



Protections lifted for Yellowstone grizzlies/6C



Heat spurs classic sidewalk experiment/5C

Taking the plunge



Ron Haynes and Sally Ann Peters pose Wednesday with their water aerobics class at the Roundup Athletic Club. The two met at the class when Haynes started attending after suffering a stroke. Their wedding plans were interrupted a year ago when Peters had a stroke, too. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Swim buddies find love at Pendleton pool

Story and photo by KATHY ANEY ♦ East Oregonian

Stroke survivors Ron Haynes and Sally Ann Peters are helping each other stay afloat in troubled waters.

Haynes and Peters met at the swimming pool. On Friday afternoon, they exchanged vows as their water aerobics classmates looked on.

Haynes started going to the aqua class at the Roundup Athletic Club pool as a way to recuperate from a devastating stroke. The stroke hit seven years ago as the retired teacher slept on a cot in his wife Judy's Oregon Health & Science University hospital room in Portland. Judy, recovering from cancer surgery, called a nurse when Ron fell ill.

"The nurse got me into a wheelchair and wheeled me to the emergency department," recalled Haynes, 65. "They determined I was having a stroke."

So began Haynes' long journey back to health. The Pilot Rock man started going to the Pendleton pool as a low-impact way to get his body moving again. One day, Peters noticed Haynes was in a spot of trouble.

"He slipped under the water," Peters said. "I helped him up."

They became aqua buddies. Peters stayed close in case he foundered.

"She kept an eye on me," Haynes said, as did the other class members and instructor Julie Sneden-Carlson.

"We are truly a community in here," Sneden-Carlson said of her class. "We share each other's

joys and sorrows."

The class fluctuates between 25 and 35. It's an easygoing group. Sneden-Carlson keeps them moving during each session, but before and after and even during, her charges share each other's lives. The class grieved

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with Haynes, for example, when his wife died of congestive heart failure last April.

Peters and Haynes' friendship deepened further as time went on, bonded in part by life experiences they share in common. Both had divorced in their younger years, then married again. Each lost a second spouse to death. Haynes, who grew up in California, the son of a school administrator, taught history and business at Aloha High School near Portland. Peters, raised in Pomeroy, Washington, grew up on a wheat farm, attended secretarial school and finished out her career as the head of the human resources

department at the Lourdes Health Network in Pasco. Haynes has a son and Peters has two daughters.

Last summer, the swimmers say love blossomed in earnest.

"Things went really fast," Haynes said of their romance. "From July 3 on, we were an item."

The rest of the class detected smiles and whispers between the two. One day last summer, Sneden-Carlson noticed the couple was holding hands underwater.

"We watched love bloom," said Helen Gowan, who attends the water aerobics classes three times a week. "It was heartwarming to see."

When Haynes eventually asked Peters to marry him, she said yes. The couple planned to tie the knot at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Pendleton in November of 2016. Then, a month before the nuptials, on October 11, the unexpected happened — Peters suffered a stroke, too.

She was loaded aboard an airplane bound for Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland. At the St. Vincent emergency room, Peters had a second stroke. Eventually, she ended up in College Place at Regency at the Park care center where she struggled to regain her health. Wedding plans went on hold.

Aqua class friends responded with cards, visits to Peters and rides to class for Haynes. When Peters transferred to Elizabethan Manor in Pendleton, Haynes decided he would move there,

too, to be with her. The decision meant he needed to give away his beloved springer spaniel, P.J. The dog found a home with water aerobics friend Grace Nelson.

"It was a total act of love," Nelson said of Haynes' decision to give away his dog. "It was devastating for Ron."

On Friday, P.J. was in attendance when Haynes and Peters exchanged vows in Elizabethan Manor's dining room. The ceremony, called a ceremony of commitment, stops just short of a traditional wedding. While the ceremony contains all the religious elements, there is no legal involvement by the state. The ceremony offered a way to be blessed by the church, but doesn't affect the couple financially as they work to pay their medical bills.

The couple will honeymoon at Wildhorse Resort, a gift from the water aerobics class. Afterwards, the pair will settle into a life focused on each other and the long slog of recovering from their respective strokes. Sally Ann has one goal she hopes to accomplish before long.

"I want to get back in the pool," she said.

As the couple heads into the next leg of their journey together, they know one thing — the water aerobics class will have their backs.

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