

KONONEN: Raised two children with her husband

Continued from 1A

worried aloud about Polly, who had just died at the brothel — what would they do with the body?

“Polly turned out to be a parrot,” Kononen said.

At times, callers were rude or asked for non-existent businesses such as the Pendleton Drain Blowers. One elderly woman asked to talk with God. A man called to make sure his hearing aid worked.

Kononen looks back with humor and fondness on her time as an operator, but admitted it wasn’t her first choice.

She spent a year attending University of Michigan, but dropped out after a year when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. She spent a short time working for National Biscuit in California.

“It was a crummy job,” she quipped. “I was packing crackers.”

Kononen, who loves a good pun, swears this is the truth and not just a chance to exercise her agile sense of humor.

During World War II, the Detroit native worked with engineers at Chrysler while the men were busy with war. Several years later, after moving to Pendleton to be near her sister and her future husband Ellis, she decided to apply for a city job working with blueprints.

“After my year at Chrysler in the engineering department, I could read a blueprint upside down and backwards,” she said.

When she dropped into City Hall and asked for an application, however, the two men in the office looked baffled at the audacity of a woman applying for the position.

“They both started laughing,” she said. “They laughed me out of there.”



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

During World War II June Kononen worked in the engineering department at Chrysler in Detroit.

Kononen isn’t one to hold a grudge. She applied for the operator job. She raised two children with Ellis. She found an outlet in theater.

She first acted in a Community College Theater production of “Talking With,” playing a bag lady who wanted to live at McDonalds because it was so clean. She remembers waiting to go on at a pre-performance held in a local restaurant, sitting outside at a table dressed in her bag lady clothes. The people passing by assumed she was really a bag lady and averted their faces.

“People didn’t see me, even people I knew,” she said. “They just saw some bag lady.”

Seeing past someone’s outer shell and into their soul is a Kononen specialty. She recalls helping out in later years at the annual Pendleton cotillion — a gown and black tie affair. Among the glitter and glam, Kononen remembered an out-of-place young couple. The girl wore a Southern belle dress with

droopy roses. The young man wore a plaid shirt, overalls and tennis shoes. She remembers the couple danced all night.

“She looked into his eyes,” Kononen said. “He looked at her like she was the most beautiful woman in the building.”

That’s what matters, she said. Those moments. The people you hold close.

Kononen has faced down some hard times. She lost her husband and her son. She survived cancer twice, along the way losing a breast and the center lobe of her right lung. After the death of Ellis in 1979, she went on only one date.

“Afterwards I thought I don’t want to go through that again,” she said. “When you had the best, you don’t want to settle.”

These days, she keeps her humor, but gets winded easily. She coaxes each day along, doing her daily Sudoku and crosswords and babying her orchids. She gets her nails painted a different color every month

and spends precious times with friends and family. Last month, a large group of them threw her a 90th birthday party at the Bob Clapp Theater at Blue Mountain Community College.

One friend, Karen Hill, who once worked with Kononen at United Way, describes her as bright, extraordinary and curious.

“She’s the quintessential World War II-vintage woman,” Hill said.

A yellowed 1953 phone book hanging in her living room reminds her of her days as a switchboard operator. She owns a cellphone, but hardly ever turns it on. She misses the personal touch of days gone by and wishes she could lift her phone receiver and talk to an operator.

“It’s all done with computers and mechanical voices now,” she said. “Something is missed by not having operators.”

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

LIQUOR: 248 liquor stores in the state

Continued from 1A

Distributors Association, which is a member of the coalition.

The measure also would likely increase the number of liquor outlets in Oregon. There were 248 liquor stores in the state, as of March 24, according to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

Craft beer and wine makers oppose privatization because liquor would compete with beer and wine for both store shelf space and buyers.

“If there is liquor in the store, the shelf space has to come somewhere,” said Paul Romain, a lobbyist for the Oregon Beer & Wine Distributors Association. “In Washington state, a lot of the wineries that had product in stores, their numbers went down because the shelf space was then used for liquor.”

Oregon is one of a diminishing number of states

that still regulates pricing, marketing, distribution and retail sales of liquor, according to Oregonians for Competition, a coalition of grocers, retailers, craft distillers, and consumers who support the initiative. Oregon is one of 13 states that still controls retail sales by government-operated stores or designated agents, according to the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association.

“We believe Oregonians are ready to end the state’s monopoly on liquor sales and allow Oregon consumers to buy liquor at qualified grocery and retail stores — just like consumers do in most other states,” co-sponsor Lynn Gust, retired president of Portland-based Fred Meyer Stores, said in a statement. “The initiative will allow the state to focus more on alcohol law enforcement, which is what Oregon voters originally intended the OLCC to do.”

REFUGE: Biologists missed chance to remove invasive carp

Continued from 1A

cleaning, with the use of industrial vacuums and cargo trailers filled with cleaning supplies. Repairing damage and removing debris is expected to take until early summer.

In all, the standoff will cost Fish and Wildlife about \$6 million, with about \$2 million spent during the takeover, including the cost of moving the refuge’s 17 employees out of town for safety to live at government expense in hotels for weeks, Ashe said.

Fish biologist Linda Beck said she’s glad to be back at work, but the biggest cost of the standoff was missed work.

Beck and a team of biologists were planning to remove invasive carp by commercial fishing because the fish consume habitat needed by birds. At the beginning of the year, Malheur Lake covered about 3,000 acres. It has since grown to about 20,000 acres.

“We lost the opportunity to fish for these fish in a really condensed setting,” Beck said.

WATER: NOWA plans to start building pipeline, infrastructure

Continued from 1A

Department.

That’s where Hermiston recently came into play. The Port of Umatilla has a full municipal and industrial water right of 155 cubic feet per second from the Columbia. One-third of that was already allocated to Hermiston for operating a regional water system intended to lure in new development.

Water for the regional system is pumped nine miles from the river at McNary Industrial Park to a treatment plant at Highway 207 and Feedville Road, where it gets distributed to the city, Hermiston Generating Station, Simplot, Shearer’s Foods and Calpine Corp. The remaining 100 cfs of water has not been developed. That’s what the port agreed to lease to NOWA, following nearly three years of negotiations.

Before that lease can move forward, the full water right needs to be certified. To do that, Hermiston needed to prove it was capable of pumping all that water, thereby proving its “beneficial use.”

The regional water system certainly isn’t built to handle all 155 cfs at once — that’s nearly 70,000 gallons per minute. Instead, the Water Resources Department allows municipal water rights to be certified in quarters. To pump even a quarter of the full right, the city and port still had to install a new pump along the river.

Hermiston City Council approved making improvements to the system last December, which cost \$650,000 and was paid for by a state Regional Solutions grant. Last week, the city finally pumped just a little more than 39 cfs through its

system for four hours, satisfying the minimum requirement for the first 25 percent of the water right.

City Manager Byron Smith said they were excited to clear that first hurdle.

“We’ve been pumping water for many years, but to get the certificate and really solidify the water right, we had to do this process,” Smith said. “Now, we’re just checking the boxes and jumping through the hoops.”

Smith figures it will take roughly 18 months to repeat the process three more times for the remaining 75 percent of the right. In the meantime, the port can submit what’s known as a “claim of beneficial use” to get the first chunk of water certified, which allows NOWA to follow up on its own application.

“Those applications are ready to submit once the water right is through the process,” Smith said.

With water rights in place, NOWA plans to use money allocated by the Legislature in 2015 to start building pipelines and infrastructure spanning three distinct areas from Boardman to east of Hermiston. Gains have been incremental, but NOWA founder J.R. Cook said the project could ultimately amount to billions of dollars in economic development.

Smith anticipates Hermiston would benefit from much of that growth.

“We hope that we can assist in getting some more job creation out of this, and boost the economy for our area,” he said.

Banks, dam targeted by Iranian hackers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. charged seven hackers linked to the Iranian government with executing large-scale coordinated cyberattacks on dozens of banks as well as a small dam outside New York City — intrusions that law enforcement officials said reached into America’s infrastructure, disrupted the nation’s financial system and cost tens of millions.

Indictments announced Thursday by the Justice Department show a determination by overseas hackers to cripple vital American interests, officials said, and marked the first time the FBI attributed a breach of a U.S. computer system that controls critical infrastructure to a hacker linked to a foreign government.

The hackers are accused of infecting thousands of people’s computers with malware to create a network of zombie computers they used to overwhelm servers of major institutions to knock them offline. Those included the Bank of America, NASDAQ and the New York Stock Exchange.

“The attacks were relentless, systematic and widespread,” said Attorney General Loretta Lynch. “They threatened our economic well-being and our ability to compete fairly in the global marketplace, both of which are directly linked to our national security.”

One of the alleged hackers is accused of

repeatedly gaining access to the control system of the Bowman Avenue Dam, a small flood-control structure in Rye Brook, about 20 miles north of New York City. Officials termed his access “a frightening frontier on cybercrime,” and said the hacker would have been able to operate a digitally controlled sluice gate, flooding portions of the city of Rye, but the gate had been disconnected for maintenance.

The hacker was still able to gain information about the dam’s operations, including its water level, temperature and the sluice gate.

While that attack did no harm, one official said the hacker obtained knowledge

about the computer system that could be used on other dams and infrastructure. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to speak publicly. Computer systems, such as the one controlling the dam, are considered the backbone or core of modern industries including transportation, energy, oil and gas and manufacturing.

The indictments unsealed Thursday stem from intrusions between 2011 and 2013 that officials say targeted 46 victims, disabling bank websites and interfering with customers’ ability to do online banking. The attacks, which occurred sporadically over 176 days, cost the institutions tens

of millions of dollars in remediation costs, but no customers lost money or had their personal information stolen.

The accused hackers worked for two Iranian computer companies linked to the Iranian government, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the U.S. said. Charges include violating U.S. laws on computer hacking and gaining unauthorized access to a protected computer.

The seven defendants are Ahmad Fathi, 37; Hamid Firoozi, 34; Amin Shokohi, 25; Sadeh Ahmadzadega, 23; Omid Ghaffarinia, 25; Sina Keissar, 25, and Nader Saedi, 26. Faroozi is charged alone for hacking the dam.

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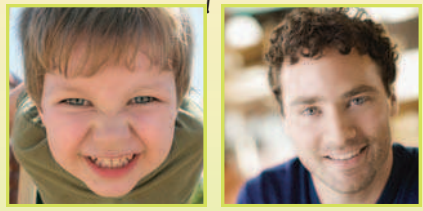
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