

Mrs. Baker: Longtime Helix teacher remembered

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baths, then tucked them into bed. Baker treasured the memory. The officer returned the sisters to the car the next morning.

As an adult, Baker lost her first husband, Charles Loveland, in World War II. She met her second husband, Preston “Harry” Baker, in Weston, where he owned the Blue Mountain Cafe and Tavern. Since Harry was 20 years her senior, Faircloth said, Baker decided she needed to go back to school to secure her financial future. The high school dropout earned her GED, and then enrolled in Eastern Oregon College (now University) in La Grande.

“Every day, she drove her Volkswagen Beetle over Tollgate to get her bachelor’s and master’s degrees,” Faircloth said. At age 42, Baker first applied for a teaching job in Weston, but was turned down because she and Harry ran a tavern. Almost immediately, “Helix snatched her right up.”

Wayne Miller, who taught with Baker at the Helix middle school and is the current high school athletic director, said he is grateful.

“Weston wouldn’t have her and Helix benefitted,” Miller said. “We thanked them for that. They missed out on a great teacher.”

The new teacher with the beehive hairdo and the straight-shooting style became a fixture in Helix.

Over the years, Baker taught fifth, seventh and eighth grades and also coached the high school volleyball team from 1971-77, guiding the girls to two sixth-place finishes during a time when all the teams in the state were lumped into one classification.

She continued to live in Weston, driving back and forth daily. Her notoriously heavy foot sometimes got her into trouble. Superintendent Darrick Cope said the last time he saw her beat-up Hyundai Sonata, it had at least three visible dents. She had a collection of speeding tickets, too.

“She got her last speeding ticket going through Athena on her way to school,” McMillan said of her aunt. “She was going 85.”

Baker taught until 1989. Soon after, when former Griswold school secretary Janet Kilby’s multiple sclerosis wors-



Coach Elnora Baker poses with the 1976-77 Griswold High School volleyball team, which went to state that year.

Contributed photo



Contributed photos

Elnora Baker graduated from Eastern Oregon College before accepting a teaching job in the Helix School District.

ened, Baker followed her to work each day to help her get out of the car and into her wheelchair. Finally, Baker figured since she was driving all the way to the school each day, she might as well stay. Some days she subbed for absent teachers and others she worked in the office filing and doing other tasks.

History teacher Lorin Kubishta often invited Baker to speak to his students about growing up during the Great Depression.

“With Mrs. Baker, the students could

“SHE’S ONE OF THE FINEST HUMAN BEINGS I’VE EVER MET.”

— Lorin Kubishta, history teacher

put a face on those desperate times,” he said. “She would talk about how hard things were and the next moment, she would talk about how grateful she was. The hard times made her appreciate what she had later.”

Kubishta marveled at Baker’s optimistic view of life despite her rough beginning.

“She’s one of the finest human beings I’ve ever met,” he said.

McMillan said her aunt somehow became a great person and wonderful parent to her two children despite the lack of a parental role model. She leaned on her faith in God.

“She had the resiliency to pick up and move on no matter what life gave her,” McMillan said.

During a 2007 interview, Baker thought back on her life and said she wouldn’t change anything.

“I have been the most blessed per-

son,” she said. “God has been good to me. I wouldn’t give up one minute.”

One way Baker showed affection was with fudge.

“At Christmas, she’d bring 20 pounds of fudge and set it on the counter. There were four or five different kinds,” Cope said. “Former students still talk about Mrs. Baker’s fudge.”

Mrs. Baker continued coming to the school until near the end.

“I think she needed her daily kid fix,” Cope said. “She just kept coming. Sometimes she’d drive over here for 30 minutes, and then move on with her day.”

Faircloth said the community will say goodbye to Baker at a service set for 3 p.m., Nov. 17, at the Helix school. The interment of her body won’t happen until months later.

“She gave her body to science,” Faircloth said, “so she could keep on teaching.”

Mayor: City-cut deals for some developers but not for others

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The crowd murmured in response to the jab, and some councilors shot surprised glances at Turner.

Turner has given the what-for to city critics more than once. Rick Rohde was on the receiving end during a council meeting in June 2017. Turner addressed Rohde for writing letters to the editor that accused the city council of funding “private projects that benefit a few people within their circle of friends.” Rohde’s conduct was “morally and ethically irresponsible” because he could not back up his accusation, Turner said, and he warned he would remind Rohde and the council “of your dishonest, disingenuous and dishonorable conduct of every meeting I chair.”

The challenge had a chilling effect on Rohde for a while, but he shared his thoughts about Turner’s snap at Brusselback.

“I thought it was downright rude,” he said.

Turner on Wednesday afternoon had his own assessment of his words to Brusselback.

“I probably just lost my temper a little bit,” he said.

Still, he remained frank about his assessment of the Pendleton property owner.

“Nate is a businessman, and he’s more concerned about his individual business than the future of Pendleton,” Turner said.

The city has plenty of evidence to show all levels of housing need, he continued, but Brusselback just does not want competition. However, he does want the city to cut him a deal after he was in a rush to build, Turner said, while others negotiated on the front end.

Councilor Dale Primmer said Wednesday that Turner’s shot may not have



EO file photo

Pendleton Mayor John Turner presides over his first city council meeting on Jan. 3, 2017, in Pendleton.

helped the city nor council’s reputation among detractors, but he is no fan of barbed exchanges in the public comment section. He said that time should be for people to address the council, make statements and express their views.

“It’s public comment, not public debate,” he said.

Despite pushback from Turner, Councilor Scott Fairley found the idea of a standardized housing incentive program intriguing and worthy of more discussion, he said in an interview after the meeting.

Fairley said the challenge was determining what kind of incentives the city would offer. Previous deals, Fairley said, aren’t necessarily replicable because they revolved around leveraging city-owned land.

In 2013, the city sold 7 acres of land adjacent to Olney Cemetery for a housing development that would become Pendleton Heights in addition to fronting some of the infrastructure costs.

Five years later, the council agreed to donate 9 acres of Westgate property to I&E Construction of Clackamas to build a housing project and threw in a property tax discount based on vacancy rates.

But Fairley also said

the council needed to take a look at how much longer it wanted to be directly involved in the housing business.

The local housing industry was stagnant when the city made an incentive deal with Pendleton Heights developer Saj Jivanjee, but times have changed.

After several rounds of haggling with the city council, Jivanjee is planning to start construction on a 100-unit apartment complex that will complement the 32 townhouses he has already built. In exchange for its incentives, I&E intends to build more than 200 apartments.

No law requires public bodies to allow time for public comments, but governing bodies usually do set aside time for comments not related to agenda items. The Pendleton School Board, for example, sometimes hears from concerned or even irate community members, but board members rarely engage in discussions with those members.

Turner said that is something he may take to the council for consideration, but he continued to assert the city needs to be flexible when it comes to housing deals and take each issue on a case-by-case basis.

Allen: Stepped up for a job nobody wanted at Oregon Health Authority

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government responsible for looking after Oregon’s most troubled residents was not attractive.

But where others saw a chaotic mess, Steve Allen saw opportunity.

At the time of the Oregon Health Authority’s search, Steve Allen, 63, was working with lawmakers, advocacy groups and behavioral health specialists to craft policy that would become Senate Bill 937, otherwise known as the Improving People’s Access to Community-based Treatment, Support and Services program (IMPACTS).

He was a consultant from the Washington, D.C.-based Council of State Governments Justice Center tasked to help Oregon. He helped design the plan to infuse \$10.6 million in grants to Oregon’s counties, tribes and regional consortiums to strengthen services for people who frequently cycle through jails, courts, and hospitals.

“I wanted to look at what the state could do differently to slow or stop that trajectory, and what additional services could be provided,” Allen said.

During his work on the 2019 legislation, Allen had the opportunity to see a lot of the state and meet many passionate people in communities dealing with these problems. Oregon was the 10th state he’d worked in as a consultant and the only one that prompted him to share observations with his wife, back home in Wisconsin.

“I told her this was a place we could live for two reasons. One, Oregon is just gorgeous, but as importantly, I was really taken by the people here trying to work differently and improve systems,” he said.

Pat Allen co-chaired

the SB 937 work group, and the pair — who are not related — became familiar with one another’s history, strengths and leadership styles.

“I was just so impressed with the quality of (Pat’s) leadership—clear, thoughtful, decisive, self-reflective. He’s the kind of leader that I knew I could work for,” Allen said. “Having just worked in 10 states, the atmosphere here in Oregon was that so many people were coming together and saying, we need to create an environment in which we can do better for the people of Oregon.”

One day after a work group meeting, Allen casually asked the Health Authority director how someone might apply for the job of behavioral health director.

Pat Allen pointed him in the right direction and went about his business, but hours later he picked up the phone and rang the consultant.

“I called him up and said, ‘Steve, I’m kind of dense, but are you the person that’s interested in the job?’” Pat Allen said.

The nationwide search came down to a conversation between the two, and it couldn’t have come at a better time. Mike Morris, who took over as interim behavioral health director following Royce Bowlin’s resignation after the Health Authority’s 2018 reorganization, had just retired.

“I came to realize a couple things. First, (Steve) is an honest-to-God national expert with experience in the trenches delivering care and running and operating statewide systems,” Pat Allen said. “Also, he just has an incredible way with stakeholders and clients, and he brings no ego.”

From his days as a graduate student at the Univer-

sity of Wisconsin, directing the mental health programs for the entire Minnesota prison system and consulting for the Council of State Governments, Steve Allen gained national acclaim in the realm of behavioral health.

His background includes working as a clinician in his home state of Wisconsin where he earned his master’s degree in social work with an emphasis on complex populations — patients with co-occurring illnesses.

He provided therapy to people on probation or parole in Minnesota before becoming director of psychology at the high-security Stillwater Correctional Facility.

“I learned a lot about people with very serious mental illness and addiction in helping them return back to the community,” Allen said.

He shifted out of prison work, overseeing 19 state clinics from psychiatric hospitals and residential programs to child and adolescent psychiatric facilities and transitional programs.

Pat Allen looks to his new director to improve accountability and transparency in state operations.

Since taking over in April at a salary of \$225,000, Allen has continued touring the state, hosting even more stakeholder listening sessions and devising a new approach to the state’s coordination of more than \$2 billion in spending on behavioral health care treatment.

He’s heard that due to Oregon’s housing shortage, the stakes are really high. Those who experience an episodic break or mental health crisis can end up losing their jobs and becoming homeless. Getting care once on the streets isn’t easy in Oregon, Allen said.