

MARTIN: Remains in jail with \$137,500 bail

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page shows a photo of her and her daughter with these words, “Rip Savannah Martin.”

Tara Ramos of Hermiston began a donation campaign on the website gofundme.com seeking \$5,000 for Savannah’s funeral. Ramos called the Martins good friends and stated “their sweet baby girl lost her life.” Ramos also relayed she would not provide any personal details about the baby’s death.

“Regardless of what anyone thinks or reads,” according to the gofundme page, “this little angel deserves a proper burial.”

Martin remains in jail in lieu of \$137,500 bail.

George Plaven contributed to this report. Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

UTILITY: Water and sewer cost alone higher than entire proposed city budget

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the next 10 years to improve and maintain the city’s water and sewer system and \$7.5 million over the next five years to cover the costs of the city’s stormwater drainage system.

To cover the increased activity, the consultants also suggested creating 11.5 jobs to handle maintenance duties.

While the cost of covering water and sewer alone is higher than the entire proposed budget for the city’s 2015-2016 fiscal year, Patterson said adopting the master plan doesn’t bind the city to rate hikes or new charges.

Required by the state, those master plans are a framework the city can use when making a decision.

Before any rate hikes or charges are approved, Patterson said the council will need to consider factors like a definitive rate and charge structures and whether to hire new utility workers in-house or by contract.

Patterson said system development charges would help take the burden off rate payers, who are currently funding 100 percent of all improvements to the city’s utility system.

The consulting firm’s methodology reports provide some hypothetical numbers for what developers could pay based on their estimate of the city’s need.

Based on the consultants’ estimates, a system development charge for the city’s water system could cost between \$3,769 and \$301,550 based on the development’s water meter size.

Those costs could be lowered if the city spins off the cost of a fire suppression system for the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport industrial park into a separate improvement area with its own set of system development charges.

Also based on meter size, the firm projected a sewer charge could cost between \$3,089 and \$247,106.

The stormwater charge is structured a little differently.

The average housing development would be charged 5 cents per square foot of impervious area while residential developments 3,500 square feet and larger and nonresidential developments would be charged by actual measured area.

With the state and federal governments unlikely to grant money for these projects any time soon, Patterson said the city will need to look inward for funding sources.

“We have a big hole,” he said. “How do we start digging out of it?”

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PGG: Restructuring has left just 67 of 225 employees with a job

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following the resignation of former CEO Allen Waggoner. From day one, he said the board started talking about the long-term future of the 86-year-old co-op.

Right away, Jacobson said they knew it wouldn’t be business as usual. Going back through the books, PGG found it had overstated \$10 million of year-end earnings in the years prior to Jacobson’s hiring and current board leadership.

At least initially, PGG considered partnering with CHS Inc. of St. Paul, Minnesota, to recoup some working capital. Jacobson insisted the co-op would remain under local control in a February 2014 meeting with the *East Oregonian* editorial board. Three months later, PGG announced it would restructure and sell off its slumping retail and agronomy divisions.

“We were not at all comfortable in their performance,” Jacobson said. “For some years, they were marginal at best.”

AG Supply stores closed in Pendleton, Hermiston, Milton-Freewater, Athena, Island City and Joseph, along with the Pendleton Automotive Service Center, after PGG failed to find a buyer willing to keep the locations opened. The Island City store, however, was transitioned into Precision Rain, which specializes

in irrigation systems and employs 17 people.

“I think our growers there are pleased,” Jacobson said. “I’m pretty optimistic it’s going to do well.”

Meanwhile, the agronomy fleet sold to CHS in September 2014, and CHS equipment can now be found at both PGG’s McKennon Station and Feedville location in Hermiston. All together, retail and agronomy accounted for \$7.5 million of PGG’s \$7.9 million losses last year, Jacobson said.

“We had not been profitable. That’s not hard to say,” Jacobson said. “Suffice to say, it was time for PGG to restructure itself to serve its members the way it was intended.”

That intention is to help farmers grow, market and sell their grain, and Jacobson said they are preparing for a successful harvest. PGG has 14 of 19 elevators in service for the season, and recently invested in its barge loading facilities at McNary, he said.

But restructuring has come at a cost, with just 67 of 225 employees still in a job. In a statement released Monday, board Chairman Tim Hawkins said that, although some steps were difficult, PGG has now laid a meaningful foundation for the future.

“We have done the hard work together,” Hawkins said. “We are pursuing additional opportunities to

expand our financial returns and we look forward to continuing to provide locally owned and controlled grain, energy, seed, transportation and irrigation services to our members for years to come.

PGG, which serves 1,850 members in Eastern Oregon and Washington and traces its roots dating back to the Great Depression, is an iconic company across the region, Jacobson said.

“I wouldn’t have done this if I didn’t think it was worth the effort,” he said. “It is an iconic business, and it’s a brand Pendleton can be proud of.”

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