

Village Continued from A1

on the side of the road and we know this isn't like our son and we know what some of those boys have been into and Graig just loses it," Munsell says. "He starts screaming at them, 'Do you see this? Do you see what's happened?' But you have to understand. We know these boys. We coached these boys and fed these boys. This is a village and we raise our children together."

That would be the first time their son would refuse them. The second would be at the hospital later that day. Over the next two years, it became common place.

WE LOST HIM

"Karen came in one day and said I have a program for you. You have to do this program." Krista Parent has served as the South Lane School District Superintendent for nearly 15 years and for some of those years she was Munsell's boss. A decade before finding her son on the side of the road, Munsell drove the streets of Cottage Grove, picking up kids and bringing them to school, learning their names and watching them grow from grade to grade. She says Parent has been a blessing as the district's top administrator but Munsell first met Parent, not in her official role, but as a mom. And while under Parent's leadership, the high school graduation rate has skyrocketed, landing in the number two spot in 2016 as much as the district has improved in nearly every measurable standard, she still continues to chase the ones the district couldn't save.

"He was an excellent student, very academically-minded and a great athlete but he ended up not playing basketball, and basketball was his thing, toward the end of his high school career because he got involved in these other things. And we lost him for awhile," she said.

It was only a few days after December 11 that Parent heard of the accident and not long after that, that Munsell was in

her office urging her to watch a video on the Every 15 Minutes Project.

It happens every year around prom when students are contemplating how far into the adult pool they'd like to wade. When fake ID sales rise and inhibitions fall and inevitably a parent is woken up by a 4 a.m. phone call.

"They identify kids beforehand and the grim reaper comes in, dresses the kid in black," Parent explained. "For the rest of the day they don't talk. Essentially they're deemed dead. It's very intense. They stage an accident and have a helicopter bring one of the kids out. They go as far as to notify the parents and the whole student body watches. It's really impactful for the kids."

It was Munsell's effort that Parent credits for bringing Every 15 Minutes to South Lane.

"It's absolutely the worst thing that can happen as a superintendent," Parent says of hearing the news of the accident and watching the subsequent spiral. "Especially in a small community because you know the kids through their K-12 education, you know their parents. My own kids interacted with him in this case. It's probably the worst thing I have to experience, to have a kid like that and to lose him. Thank God he has the family he has. Not everyone has a Karen as a mom who says 'ok we're going to go after this.' It was about saving him but it's much more than that. It's about saving all the kids like him in the future. It takes a village."

FINDING WHIP-ITS

Munsell's son was headed for medical school. His parents had never had to use tough love or even stretch their imaginations for a punishment beyond having his phone taken away or a cut in TV time. But in the aftermath of the accident, Munsell was left with few answers concerning her boy's behavior and so, she went looking.

She'd never seen a nitrous oxide canister before but now she had a sandwich bag full of them and no idea what they were used for.

"They're basically, even though they're used in catering to make whipped cream, it's basically anesthetic gas." Dr. Zane Horowitz is the medical director of Oregon Poison Control at OHSU. "It's basically like inhaling a general anesthetic," he said. "It makes the mind fuzzy, judgment is horrible, coordination is horrible. The difference is obviously, there's no medical official around to monitor and make sure you're getting enough oxygen."

To use the product as a drug, the canisters have to be opened with a special gadget known as a cracker. A balloon is used to capture the nitrous oxide and then, inhaled in the same manner pranksters use helium balloons to change their voice.

"But nitrous oxide isn't an oxygen carrying element," Horowitz says. "So episodically, people will die from this." The cause of death from a whip-pet is lack of oxygen to the brain. A seizure will occur. Or the heart simply stops.

By the time individuals reach the emergency room, it's often for a secondary side effect of the drug according to Dr. Danny Kranitz, an emergency room doctor for PeaceHealth.

"It's a very short lived drug and so its profile as an anesthetic is fairly safe but when used inappropriately, you can trade oxygen for nitrous," he said. "If we see it in the emergency room it's because of a secondary injury caused by being under the influence."

According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, 9.6 percent of 12 to 17 year olds had used an inhalant in 2015 and 13.10 percent of those ages 18 to 25 had used the product to get high. The average age of first use is 16 years old.

Munsell didn't know her son's heart could have stopped.

She had no idea the crash was a secondary cause of the nitrous oxide when she stopped Don Williams in the street the day she found the canisters in her family's shop.

"I saw him and I said pull over!" she said, gesturing wildly. Williams pulled over.

He's served on every public board there is in Cottage Grove. At just over 80 he still takes part in Rotary, matters of the fire board and in his spare time he works to raise money to bring an antique carousel to Cottage Grove. He's done everything short of serving as mayor but those who know him say it doesn't matter who's sworn in, Williams is chief of Cottage Grove.

WHERE DO THEY GET THEM?

"I first met Karen in the 90s," he says. His cowboy hat tips and tilts as he speaks and his nails are just long enough to tap against the table as he talks with his hands to better demonstrate his point.

"She told me what was happening and it, to me, is a shame. These kids can go in and just buy the stuff. So I told her, you have to talk to Tom."

Tom Munroe was in his fourth term as mayor when he was approached by Munsell. He had never seen a whip-it before the day Munsell thrust a sandwich bag full of them in his face.

"I met her at a council meeting and she told me about her son. And I remember us all saying we wanted to do something about this, we'd never heard of it, but we thought we need to do something about this. We just didn't know what we could do," Munroe said. "I thought, we better talk to the police chief."

Munsell remembers him listening to her, looking at the bag of whip-it and asking, "Karen, where do they get them?"

The parking lot in front of the CG Market is narrow, enough room for half a dozen cars. The paint is peeling and the win-

dows in need of a wash. It sits in the vertex of an angle formed by Cottage Grove High School just up the road and Lincoln Middle School across the railroad tracks and to the right. It offers the usual corner market soda cooler, chip rack and candy aisle but just to the right of the register a glass display case that stretches for nearly a third of the length of the store itself. The woman behind the counter says she doesn't know what nitrous oxide is. But inquire as to a "whip it" and she nods and reaches into the glass display case full of brightly colored paraphernalia and pulls a box full of pastel blue canisters. 99 cents each. A box of 24 for \$20. On the box is a cartoon girl with pigtales.

LOOKING FOR HELP

Cottage Grove Police Chief Scott Shepherd couldn't help Munsell.

"It has to be easy for me to tell people no because it has to be factual," he said. "But it's difficult sometimes because any one in law enforcement, we want to help."

But nitrous oxide is not illegal and the stores selling them are not breaking the law. Distributors can place the products in the store alongside crackers and store owners can claim ignorance while selling the whip its to middle-schoolers.

"Sometimes people just want to hear that, that there's nothing we can do," Shepherd said.

While the chief couldn't do anything legally about the sales, Munsell said he helped to guide her in a direction.

One day, she left her house, traveled into town and knocked on Shepherd's office door. When he answered she held out her phone and hit play on a recording she'd made.

"It was my son yelling and screaming. I told him, 'This is going on at my house right now Scott and Graig is there alone and I don't know what to do. Help me,'" she said.

Shepherd told her they need-

ed to send law enforcement out to the house but she didn't want to saddle her son with a record.

Luckily, Tami Miles was on duty. She had lived next door to the Munsells. As children, her daughter and Munsell's son would share an elementary school kiss over the fence.

"She said, 'Would it help if I go? A pseudo mother figure might be able to get through to him,'" Munsell said.

TURNING TO FAITH

It wasn't the first time Munsell sought help from law enforcement. Her son would ping-pong between her home and a trailer the family owned.

"He would come in and just scream at us but we had to use tough love and that was new for us," Munsell said. "He would go in to take a shower and come out like a raging bull. That wasn't my son."

The couple would turn to South Lane Mental Health for help.

"We went in and said we need to speak to someone and they took us right there," Munsell said.


South Lane serves anyone in the county who comes through the door asking for counseling and in the Munsell's case, they provided tools for dealing with drug addiction and a wayward child.

"They told us, the first thing to say and it took us months to say this to him, they told us to say, 'This is what I think you need right now and if you're not willing to do that, I can't help you.'"

Cindy Weeldreyer is second only to Don Williams in volunteering hours. It's not usual to see her at every town function, her church hat atop her head and her heart on her sleeve. She's served as Lane County Commissioner, KNND Radio host and is currently chairing Cottage Grove's biggest tourism draw of the year, Bohemia Mining Days.

"Don Williams is really the

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