

# Village Continued from A3

one who, sort of, got the river flowing on this," she said. "Karen ended up in his driveway one day and she was an emotional mess and Don didn't know what to do so he called me."

Weeldreyer drove to the Vintage Inn to meet Williams and Munsell.

"I found myself sitting in the restaurant with her and she was pouring out her heart and I said, 'Hey what about going to church with me?' So she ended up at church."

The Methodist church in Cottage Grove is a long, rectangular building with pews stretching into the back of the room.

That's where Weeldreyer sat. "One of my dearest members was old and couldn't walk well so I sat in the back with him, he was a widower and when he passed, you know how churches are, that was now my spot," Weeldreyer said. "So I invited Karen to join my posse at the back of the church."

Munsell began attending regularly and Weeldreyer says they would text back and forth, some-times on a daily basis. She and Williams would direct her to the webbed network of do-gooders and public officials in the city that might have a lead on how to put a stop to the sale of whip its in Cottage Grove. They would also listen to her in her darkest hours and provide a shoulder to cry on.

"She said to me, Cindy said, 'Karen, God has a special place for a mother's prayer,'" Munsell remembers. "So I just kept praying."

## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES, NEW STARTS

Exactly 18 years ago, on June 7, the Oregon Governor approved legislation that would limit the use of and define the illegal nature of inhalants. The list included acetone, butane, chloroform, nitrous oxide and a dozen others. Under the law, the assistant director for alcohol and drug abuse programs was to create educational material focusing on the problem of inhalants and their abuse by minors. Signs, posters, and drawings depicting the abuse and product were scheduled to be part of the standard drug warning system like smoking for pregnant women and drinking by minors.

"If the law had been enacted the way it was supposed to be, then maybe I would have known. In 1999 my son was a toddler. I would have known

to warn against this. Maybe it would have been in a program like Every 15 Minutes," Munsell said.

It was a point she made when she visited the Cottage Grove City Council again in 2016. She spoke about her son and she spoke about the stores that still sold the products in Cottage Grove and she spoke about how cheap they were. The council still couldn't do anything to help but the city had instituted the Youth Advisory Board. It was made up of civic-minded high school students who sat on the council, heard issues with the council and voted with the council. The youth board representative there that night heard everything Munsell said and brought it back to the board.

## HOUSE BILL 3030

"We took a trip to the capitol in Salem and we talked to Cedric Hayden," said Cottage Grove City Manager Richard Meyers. "He, being a dentist, knew a lot about nitrous oxide and a few months later we get this legislative concept."

House Bill 3030 would raise the age to purchase nitrous oxide to 18. Anyone caught selling a whip-it without checking ID would be subject to a year in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

"I got involved with HB 3030 because the Cottage Grove Youth Authority reached out with concerns over nitrous 'whip its' use," Hayden said. "With my background in dentistry, I am familiar with the effects and hazards of nitrous use. I submitted the bill and the kids from the youth advisory took the lead and did a tremendous job coming to Salem and testifying before the House Health Care committee then the Senate Judiciary Committee where it passed both unanimously."

Munsell remembers shaking the morning she testified before the committee in Salem.

"They thought it might be harder in the Senate so they asked me to speak," she said. But it was complicated. Her son

had climbed up from rock bottom and he was embarrassed. She didn't want to identify him or steal his story from him to broadcast in public but there were more kids in Cottage Grove, more kids at Cottage Grove High School and Lincoln Middle School. There were more kids in the village.

"Now, we wait," she said. "They say it's dead on arrival." There's a nervousness in her voice but it's swept away with the recital of promises she's collected from the community. If the bill doesn't become law at the state level, there's hope for it at the county level with Lane County's new commissioner Gary Williams. He went to school with Graig. He was mayor of Cottage Grove for over a decade.

## VILLAGE KEEPERS

Munsell still has breakfast with Williams almost every morning. She sees Weeldreyer in church, stops by the police station to chat with Shepherd. She's exchanged letters with Parent and has stood up at school board meetings to give her two cents on the agenda.

On Mother's Day her son went fishing. He's working again and looking at returning to school. "He put on the waders we got him last Christmas. He had never put them on. He got a new boat because his old one was ruined since he wasn't in a place to help us move a few years ago when everything was going on," she said. Munsell will continue to collect research in triplicate and hand it to whatever official she runs across. She'll swallow her nerves to speak in front of councils and boards and make phone calls to community lobbyists who may be able to help. She has gone to every smoke shop and convenience store in the city begging store owners to pull the canisters. Several have complied. Two have not and she will continue to visit them, showing them a photo of her son who lost everything but his life with-

in the span of three months and then wallowed and scratched his way back in the subsequent months and year that followed.

In the end, she wants to bring legislation to the federal level because she says, there's no reason for a mother to get a phone call at 4 a.m. because their child was able to buy a whip-it and a balloon. She will continue her quest but it's measured because for her, her son's health and well-being comes first, a notion she balances with the good of the village. "I got my son back. He's coming back." She speaks of a man who walks the length of Main St. He passes the police station and the cafe where her son recently ate breakfast in public for the first time in months. He shouts and talks to himself, his hair long and ragged. "He went to school with my son. He's part of our village. We are better than this and we're going to fix it."

## Ask for help

If you or someone you know is in need of support or instruction in dealing with a similar situation as detailed in "We are a Village" please contact South Lane Mental Health at (541) 942-3939 or visit the office at 1345 Birch Ave. in Cottage Grove. If you suspect illegal activity in your home related to the subject in "We are a Village," contact the Cottage Grove Police Department at (541) 942-9145.



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