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Security concerns at CGCC

April 29 incident prompts calls for review of safety policies, procedures

By KIRBY NEUMANN-REA
News staff writer

Faculty members and a student voiced strong concerns over safety policies and procedures at Columbia Gorge Community College facilities in Tuesday's board meeting at Indian Creek campus.

The matter centered on an April 29 incident involving an alleged attack by a 50-year-old student on in-

structor Jim Pytel. The suspect has since been trespassed from college properties, and the college has created a Facebook page featuring the suspect's photo.

Yet one student, Ashley Platt, said she has not been informed of this response, and has never been shown the photo.

"I don't know about it. Nothing has been done to inform students," said Pratt, who attends Indian Creek.

"We're not ignoring it," chief operations officer Robb Van Cleave said.



Robb Van Cleave

"She's a student and she has not been informed," responded Rob Kovacich, who teaches at Indian Creek.

In other business, CGCC president Dr. Frank Toda told the board he was fulfilling Policy 7/A by informing them of an email he received from faculty member Tim Schell, notifying him that on April 25, the faculty had voted to censure Toda, citing "budget mismanagement; his inability to include faculty and staff in a process to address the current budgetary crisis; his decision to close the Hood River Indian Creek Campus resulting in the community's lack of confidence in Toda" and other issues.

Toda nor any board member

made any comment on the letter which, also cites "his dismissal of key employees resulting in the college being understaffed to the point where servicing students has become a dire problem."

The letter concludes, "Because President Toda's actions collectively constitute a threat to the viability of CGCC, the faculty asks that the president resign immediately and that the college initiate a national search for a new president." The CGCC board has taken no action on the request.

Board chairman M.D. Van Valkenburgh opened Tuesday's meeting by talking about the suc-

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Ballots due on Tuesday

Voters must turn in their ballots by 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 19 in the Hood River County Special Districts Election.

It is too late to mail your ballot and be sure it makes it in time to the Elections office; postmarks don't count.

The two drop-off locations (and any Hood River County voter can drop it at either place) are: the Hood River County Building, Sixth and State, or at Cascade City Hall.



Photo by Kirby Neumann-REA

CORNER OF RAND AND CANINE

All eyes are on Cobey the dog, who would not leave the car after a Tuesday afternoon two-car collision until his owner, Jeff Alway, climbed over him — the passenger door too damaged to open. "He's sensitive and this just scared him more," said Alway, of Stevenson, collided with Sally Harpe of Hood River, who was uninjured but cited for failure to obey a stop sign in the crash at Rand and Cascade. Responders noted that it demonstrates the need for a traffic light at the intersection. Bettina Bardin-Brown, right, came to retrieve Cobey and take care of him while his owner was checked out at the hospital. Alway was cited for having no vehicle insurance.

Man pleads not guilty to murder in 2009 Eagle Creek fall

By PATRICK MULVIHILL
News staff writer

A Bend man accused of killing his girlfriend six years ago while hiking Eagle Creek Trail pleaded not guilty to murder Monday.

Stephen Wagner Nichols, 40, appeared with his lawyer, Michael Arnold, of Eugene, at the Hood River County Courthouse on May 11 to plead not guilty to one count of murder for the death of his girlfriend, 23-year-old Rhonda Casto, of Portland, according to court records.

Nichols is scheduled to stand trial in late May or June of next year. His next pre-trial hearing before Circuit Court Judge John Olson is scheduled for Aug. 3 at the courthouse.

Officials were alerted to Casto's death at Eagle Creek Trail near Cascade Locks in March 2009. According to a story in the March 18, 2009, edition of the News, Hood River 911 received a call on March 16, 2009, from a man who reported he had accompanied Casto on a hike. He claimed Casto had died after falling off a cliff on the trail.

Rescuers arrived shortly after and found the body of Casto down an embankment approximately 100 feet off the trail.

Nichols was charged with murder via a secret indictment filed in April 2014, according to court records — 10 months before he was ultimately arrested in February. Officers arrested Nichols at San Francisco International Airport on Feb. 2 on a nationwide felony warrant after arriving from China, according to the San Mateo County, California, Sheriff's Office. His destination was Medford.

Nichols has been in custody at the Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility in The Dalles since February.

In court Monday, Olson ruled that "the defendant is to be in



Stephen Wagner Nichols

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Spotlight

A weekly series about a day in the life ...

Joe O'Neill goes worldwide with 'Red Hand Adventures'

BY TRISHA WALKER
News staff writer

Hood River author Joe O'Neill is a little busy these days. His new book, "Legends of the Rif," the third in his Red Hand Adventure series, was released two weeks ago, and book tour dates are lining up.

"Right now, we're lining up school visits, lining up bookstore talks, and (seeing about) getting an article in the local paper to get the word out," O'Neill said. "We're hitting the Pacific Northwest and have a good relationship with a lot of the schools and bookstores."

Last weekend, he was in Spokane, presenting a series of classroom visits to middle and elementary schools, and later this month, he has stops scheduled for Bend/Sunriver and Ashland.

But on May 16, he'll be at Waucoma Bookstore for a special book release party: not only will he be "hanging out signing books," but there will be signed posters for young fans and a treasure hunt, complete with prizes. (Details A14).

"It's a way to participate and kind of have some fun: Book signing, treasure hunt, just kind of meeting people," he said.

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Photos by Kristin O'Neill

JOE O'NEILL will be at Waucoma Bookstore on May 16 for the release of the third book in his Red Hand Adventure series, "Legends of the Rif." His stories have him traveling abroad for research — and allows him to meet young fans, like these girls in Southeast Asia.

Four To Go

Yacht club opens season Sunday

The Hood River Yacht Club based at Hood River marina, opens its season Sunday with a boat parade at noon and club social at 3 p.m., followed by a 4 p.m. pizza and salad fundraiser for the Gorge High School Sailing Team. Cost is \$10, or \$5 for those under 12. Anyone may attend the events.

The boat parade theme is Norwegian Independence Day (May 17). Boat owners will deck out their vessels in Viking style, according to commodore Brian Douglass, adding that boating will likely continue all day.

Mosier Community Picnic Sunday

Mosier Middle School 6th graders are hosting the Mosier Community Picnic May 17 from 5-8 p.m. at the Mosier Community School to raise funds for Outdoor School. Food will be by Solstice and local beverages will be for sale; raffle drawing and entertainment round out the fun. Admission is \$7 for an individual or \$20 for a family of three and includes admission, one raffle ticket and a complimentary drink. Additional raffle tickets will be available for purchase. Everyone is invited to attend.

County Board meets Monday

Hood River County Board of Commissioners meets Monday starting with a 4:15 p.m. work session, leading into the 6 p.m. regular session, both open to the public.

Work session includes the Hood River Soil and Water/Watershed Group annual presentation, and updates on Parole and Probation and community development projects. In regular session the board will hold a public hearing on a staff proposal to change the zoning ordinance to increase board flexibility in responding to land use applications.

Pie with the Mayor on Monday

Mayor Paul Blackburn will host office hours at Bette's Place on Monday, May 18 from noon to 1 p.m.

Come enjoy a slice of pie (or maple bar) and meet your Mayor. Bette's is located in the Oak Mall at Fifth and Oak streets. This is the second "Pie with the Mayor" with Blackburn, who took office in January.

