

Gavin:

Continued from Page A1

hospital, and Shawna volunteered to take him. Despite going through her own battle with the virus, Shawna didn't want to expose Jill-Marie.

Even as he was admitted to Providence St. Mary Medical Center in Walla Walla, Michael downplayed his condition to his family. But Jill-Marie remained worried. She urged her mother to call his doctors. The doctor's assessment was more grim: Michael was now in the intensive care unit.

Doctors presented intubation as a possibility early in Michael's stay, but the option scared him. To Michael, breathing tubes were portentous of something darker.

"He was worried that if he was intubated, he would never wake up," Jill-Marie said. "So he decided to stay awake and fight. And that's what he told us: 'I want to stay awake and fight.'"

For a few days, it seemed like Michael might emerge from the other side. He was able to breathe with less assistance from a machine. On Aug. 5, he was able to sit in a chair and eat a meal. He called old friends and started updating his social media. With the worst seemingly behind Michael, Jill-Marie traveled to Portland to be with her other brothers, Derek and Lee.

The following day, Michael went silent over his usual modes of communication, the only response he could muster was a message to Shawna that he was too tired to talk. Michael's condition deteriorated rapidly. The hospital called Shawna to tell her that doctors had intubated Michael. Shawna put out the news to her children, who cut



Attendees line the Mission Longhouse on Aug. 11, 2021, for the funeral service of Michael Gavin, 39, who died of COVID-19 less than a week before.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

off their plans to rush back to Pendleton. Midway back, they learned Michael was going to be flown to Portland to receive additional care.

But as medical staff attempted to transfer Michael to a gurney, he went into cardiac arrest. They tried to revive him for 45 minutes before getting in touch with Shawna, who knew what Michael wanted.

"My mom knew that he didn't like being in the hospital, he didn't like being on machines," she said. "And so she told them to let him go. She was worried about the damage to his body. So we let him go."

It was Aug. 7. He was 39.

Every number is a tragedy

Michael's death marks the Umatilla Indian Reservation's second loss and also the second loss for the Gavin family. Shawna lost her brother, Chet Tias, in July 2020, when the reservation and the rest of the region experienced its first spike in the novel virus.

Shawna and Jill-Marie not only bore the responsibility of taking care of their families, but the CTUIR as a whole. Jill-Marie is an at-large board member on the Board of Trustees while Shawna sits on the CTUIR Tribal Health Commission

and serves with her brother Michael Ray Johnson on the General Council. Collectively, they worked with an incident command team to coordinate the emergency response to the pandemic. The early days of COVID-19 brought unprecedented measures to the reservation. The Wildhorse Resort & Casino closed its doors and the tribes suspended many cultural and spiritual practices that brought tribal members together in close quarters. Jill-Marie remembered the sleepless nights she had during this time, worried that tribal elders were spending the last years of their life without the celebrations,

Layoffs:

Continued from Page A1

Lifeways officials did not return calls and an email seeking comment prior to press time.

As a nonprofit, Lifeways' tax filings are a matter of public record. According to Lifeway's 2019 tax form the most recent filing available via www.guidestar.org, which reports on U.S. nonprofit companies, the company reported net revenue of negative \$1.54 million, but total assessment and fund balances in excess of \$10.7 million.

In June, after the county board gave the contract to CCS, Lifeways planned to stay in the county by "pivoting its services to retain staff," Chief Executive Officer Tim Hoekstra said in a press release.

Liz Johnsen, director of Lifeways at the time, however, could not provide specifics at that time about the pivot and what it planned to do with its patients, employees and facilities.

Johnsen said Aug. 18 that she "is no longer with Lifeways."

In late spring, Lifeways came

under scrutiny from officials for its ability to respond when law enforcement requests help during calls for people experiencing mental health issues. In April, the provider again drew attention for the closure of Aspen Springs in Hermiston. The acute care facility provided the highest level of psychiatric care for individuals experiencing a severe mental health crisis before it closed after being open for just seven months. It reopened in May as a secure residential treatment facility, which is a lower level of care.

Lifeways then protested the county's move to award the contract to CCS, calling the decision "arbitrary and capricious." Hoekstra claimed at the time that CCS was "underqualified and underprepared to take on the significantly more complex, higher volume work in Umatilla County."

As of early June, the provider served 184 clients with schizophrenic disorders, 491 clients with major depression, 471 clients with post-traumatic stress disorder, 215 clients with bipolar disorder and more than 2,000 clients with adjustment disorders.

Sams:

Continued from Page A1

steward of the gems of America's natural beauty.

"Today is a proud day for Oregon. Chuck Sams is among Oregon's finest, and I can't think of a better person for the important role of National Park Service Director," Brown said. "I have worked closely with Chuck for many years, and have witnessed firsthand his unparalleled devotion and service to his Tribe, our state, and our nation."

Sams was chosen earlier this year by Brown as one of Oregon's two representatives to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. He held positions with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, including executive and deputy executive director, communications director, and environmental health and safety officer/planner. He's a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Sams also has been an adjunct professor at Georgetown Univer-

sity and Whitman College. He serves on the boards of the Oregon Cultural Trust and Gray Family Foundation. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Concordia University-Portland and a master of legal studies in Indigenous Peoples Law from the University of Oklahoma.

Sams climbed the ladder in tribal government after returning home in 2012, culminating in a second stint as interim executive director in late 2020. Despite the opportunity, Sams quickly told the board he would not consider the job on a permanent basis.

Sams said he already was starting to think about other opportunities outside tribal government prior to his appointment to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. Sams is the only enrolled tribal member on the power council and only the second American Indian in the council's 30-year history.

Sams' appointment was endorsed by Sen. Ron Wyden, Sen. Jeff Merkley and Brown.

gatherings and powwows that are woven into CTUIR tradition.

The restrictions slowed the spread of COVID-19, and before the spread of the delta variant, the reservation had mostly tamped down new cases. As time went on, Jill-Marie and Shawna would hear from people about how fortunate the tribes were to lose only one person to COVID-19. Those comments stung, especially as Michael came down with the illness, the virus seemingly tracking the Gavin family specifically.

"It's hurt so badly that we spent the last 18 months trying to keep people safe and I wasn't able to keep my brother safe," Jill-Marie said. "The rules that are in place are not to infringe on their personal rights. They're there to keep people from having to bury their brothers, and their uncles and their mothers and their grandmothers. And while I'm so happy that our death toll has been lower than most reservations, people can get lost in the numbers and not realize that every single one of those numbers is a tragedy for some family."

Michael wasn't vaccinated, despite his family's encouragement. Jill-Marie said he wasn't firmly against the vaccine, but wasn't comfortable getting the shot yet. The family didn't want to dwell on it or turn Michael into a talking point, but did reflect on what his death might mean for others.

"I don't want it to be a hardcore message," Shawna said. "Just please reconsider your stance on vaccination."

Michael was a Christian and a youth pastor at Pendleton's Bethel Church. Not everyone in his family shared his faith, but they drew comfort that he knew where he was going.

Biden had not yet taken office in January when Brown wrote to him suggesting Sams for the National Park Service position.

"During your administration, I envision students — both young and old, tribal and nontribal alike — visiting Yellowstone, Arches, Mesa Verde or Oregon's Crater Lake, and hearing the stories of our past and present, including the important stories of the tribal peoples who have inhabited these special places," she wrote. "Chuck is a consummate storyteller, and has the skill set and passion to inspire the dedicated staff of the NPS to tell those stories, and to find new and innovative ways to make our parks accessible to all Americans, while conserving and preserving those lands."

Sams' last day in tribal government was March 12. His work was hailed by tribal leaders.

"I can't thank Chuck enough for his service to the Tribe," Kat Brigham, CTUIR board chair, said in a statement. "We are sad to see him go."

Taliban:

Continued from Page A1

States began withdrawing troops.

On Monday, Aug. 16, President Joe Biden defended his decision to withdraw the troops.

"We gave them every tool they could need. We paid their salaries. Provided for the maintenance of their airplanes," Biden said of the Afghanistan government, which crumbled in a matter of days. "We gave them every chance to determine their own future. What we could not provide was the will to fight for that future."

Biden echoed a sentiment held by many veterans and their families across the nation: "How many more generations of America's daughters and sons would you have me send to fight Afghans — Afghanistan's civil war, when Afghan troops will not?"

Duane Carter, a Hermiston resident and veteran of the United States Army, 24th Infantry, served in Operation Desert Shield in Saudi Arabia and Desert Storm in Iraq. Carter said he has grown numb to the news.

"It didn't surprise me," he said of watching the Afghan government crumble. "But at least we're getting out of there."

But scenes from the Kabul

Airport, showing Afghan citizens desperately climbing onto aircrafts to escape, did surprise Carter. Some citizens who clung to planes fell to their deaths, according to news reports.

Carter said he "had no doubt" the Taliban would reaffirm its grip on the nation after the U.S.'s departure. But what was surprising, Carter said, was the speed at which the Afghan government fell.

"I feel sorry for all the guys who served over there, lost their lives, got wounded," he said. "This must crush them. There was a lot of time and effort over there. And it's just gone."

The most important thing now, Carter said, is to "get all the troops out" safely.

"We've already lost too many people," he said.

Local leaders speak out

Now a refugee crisis is sweeping the world, as Afghan citizens desperately seek a way to escape the country.

Oregon Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, is one of a handful of Republican legislators who have so far signed a letter that seeks to create a safe passage for Afghan refugees.

The letter, sent to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, calls on the Biden administration to "lift

the refugee admission caps and take other emergency humanitarian actions that will save lives at this pivotal time." It says the state must "take all the necessary steps to be prepared to resettle families when they arrive."

"It's not right, morally, to abandon our friends in tough situations," Hansell said.

Hansell said he would support efforts aimed at expediting the process of getting Afghans safely to the U.S. He said he has grown "concerned" and "frustrated" with the U.S. government's actions leading up to the Afghan government's collapse.

Pendleton Mayor John Turner, an Iraq veteran and retired colonel and infantry officer who served in the 1st, 3rd and 4th Marine divisions for 28 years, said he thought the collapse of Afghanistan was very predictable.

"I think any of us that were paying close attention were a bit surprised by the rapidity of how the Afghan government fell," he said. "I don't think anybody was surprised by the fact that it actually fell."

Turner said it was an incredibly difficult issue and it will continue in the weeks to come with the United States only being able to evacuate about 5,000 people a day. Since the United States still has tremendous



Shekib Rahmani/The Associated Press

Hundreds of people gather near a U.S. Air Force C-17 transport plane at a perimeter at the international airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. That day, the U.S. military and officials focus was on Kabul's airport, where thousands of Afghans trapped by the sudden Taliban takeover rushed the tarmac and clung to U.S. military planes deployed to fly out staffers of the U.S. Embassy, which shut down Aug. 15, and others.

combat power, though, he said he thinks the Taliban will be sensible and let the evacuation take place peacefully.

While he's sure it's frustrating to veterans who served in Afghanistan, Turner said they still accomplished their goal to eliminate the Taliban as a source of power and a safe haven for terrorism training — even while they might not have been able to convert Afghanistan into a pro-Western democratic

government over the following 19 years.

"We probably should have withdrawn 15 years ago," he said. "This is a problem that's been faced now by four American presidents over a 20-year period. Afghanistan is a unique country. It's got a tribal culture. It's not necessarily adaptable to Western democratic principles, so I don't think anybody who served there was surprised by what happened."

Your home is only as smart as your Internet.

AT&T Internet

\$40 /month

- Plans up to 100 Mbps.¹
- Free Smart Home Manager App² with Parental Controls.²
- The bandwidth to power multiple devices at once.³
- Get a seamless whole-home Wi-Fi experience with AT&T Smart Wi-Fi.⁴

Smart availability. May not be available in your area. Call to see if you qualify.

Cut cable internet and switch to AT&T Internet. Call now!

AT&T Preferred Dealer

888-486-0359

dish **BRING EVERYTHING YOU LOVE TOGETHER!** **Blazing Fast Internet!**

ADD TO YOUR PACKAGE FOR ONLY \$19.99 /month

2-YEAR TV PRICE GUARANTEE

\$64.99 /MO. **190 CHANNELS** including Local Channels!

CALL TODAY - For \$100 Gift Card Promo Code: DISH100

1-866-373-9175 Offer ends 11/15/21.

One solution for oxygen at home, away, and for travel

Introducing the INOGEN ONE - It's oxygen therapy on your terms

No more tanks to refill. No more deliveries. No more hassles with travel. The INOGEN ONE portable oxygen concentrator is designed to provide unparalleled freedom for oxygen therapy users. It's small, lightweight, clinically proven for stationary and portable use, during the day and at night, and can go virtually anywhere — even on most airlines. Inogen accepts Medicare and many private insurances!

Reclaim Your Freedom And Independence NOW!

Call Inogen Today To Request Your FREE Info Kit

1-855-839-0752