

Pendleton superintendent testifies in case against former district

By **ZACH HALE**
(Longview) Daily News

Pendleton School District Superintendent Chris Fritsch testified in U.S. District Court in Tacoma, Washington, Dec. 19 as part of a civil suit against his former district alleging improper use of an isolation booth.

The *(Longview) Daily News* reports the families of five former Mint Valley Elementary School students are suing the Longview School District and Jerry Stein, a former special education teacher who ran the school’s program for behaviorally challenged children from 2005 to 2016.

Fritsch, who was the assistant superintendent in Longview from 2011 until he took the Pendleton job in May 2017, is not named in the lawsuit.

The five students in the suit have each made constitutional claims against Stein, alleging that he violated their right to freedom from unreasonable seizure under the Fourth Amendment by placing them in a 4-by-4-foot isolation

booth between 2009 and 2012.

Plaintiffs have also made five different negligence claims against the district, which they argue should be held liable for Stein’s alleged actions.

The district has denied all of the allegations. Throughout the trial, the defense team has argued that staff used the booth only once to control one of the children for emergency reasons.

The eight-member jury will resume deliberations on the 12 claims Wednesday morning.

Plaintiffs’ attorneys have suggested \$17.6 million in damages for the five families to cover the value of lost wages, salaries, and employment opportunities — plus the value of medical care and non-medical services in the future. Parents are also seeking compensation for the loss of love and companionship in the parent-child relationship.

A forensic psychologist hired by the plaintiffs has diagnosed all five

of the children with trauma-induced stress disorders related to their alleged experiences inside the booth. But a psychologist hired by the defense team says the plaintiffs’ expert failed to account for other sources of stress in the children’s lives.

Throughout the trial, the defense team has denied allegations that the district engaged in a cover-up because it feared it was exposed to legal liability. But plaintiffs argued that the district realized it could be legally exposed immediately after images of the booth surfaced online in 2012. Fritsch testified that he contacted a legal firm less than 24 hours after the images went viral.

And a subsequent email from Fritsch to former Superintendent Suzanne Cusick dated Nov. 29, 2012 illustrated how quickly the district decided to destroy the windowless structure.

“I am meeting with (a maintenance employee) at 4:30 today at Mint Valley to go over the demo-

lition project in the CLC room,” Fritsch wrote, according to court records.

Ultimately the booth was destroyed just five days after photos surfaced online.

“Calming booths were removed from Mint Valley and Mount Solo this morning without incident. They are now part of the landfill,” Fritsch emailed Cusick again on Dec. 2, 2012, according to court records.

During cross-examination, Fritsch told defense attorney John Safarli that a law firm hired by the district had assured him the isolation booth was operated correctly.

“I was led to believe that (the booth) ... met the legal requirements,” he said. “And the people that were working that program were following all the rules and were keeping adequate records.”

But on Dec. 19, 2012 — the same day the firm finished its report — Fritsch also emailed a new list of guidelines to the former principal and former Special Education Director Jill Diehl. One of the rules specified that general education students should not be sent to

Stein’s classroom for discipline under any circumstance.

Another guideline stipulated that any new isolation area “needs to have a window in the door, similar to the door in my office, with adequate ventilation and lighting,” according to court records.

Fritsch told the *East Oregonian* on Tuesday that details of the 2012 incident were difficult to remember, but he doesn’t believe any employees acted inappropriately.

“The whole situation is unfortunate,” he said. “My heart goes out to the parents of special needs students and to special needs teachers. Those are tough jobs.”

In Pendleton, both Washington and Sherwood elementary schools were built with seclusion rooms that Fritsch said were constructed in accordance with Oregon Department of Education rules. Fritsch said those rules are more specific than Washington’s, including a minimum of 64 square feet and seven feet between walls.

— *East Oregonian* editor Daniel Wattenburger contributed to this report.

HERMISTON

Chamber of Commerce opens new office

Working on updating the chamber’s website

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The new year comes with new digs for the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber opened their new offices in the Cornerstone Plaza, 1055 S. Highway 395, Suite 111, on Tuesday. There were still some moving boxes to be seen on opening day, but executive director Debbie Pedro said it wasn’t stopping chamber staff from serving customers.

“We’ve already had quite a few people in this morning,” she said.

The chamber had to move out of its offices at the Hermiston Conference Center — now being rebranded as the Hermiston Community Center — by the end of 2017, after the city of Hermiston decided to take over management of the center and move its parks and recreation department into the space. Pedro said the chamber would love to purchase its own building eventually, but for now they are excited they found a space visible to travelers on Highway 395.

Racks of information for visitors, plus pamphlets and business cards from chamber members, line the walls of the reception area of the new office, which used to be a photography studio. There are also individual offices for chamber staff and an open space that will act as a conference room. The chamber is renting storage space elsewhere. Phone numbers will remain the same as before the move.

Pedro said the chamber will continue to do everything it did



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce executive director Debbie Pedro shows off the reception area of the chamber’s new offices.

“There are a lot of partnerships being formed, and partnerships that have been longstanding that will continue.”

— **Debbie Pedro**, Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce executive director

before — including acting as Hermiston’s visitor center and providing services for members such as educational classes — besides running the conference center. Giving up that duty will free up the chamber to spend even more time focusing on new ways to serve chamber members and the community, Pedro said, and she was excited about some new initiatives that will be announced in the coming months.

The new address has also

provided an incentive to start work on updating the chamber’s website and other offerings, and to find new locations outside of the conference center to hold events like the chamber’s Business to Business luncheon, which is being revamped in 2018 to a longer event held quarterly.

“There are a lot of partnerships being formed, and partnerships that have been longstanding that will continue,” Pedro said.

Over at the community center, the parks and recreation office was still in the middle of unpacking on Tuesday morning, but is expected to transition staff over from city hall on Wednesday. Phone numbers for the parks and recreation department will also remain the same despite changing locations.

Contact *Jade McDowell* at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

HERMISTON

Umatilla man arrested for threatening family with ax

East Oregonian

A Umatilla man was arrested Friday night in Hermiston for threatening to kill members of his family with an ax during a family meal.

The Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office was called to the disturbance on Baxter Road at 10:46 p.m. after family reported Kasey Shawn Pankey, 26, had become upset and was making threats. There were 10 people in the house.

One family member fought to take the ax from Pankey. No one was injured, but the caller was worried Pankey would get his hands on other weapons or firearms.



Pankey

Deputy Nathan Rankin responded and arrived just as Pankey was leaving the house in a white Subaru with a female driver.

Pankey got out of the vehicle and after briefly ignoring Rankin’s orders, eventually complied and was secured. Rankin spoke to witnesses and arrested Pankey, lodging him at the Umatilla County Jail on six domestic violence counts each of second-degree attempted assault, menacing, coercion and recklessly endangering.

Umatilla County Undersheriff Jim Littlefield said Pankey was likely set off when “someone said something he didn’t like.”

BRIEFLY

Candlelight service remembers loved ones

HERMISTON — The public is invited to the annual Candlelight Memorial Service, which is sponsored by Vange John Memorial Hospice

The event, which is in its 22nd year, provides a time to remember loved ones and honor someone special. In addition, it includes a military ceremony in recognition of veterans.

The free event is Tuesday, Jan. 9 from 6-9 p.m. at the Hermiston Christian Center, 1825 W. Highland Ave. A time of fellowship will follow the service.

Names included in the hospice’s annual “Light Up A Life” celebration during the month of December will be included as a part of the service. People are encouraged to come for a time of

reflection, inspiration, and healing. Hospice staff and volunteers will be on hand to greet people.

For more information, call 541-667-3543.

Free walking program offers warm refuge

PENDLETON — With temperatures dipping below freezing, people might want to take advantage of Pendleton Parks & Recreation’s Walking for Wellness.

The public is invited to get out of the elements and enjoy a warm place to walk. The free program is Monday through Fridays from 8-9:30 a.m. at the Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. People can visit with others and listen to music while walking.

For more information, call 541-276-8100 or visit www.pendletonparksandrec.com.

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

EASTERN OREGON FORUM

Presents

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16TH, 2018 AT 7:00 P.M.
BLUE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (BMCC), 2411 NW CARDEN, PENDLETON, OR.
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY BUILDING, ROOM ST-200

LEGAL MARIJUANA IN PENDLETON: ONE YEAR LATER

FEATURING: BRANDON KRENZLER, STEVE HARDIN AND DAVID CONANT-NORVILLE

Brandon Krenzler, Partner/Owner, Kind Leaf Pendleton recreational cannabis dispensary

Steve Hardin, Manager of Emergency Services, CHI/St. Anthony Hospital

David Conant-Norville, M.D., Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Mind Matters clinics, Pendleton & Hillsboro

THE COST FOR THIS SERIES OF 4 FORUMS IS \$15 PER PERSON. \$25 PER COUPLE OR \$5 PER FORUM AT THE DOOR - STUDENTS ARE FREE

For more information about the EO Forum, please contact: Karen Parker at 541-966-3177.

The EO Forum is a collaborative effort among leaders from Blue Mountain Community College, InterMountain Education Service District; the East Oregonian; American Association of University Women; and Harriet Isom, a former United States ambassador who also serves on the committee. This EO Forum program is offered as part of Blue Mountain Community College's annual Arts and Culture Festival. For more information on the festival go to www.bluecc.edu.

Oregon Attorney General Settlement Notice

The Attorney General’s Settlement Could Benefit You!

Did You Buy a TV, Monitor, or Laptop Computer That Contained an LCD Flat Panel Screen, During the Years 2002 to 2006?

Or Did You Buy a TV or Computer Monitor That Contained a Cathode Ray Tube (“CRT”), During the Years 1995 through 2007?

You May be Entitled to Compensation.

Please read this notice carefully as your legal rights are affected whether you act or do not act.

PARA UNA NOTIFICACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL, LLAMAR O VISITAR NUESTRO WEBSITE.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has resolved two lawsuits she brought on behalf of Oregon natural persons against certain manufacturers of liquid crystal display (“LCD”) flat panels and cathode ray tubes (“CRTs”). The lawsuits allege the manufacturers illegally agreed upon the pricing of LCD flat panels and CRTs.

Oregon has settled with all defendants for a total of \$36,900,000 (“Settlement Fund”), and you may be entitled to a portion of the Settlement Fund.

Who Is Included?

Natural persons who indirectly purchased at any time during the years 2002 to 2006, for their own use and not for resale, LCD panels incorporated into flat panel TVs, computer monitors or laptop computers; or who indirectly purchased at any time during the years 1995 to 2007, for their own use and not for resale, CRTs incorporated into TVs or computer monitors. A purchaser must have been an Oregon resident at the time of the purchase. An indirect purchaser is someone that purchased products containing LCD flat panels or CRTs from someone other than the company that manufactured the LCD flat panel or CRT component, such as from an electronics retailer or a device manufacturer other than one of the Defendants. “Natural persons” means a human, not a business.

How Do I Get Settlement Funds?

File a claim: Consumers need to file a claim to obtain benefits in this settlement. Claims can be completed online at www.OregonScreenSettlement.com or by mailing the claim form, available for download, to the Settlement Administrator. The deadline for filing claims is April 2, 2018.

How Do I Get More Information?

More information about the lawsuits, settlements, and the claims process can be found at www.OregonScreenSettlement.com, by calling 1-877-940-7791, or writing to: Oregon Screen Settlement, c/o GCG, P.O. Box 10240, Dublin, Ohio 43017-5740.

This Notice is an official legal notice of the Oregon Department of Justice

1-877-940-7791
www.OregonScreenSettlement.com