

IN BRIEF

Seaside man sentenced to prison after attack

A Seaside man who attacked a woman in March at a condominium was sentenced in Circuit Court to three years in prison on Wednesday.

Thomas Squier Whiteford, 60, was convicted of strangulation, second-degree assault and menacing, with the last two counts constituting domestic violence.

He entered an Alford plea on each count, meaning that he maintained his innocence but knew a jury would likely find him guilty at trial. He was intoxicated when the incident occurred.

Fire destroys two homes in Seaside

SEASIDE — Two homes on the southeast corner of Fourth Avenue along N. Roosevelt Drive were destroyed by fire early Monday morning.

The blaze, reported at 4:19 a.m., started at one house and spread to the house next door, Seaside Fire Department Division Chief David Rankin said.

According to the city, the fire caused several propane explosions that caused some damage to another home.

No injuries were reported. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

The home where the fire started had suffered a fire earlier this year and was considered uninhabitable, Rankin said.

Brownson to hold meet-and-greet

Astoria City Councilor Tom Brownson will hold a meet-and-greet from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday at the Columbia River Coffee Roaster on W. Marine Drive.

People are welcome to drop by with comments and questions. Brownson represents Ward 2, which covers the South Slope and a portion of the Port of Astoria.

— *The Astorian*

DEATH

July 22, 2022

WOOD, Dorothy Sue, 80, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIALS

Saturday, July 30
COVEY, Michael Owen — Celebration of life from 1 to 4 p.m., Broadway Park, 1300 Broadway in Seaside.

Covey, 59, of Seaside, died July 17, 2022, in Seaside.
GILLIE, Marcene (Marcy) Lou — Service at 2 p.m., Peace First Lutheran Church, 725 33rd St.

CORRECTION

Incorrect location — A wedding referenced in a profile of Constance Waisanen on A1 on Saturday took place in Naselle. The story incorrectly said the event was in Knappa.

ON THE RECORD

Theft
• David William Nichols, Jr., 33, of Hammond, was arrested on Friday at Walmart in Warrenton for second-degree theft and third-degree criminal mischief.
• Joshua Henry Marshall, 37, of Seaside, was arrested on Friday at Fred Meyer in Warrenton for second-degree theft and first-degree criminal trespass.
• Tori Lynn Gustafson, 19, of Astoria, was arrested for an alleged first-degree theft that took place on Thursday at Fred Meyer in Warrenton.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Astoria Planning Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

Clatsop Community College Board, 6:30 p.m., special session, Columbia 219, 1651 Lexington Ave., Astoria.

WEDNESDAY

Astoria Parks Board, 6:45 a.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 6 p.m., Judge Guy Boyington Building, 857 Commercial St., Astoria.

THURSDAY

Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce Council, noon, (electronic meeting).

Port of Astoria Marina Advisory Committee, noon, El Tapatio restaurant, 229 W. Marine Dr.

Cannon Beach Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower Ave.

Senators to investigate private treatment facilities that housed children in foster care

There are reports of widespread abuse

By LAUREN DAKE
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Two U.S. senators from the Pacific Northwest are investigating abuse at facilities that run treatment programs for children, including the center where a 9-year-old girl placed in Oregon foster care was drugged and another where a 16-year-old child was restrained for so long he suffocated to death.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, asked four companies operating youth residential treatment facilities for information on their policies and practices. The move comes after a litany of reports of widespread abuse and neglect stretching back years.

Oregon Public Broadcasting first chronicled tales of abuse and neglect of vulnerable children placed in Oregon foster care at facilities owned by Sequel Youth and Family Services starting in 2019. Later, the company garnered national attention amid reports from across the country of children being mistreated at private facilities. That company has since closed many facilities and sold much of the company to another business, Vivant Behavioral Healthcare. However, the founder of Sequel Youth and Family Ser-



Mandel Ngan/AP Photo

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden speaks during a Senate Finance Committee hearing in October.

vices and the CEO of Vivant Behavioral Healthcare are the same person, Jay Ripley.

Wyden and Murray have written to the CEOs of Acadia Health Services, Deveraux Advanced Behavioral Health, Universal Health Services and Vivant Behavioral Healthcare. The facilities provide care for children who have been placed in foster care and others who are struggling with emotional, behavioral or substance abuse issues.

Oregon state Sen. Sara Gelser Blouin, D-Corvallis, who led the charge to bring Oregon children placed in these facilities back home, said the news was encouraging. Gelser Blouin said she met with Wyden more than a year ago to talk about using a Senate committee to investigate private care facilities. Murray chairs the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee,

and Wyden chairs the Senate Finance Committee.

"It's legitimizing. And I think for the survivors it makes them feel seen because for the Senate committee to take this step, they have done the background work," Gelser Blouin said, adding senators have done enough groundwork to know there are systemic issues.

"Hopefully, this leads to federal requirements for states to have common, basic requirements for anyone who is caring for kids," Gelser Blouin said. "Because we don't have that yet."

The U.S. senators have asked the companies to provide the committee policies on restraining children or placing them in seclusion. They have also asked about how employees are trained, details on contracts and what company leaders are doing to ensure children placed in their care have access to edu-

cation. The lawmakers have asked for the information by Aug. 4.

"These youth and their families have put their trust in these organizations to help them get better and instead are being met with more trauma," Wyden said in a statement. "Accountability is desperately needed, and we're demanding answers."

Starting in 2018, child welfare officials in Oregon increasingly relied on out-of-state facilities to house youth placed in foster care. Initially, child welfare officials kept their decision to send more children to other states largely under wraps. They didn't alert lawmakers to the arrangement, and when Oregon Public Broadcasting broke the news in February 2019, state administrators declined to disclose where they were sending the children or what kind of oversight was offered once the children, some as young as 9, were sent thousands of miles away.

As more details were uncovered, a litany of disturbing stories and reports of widespread abuse and use of restraints at such centers surfaced.

In June 2020, two Oregon teenagers were removed from a Michigan treatment facility after state officials learned another child restrained by staff for throwing a sandwich died. At that time, Oregon officials said they would stop sending kids to treatment facilities in other states.

All sides declare victory in Washington state logging ruling

Court issues an 8-0 decision

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Supreme Court said the Department of Natural Resources has discretion on how it manages state forests, a decision that gave the timber industry an immediate victory, but was hailed by environmentalists as a "monumental conservation decision."

In the 8-0 ruling on Thursday, the court rejected claims that the Department of Natural Resources' timber-harvesting plans were violating its constitutional duty to manage state-owned forests for all the people.

Writing for the court, Judge Helen Whitener said the public gains from increased economic activity and funding for education and government.

"As DNR emphasizes, generating revenue from tim-

ber harvests helps boost local economies and maintain state institutions," she wrote.

Whitener, however, was sympathetic to the environmental groups, saying they presented a "commendable argument" that state forests should be managed to "also combat climate change and protect our crucial ecosystem."

While the Department of Natural Resources can allow logging, it's not required to, she said. It will be up to the Legislature, not the court, to order changes, she said.

The ruling dismisses a lawsuit led by Conservation Northwest. Nevertheless, Mitch Friedman, the group's executive director, declared victory.

"The court issued a monumental conservation ruling," he said. "Over coming years and decades, this ruling will be cited in support of nature-protection policies made by the Legislature and the DNR."

The Department of Nat-

ural Resources manages about 3 million acres. The federal government granted much of the land to fund public services when Washington became a state. Counties and school districts in heavily forested areas rely on money from state timber sales.

Conservation Northwest, joined by the Washington Environmental Council and Olympic Forest Coalition, accused the Department of Natural Resources of acting "like a private timber company."

Climate activists supported the lawsuit, while the timber industry and rural counties, school districts and fire districts intervened to support the department.

The Department of Natural Resources argued that it has an obligation to generate timber revenue, but also said it doesn't endanger the environment. Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz said the ruling affirms the department's authority.

"I also recognize that in the

face of a rapidly changing climate, we must do everything we can to safeguard public lands and protect our forests," she said in a statement.

American Forest Resource Council President Travis Joseph said the ruling should encourage the department to stop being "publicly bullied by anti-forestry groups."

"This opinion rejects, once and for all, legal attacks by anti-forestry groups to upend the trust mandate and the many benefits it provides," he said.

A Thurston County judge dismissed the lawsuit, which originated over the state's plan to conserve marbled murrelet habitat. The environmental groups appealed and the Supreme Court accepted the case, skipping over the Court of Appeals.

The case drew widespread interest. In an amicus brief, the Washington Council of Machinists said that if the environmental groups won, state forests would become "theme parks for the affluent."

Oregon Employment Department readies new computer system

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon businesses and workers will begin to see the rollout of a new computer system for the Employment Department after more than a decade of false starts and frustrations.

When the transition is completed in more than three years, the new system will automate employer payroll and tax records, employee claims and benefits from the state unemployment trust fund — and also contributions and benefits for Oregon's new program of paid family leave, which starts in 2023.

"It is a complex project and a multiyear effort to transform the Employment Department business processes and core technology so that they are more flexible, adaptable and efficient," said David Gerstenfeld, the agency's acting director.

In early September, the

new system will go live with Oregon employers filing their third-quarter payroll reports, on which their unemployment tax payments are based. Employers also will use the new system to gain access to their unemployment tax rates.

In late August, the two current systems that handle those functions will shut down to allow for the transition to the new system.

"We are doing this to make sure all the remaining work is completed," Gerstenfeld said. "We think this will not have an impact on most employers," because they should have completed filing payroll reports for the second quarter of 2022, which ended in June.

He said some employers that took part in agency focus

groups were invited to log on to a copy of the new system so they could become familiar with how it operates.

"It was positive overall," he said, and suggested adjustments will be incorporated into future work on the system.

"Our staff has run more than 1,500 test scenarios with a 99% pass rate," he added. "Those scenarios that did not pass were sent back to the team, fixed and will be retested. We are also working with other state agencies and organizations we share data and processes with to ensure

those connections are intact and working the way they need to."

One of those agencies is the Oregon Department of Revenue, which is the repository for the unemployment payroll taxes paid by employers. Employees do not contribute to the unemployment trust fund.

The new system, Frances Online, is named in honor of Frances Perkins, U.S. labor secretary during the 12 years Franklin D. Roosevelt was president and also the first woman appointed to a presidential Cabinet back in 1933.

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