



THE WEEK  
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# WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



137th Year, No. 6

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

## Wallowa County Voices



**Roswitha Parks**  
Joseph

### Council should 'fix the problem'

JOSEPH — A native of Germany, Roswitha Parks finds living in Wallowa County reminds her of her Bavarian home, with the Alpine-like look of the mountains.

"It reminds me of home," she said.

Parks came to the U.S. 50 years ago, tired of family trying to tell her what to do. She came to Joseph 16 years ago with her late husband, David, who wanted to live here to care for his mother. He was born and raised here.

Parks worked for about 12 years for Heidi's Towne Shoppe downtown. The Parks had no children and thus, no grandchildren.

She recently shared her thoughts about living in Wallowa County.

#### What's your favorite thing about Wallowa County?

The small-town feeling and the people and the people. They're friendly, for the most part.

#### What are your thoughts on multiple allegations of harassment of employees by Joseph City Council and its alleged "dysfunction"?

I think it's B.S. I think they are dysfunctional. They should have an investigation and fix the problem.

#### How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you?

Well, I had my shots and it's affected me as far as I stay pretty much at home and don't have a lot of company coming over, which is a change.

#### What have you learned from living in Wallowa County?

You don't talk about anybody because they're all related.

#### What's your advice for people who are thinking about moving here?

You better like wintertime and snow.

— Bill Bradshaw,  
Wallowa County Chieftain

## 'Superhero' lifting Joseph's clouds

### Parks supervisor returns to work but issues remain

By BILL BRADSHAW  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — The clouds that have covered Joseph City Hall with gloom for weeks — if not longer — may be lifting thanks to the efforts of its new interim city Administrator, Brock Eckstein.

Last week, Eckstein met with Dennis Welch, the city's parks, Main Street and facilities supervisor, and discussed Welch's harassment allegations that have kept him off work since March 22. He cited stress, "gaslighting" and harassment as reasons for his time off. Welch returned to work Sunday, May 16.

"The cloud is lifting and the sun's coming out and that's what I want," Welch said Monday. "I just want to come to work and do my job. I know the people here appreciate me. They've made that very clear."

Welch's allegation was the second of two that rocked City Hall this spring. On April 1, former city Administrator Larry Braden told the City Council that unnamed members of the council were in violation of the city charter, council rules and his own employment contract by interfering with his work in City Hall. That sparked a debate between Mayor Belinda Buswell and Councilwoman Kathy Bingham on what elected officials were allowed to do when it came to dealing with city employees.

But Braden's concerns apparently went unheeded and on April 16, he submitted a letter of resignation citing "constant harassment from members of the current City Council."

Braden has declined to return



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Dennis Welch, parks, Main Street and facilities supervisor for the city of Joseph, stands under a cloudless sky at the city park Monday, May 17, 2021, having returned to work after an eight-week absence because of health-related issues stemming from alleged harassment.

calls seeking comment.

Eckstein said May 17 he plans to meet with Braden this week to "get his side of the story."

The interim administrator believes some progress can be made, though he does not know if Braden is planning any legal action regarding his resignation or the harassment allegations.

"I'm so glad he's willing to meet with me and hear his side of the story," Eckstein said.

He said he has yet to begin any sort of investigation into the matter. The council has been silent on advice it received from city attorney Wyatt Baum on whether there should be an investigation. The advice was given during an executive session that was closed to the public.

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Buswell



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Dennis Welch, parks, Main Street and facilities supervisor for the city of Joseph, turns on a water valve at the Joseph City Park on Monday, May 17, 2021, having returned to work after an eight-week absence because of health-related issues stemming from alleged harassment.

## Remembering a legendary coach

### Former players reflect on life, impact of Gary Sather, who died in late March

By RONALD BOND  
Wallowa County Chieftain

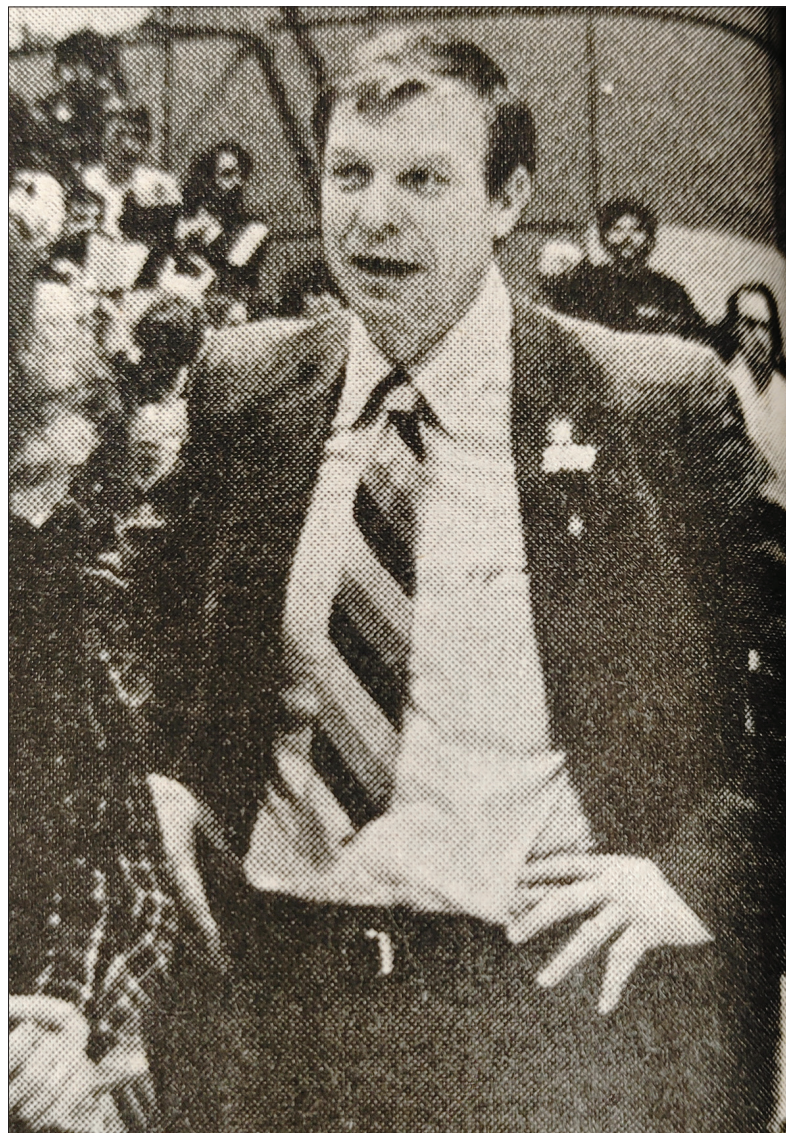
JOSEPH — To many outside Wallowa County, Gary Sather was the architect of the first high school girls basketball dynasty in Oregon, a coach who, by guiding Joseph to three straight state titles and a 79-game winning streak, became an instant legend and helped put the Joseph Eagles on the map.

But to those close to him, Sather was a father figure. He was a gentleman who had integrity, who never raised his voice, who was an encourager, an honest man, someone who led by example, and much more.

"Everything he ever said or did was always kind of done with a smile, even him getting after you, although he didn't do that very often," said Julie Jorgensen, who started each game during the Eagles' three-peat from 1981-83. "He was kind of fatherly, but never tried to take the place of anyone's father. He had a presence about him. He had smiling eyes, because everything was said with a smile."

Sather, who became an integral piece of the Joseph community and a local legend during his time in the town, died in late March at the age of 84, 40 years after he led the Eagles — often referred to the E-gals in print at the time — to their first state title and undefeated season.

His former players remembered



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Gary Sather is shown during the state tournament in 1983. The Joseph girls basketball team, guided by the local legend, won its third straight state title that season — all under Sather's watch. Sather died March 21, 2021.

him for his kindness, for his genuine demeanor, for being a man who was the same on the court, in the classroom and in his day-to-day life. His

players knew that they had an advocate who would be there for them if he was called upon, even after they moved on from playing in Joseph.

#### Loved by his players

Sather quickly gained the respect of his players and students, though it was not in a demanding manner.

Pat Mallon, a senior on the 1982 boys basketball team that reached the state tournament, said Sather's presence and demeanor made him someone you quickly looked up to or wanted to please.

"He was just a real gentleman, and just (had) a presence that garnered respect immediately," he said.

Jorgensen said his approach to the student-athletes helped him earn the respect he was given.

"He commanded respect because of how he spoke to us. He had that wisdom of how to deal with teenagers, boys and girls," she said. "He treated us well, treated us with respect so it made it easy to respect him. He was kind of by nature a gentleman."

They also knew that, if needed, they had an advocate during difficult times, or when they needed input on a major decision.

"That's what I think sticks with us, is that relationship stayed over time," said Karen Patton, one of the standout players on the 1981 and 1982 teams. "When he found out my dad passed away, he called, and we talked. When I coached, he was a mentor, and we talked often."

Susie Coughlan, also a member of the '81 and '82 teams, was a neighbor of Sather's, and said he took the players under his wing.

"When it came time for me to look for a job, I had a very first job offer given to me, and I was leery of it. I had to commit for three years,"

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