



School Zone: Bond conversation  
Kindergarten Round-up  
LMS gets a facelift



# Cottage Grove Sentinel

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2016 SOUTH LANE COUNTY'S MOST AWARD-WINNING NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1889 VOLUME 128 • NUMBER 31

## Former cop pleads guilty to Gamez killing

*Jenny Gamez had previously lived with a foster mother in Cottage Grove; Steven Zelich will be sentenced March 30*

The former Milwaukee police officer accused of killing a 19-year old Cottage Grove woman in 2012 and dumping her body in a suitcase along a Wisconsin highway pleaded guilty Monday to the crime, the Associated Press reports.

Steven Zelich was scheduled to go to trial on Monday, though a plea deal was instead announced. He reportedly pled guilty to first-degree reckless homicide with the use of a dangerous weapon and hiding a corpse. He is also charged with killing 37-year old Laura Simonson, whose body was reportedly found in a suitcase along the same Wisconsin highway.

The Associated Press reported that the District Attorney in Kenosha County, Wisconsin, Michael Gravely, will seek the maximum 75-year sentence at Zelich's sentencing on March 30.

The plea deal means the original sentence of life without parole will not be sought. Zelich had previously told authorities he picked Gamez up at the Milwaukee airport and drove to a hotel, where they played a sex game that involved him choking Gamez. He lost control and choked her until she died, according to information filed in a criminal complaint.

Gamez had previously stayed in the care of Lorraine Ericksen of Cottage Grove, who served as her foster mother.

Gamez graduated from Al Kennedy Alternative High School in 2010, then started school at Lane Community College. At the time her body was found in June of 2014, Ericksen told the Sentinel that the Department of Human Services had closed Gamez' case, at which time she moved out of her home.

"It was a puzzle to figure out what had happened to her," she said, "and now we know why. We're finding out the hard way."

(Ericksen could not be contacted by Sentinel press time Monday for this story.)

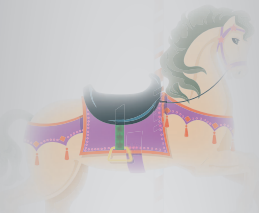
Back then, Ericksen said that, after Gamez' first year at LCC ended, she and some friends from Eugene decided to go to California. She had been talking about pursuing a career in forestry, Ericksen said, before deciding to do a little traveling.

"I didn't think anything of it," Ericksen said. "She was a pretty independent person."

Gamez was also one of Ericksen's "favorite kids."

"I always said I wish I had a houseful of Jennies," she said. "When she was with me, she went to school and got straight A's. She was involved with the Kiwanis and Bohemia Mining Days. She kept herself pretty busy."

Also  
inside:



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### CITY COUNCIL

## Council votes in favor of tobacco license ordinance

Another approval is still needed for the ordinance to pass

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The Cottage Grove City Council voted 6-1 in favor of creating a licensing program for the City's tobacco retailers before a packed crowd Monday night, though the ordinance to establish the program differed from one the Council had previously considered.

Early in 2015, officials with the Lane County Health Department approached the Council to seek its participation in a licensing program the County had created that was in place only in the unincorporated areas of the County, asking that Cottage Grove and other municipalities adopt the same program. The Council liked some aspects of the program and in fact spent much of last year implementing many of them, including banning the sale and use of e-cigarettes to and by minors; increasing the acceptable distance from a building that one must stand to smoke from 10 to 25 feet and most recently banning the use of tobacco products in city parks.

Back in November, county health officials again petitioned the Council to adopt the retail tobacco licensing program.

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photo by Jon Stinnett

**Kenneth Michael Roberts is sworn in by Cottage Grove City Attorney Carrie Connelly at the start of Monday's City Council meeting.**

## Roberts appointed to at-large position

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

"Those were some good interviews, folks," Cottage Grove Mayor Tom Munroe exclaimed as much when addressing the members of the City Council Monday evening. A worksession dedicated to interviewing candidates for appointment to the at-large position vacated by Councilor Heather Murphy in December was held prior to the Council's regular meeting, and Munroe would later echo sentiments expressed by other councilors regarding the

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## Fire District achieves improved ISO classification

*Chief credits improvement to passage of bond levy, says fire insurance premiums could decrease for local property owners*

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

A change in classification for the local fire district could mean big insurance savings for property owners in the District.

South Lane County Fire and Rescue announced that, effective April 1, the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification for Cottage Grove and Creswell will change from a Class 9 to a Class 4 in areas outside the city limits of those communities and from a Class 5 to a Class 2 within their city limits.

The Public Protection Classification Program is one of ISO's programs that provides information to insurance companies regarding property/casualty risk; PPC reviews the Fire District, water department and dispatch center capabilities.

On Monday, Chief John Wooten said the improved classifications stem largely from a local option levy approved by voters in 2012, a levy that secured full staffing levels throughout the District, in addition to a levy approved last fall to purchase upgraded equipment.

"Without the levy, we would've had to cut half our workforce," Wooten said. "The ISO rating would've gotten worse, because it's tied to staffing levels. Without the levy, this improvement would not be happening. Even so, the improvement is even better than we hoped for."

Last week's press release stated that, historically, communities strive for a Class 1 rating, which was achieved by only 60 departments nationwide in 2014. Currently, SLFR said, only 1060 departments in the U.S. hold a Class 2 rating, and there are 24 such classifications in Oregon currently.

Wooten said the change, particularly in the rural areas of the

District, could mean big savings on fire insurance premiums.

"Going from a 9 to a 4 in the rural areas is huge," he said. "There are a lot of factors to consider, but it should effect everybody's bottom line."

On Monday, Darla Avery of Payne West Insurance in Cottage Grove concurred.

"In working up some quotes, it does give a couple hundred dollars back to someone who had a Class 9 rating before," Avery said. She pointed out that many factors affect fire insurance rates — whether a home or other building is built of wood, how old the building is, etc. Still, she pointed out that a quote for her own rural home reduced her rate from \$805 per year to \$668 relative to the improved rating.

"Oh my gosh, yes, people are going to see a huge difference," she said.

Avery recommended that property owners contact their insurance companies to see if their rates may improve under the new classification, in addition to checking for any other changes.

"It's a good idea to go over your coverage and see if you're properly covered," she said.

Wooten said the savings in insurance premiums for some property owners could potentially be greater than the increase in taxes brought about by the recent levies to support fire operations.



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CGHS player takes  
first at South Eugene  
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