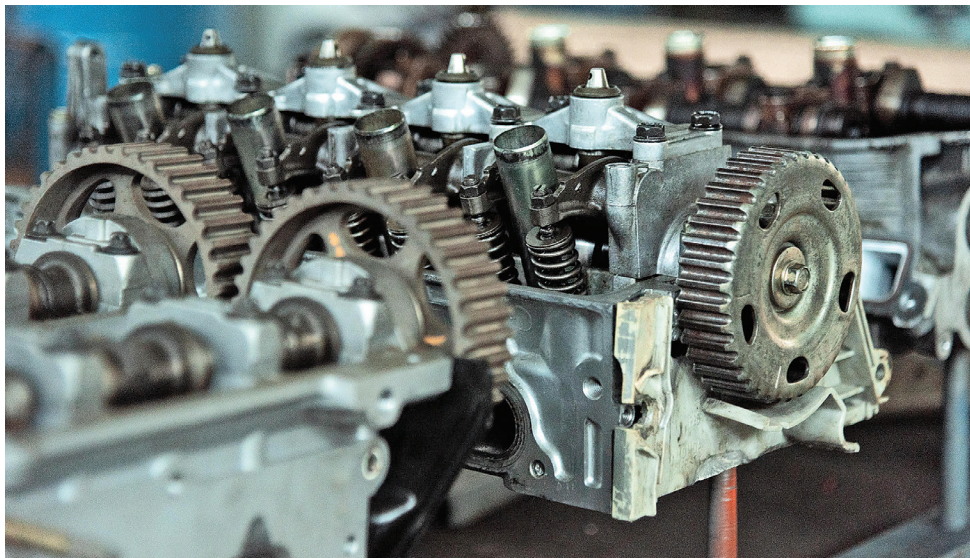
Hunt and Wilkin also credited former state Sen. Betsy Johnson, who is running as an independent for governor, for putting in a good word for the college as the museum was looking to allocate assets.

Around the same time of the World of Speed donation, Hunt met with Ed Reed, a former welding instructor at the college. He was seeking to set up his estate to go to the foundation and support welding students.

Reed died in 2021.

"He was a wonderful part of our MERTS (Marine and Environmental Research and Training Station) campus family and it's such a blessing that he was able to give back to our program in this way," Wilkin said. "With his kindness, we're not only able to help our current 33 degree-seeking students that we have ... and also for new students coming in, but he was also kind enough to set aside some of that money for equipment needs."

The donation, totaling over \$400,000 for supplies and an endowed scholarship fund, will take effect this coming school year. The foundation and college are still working on how to



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Parts used for instruction at Clatsop Community College's Marine and Environmental Research and Training Station workshop.

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— Kristen Wilkin | dean of workforce education and training, about Ed Reed

distribute the money.

The focus of the many career and technical education programs at the college, such as welding and automotive, is to help students land jobs and in turn boost the workforce.

"So helping our community, helping our region and being there to really give

our students good, solid family-wage jobs and skills that they can take really anywhere," Wilkin said.

Elizabeth Braim, a graduate of the welding program, was interested in welding on cars, so she returned to the college last year to get a one-year certification from the automo-

tive program.

As a recipient of a World of Speed scholarship, she completed the certification program in June.

"I am just super grateful for the scholarships and the opportunities that arose for me," she said.

Walking away with important skills and lasting relationships, Braim is eager to join the workforce. While doing vehicle repair work on the side, she is on the waitlist for the plumbers and steamfitters labor union in Tualatin.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for our current students and for future students that are interested in coming to Clatsop," Wilkin said. "We are very lucky for the support from these wonderful organizations and wonderful people that are helping support students."

Pretrial: New law creates uniformity for the courts

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In category No. 1, offenders who commit low-level misdemeanors and felonies can be released on their own recognizance.

Category No. 2 includes offenders with higher-level misdemeanors or class B or C felonies whose crimes don't include domestic violence. They can be released with court-imposed conditions.

Offenders in category No. 3 are alleged to have committed the most serious crimes, such as domestic violence, violent felonies and sex abuse. They will be held until they appear before a judge.

For the past several years, Clatsop County has used a pretrial release program with some of the same tools as the new order. These include a risk assessment tool that helps the sheriff's office determine which offenders can be released safely and under what conditions.

The county adopted the pretrial release policy amid concerns about overcrowding at the county jail in Astoria and the fact that too many offenders were locked up before trial.

"We are really fortunate in Clatsop County that we had a very effective and well-designed pretrial release program, so much of our pretrial release in Clatsop will stay the same," Vredevelde said. "The big difference is that, instead of people using money to get out of jail, the jail will follow the information as laid out in that presiding judge order. So I think it will feel very similar from the outside."

Although the county's pretrial release program has been replaced with a new one, the two are similar enough that the impact to the county won't be as drastic as elsewhere, according to Judge McIntosh.

"I don't think it's going to have a dramatic impact on who gets out of jail in

Clatsop County and who doesn't," she said, "except that folks that are safe to release into the community, but don't have enough money and are charged with a crime that previously would have necessitated bail, can be released."

In addition, people who commit serious crimes, and would previously have been released after posting a substantial bail, can now be held.

The new order allows certain conditions to override the category criteria. If an offender isn't capable of understanding the pretrial release program, or poses a credible threat of violence to people associated with the case, they may be slotted into a different category.

Sheriff Matt Phillips will still be able to manage the jail population and accommodate additional holds based on available beds.

Phillips said it is good that the law creates more uniformity in how courts use pretrial processes throughout the state.

"There are some things that I think a lot of us in law enforcement see as concerning," he added.

For example, a person could be released if the victim isn't a human being. Category 2 could allow crimes against animals to result in a conditional release — the suspect wouldn't be allowed to have pets — unless other factors in the offender's history qualifies them for an override and allows the jail to hold them until arraignment.

In the old system, anyone arrested for a crime could be held. "So there's a few things that raise eyebrows," Phillips said.

The sheriff, Judge McIntosh and Vredevelde believe it is too early to predict the effects.

McIntosh imagines there could be legal challenges to the law. "It'll be interesting to see how everything plays out," she said.

Mayor: Newton has criticized Balensifer

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"Just in general continuing that relationship-building and management because that will be critical and crucial for us moving forward," he said.

Newton, citing his background in business, said the city needs "somebody that can think about how to get things done."

He said the city "is in a tight spot. ... We've got a lot of things that we need to do that we haven't paid any attention to. Needs far outweigh wants and there are a lot of wants on the table, but not that many needs."

Over the past year, Newton has publicly criticized

Balensifer on numerous occasions and accused the mayor of trying to push him out of the City Commission.

"I would not do another four years under Henry," Newton said, explaining why he chose to run for mayor. "... I could not do that — mentally — under him, and (Commissioner Mark) Baldwin, because they're a tag team."

After controversy surrounding infill that Newton accepted on his property last year, Balensifer, Baldwin and Commissioner Gerald Poe asked Newton to resign, arguing that his behavior was problematic and disruptive. The infill dispute also led to a state ethics

investigation into Newton's actions, which ended with a letter of education in May.

The same three commissioners asked Newton to step down again in April when he lashed out at Balensifer during a meeting.

The city, which is looking for a new city manager with Linda Engbretson retiring, has faced turnover among key staff positions.

Balensifer and Newton both predicted challenges ahead.

"I see great opportunities. I also see great challenges," Balensifer said. "I feel like we've done pretty well — all things considered — and we have much better to do in the future."

Pools: Repeated closures at some hotels

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The Astorian. The Red Lion was among four lodging facilities that had pools or spas closed more than once this year.

The first of six inspections in January and February of this year at the Red Lion listed issues with the pool's enclosure, equipment, record-keeping and water testing. The inspection found that the hotel lacked a knowledgeable pool operator on site. The spa was also closed several times.

In late February, the county also received a complaint from a guest that the pool had black mold growing in the swimming area and the water seemed to have a "very off sheen to it." Online reviews of the hotel as recent as two weeks ago describe issues with the pool's smell and appearance.

The Red Lion did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The pool and spa at Surf-

sand Resort in Cannon Beach were closed once in April, and twice in early June, due to water balance issues.

"Anyone who has a pool might have an issue balancing it for a period of time," said Mark Hemmer, the president of Vesta Hospitality, a Vancouver, Washington-based company that purchased Surfsand Resort on July 1. He said the hotel has certified pool operators on staff.

"It is my understanding that the closures at this hotel in the past were for hours at a time, which is pretty reasonable and pretty typical. I certainly don't mean to alarm anybody by that," he said. "Sometimes out of the interest of safety you close the pool while you're getting the chemicals rebalanced."

The spa at Land's End at Cannon Beach was closed once in mid-May for having no bromine, then closed again the next day for having over twice the maximum level of bro-

mine. It was reopened at proper levels by the end of the week. Land's End did not respond to a request for comment.

The pool and spa at Best Western Bayfront Hotel in Astoria were closed twice in April to adjust chlorine and pH levels. The hotel did not respond to a request for comment.

Over a dozen other lodging businesses had their pools or spas closed at least once this year. The county said that it is not finding many issues with municipal pools due to proper employee training.

Reiley said that guests can often tell for themselves when there's an issue with pool water.

"Look at the clarity of the water. Look for that floor drain in the pool. If it's nice and crystal clear and you can see every screw that's holding that drain cover down, that's a good thing. If you can't even find the floor drain, you don't want to get into the pool," she said.



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