

# Woman found, answers still missing



PHOTO BY CAITLYN MAY/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Demi Helenius' mother, Melody, speaks with Cottage Grove Councilor Amy Slay and Cottage Grove Police's Doug Skaggs during a search party held in Cottage Grove after the woman's car was found behind a gas station on Hwy. 99.

By Caitlyn May  
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Demi Helenius, 23, went missing from a Landmark Worldwide self-help seminar held in Portland on Saturday, August 5.

Authorities reported her to be safe and healthy in Roseburg on Tuesday, August 8. However, questions surrounding the circumstances of her disappearance have gone unanswered.

"Ms. Helenius left on her own for personal reasons," the Washington County Sheriff's Office said in a statement. "Ms. Helenius was found to be not in danger and in very good health.

Though the manner in which she did it caused a lot of people, including us, much concern, we respect her privacy."

Her family issued a statement on the Facebook page it set up after Helenius' disappearance saying, "We were happy and relieved to find out Demi was found safe Tuesday evening." The statement went on to thank local law enforcement and volunteers who helped in the search.

Helenius did not return home to Washington after the second day of the Portland conference. Her phone was answered by a Creswell Dairy Queen employ-

ee who said a male had turned the phone in after finding it in the parking lot. Reportedly, he told authorities that he witnessed someone tossing the phone from a moving car.

On Monday, August 7, the black Volkswagen Helenius had been driving was located behind a gas station on Hwy. 99 in Cottage Grove with her identification, keys and money still inside. Forensic tests, reportedly showed no blood inside the vehicle.

Shortly after, family, law enforcement and volunteers swarmed the area handing out fliers and starting a search party.

Helenius' mother, Melody, noted that she did not think her daughter had left Portland and that she would never leave her car unlocked. She described her daughter as an over achiever and someone who suffered from high anxiety.

Helenius recently started a new medication to manage her anxiety but her mother said she did not think it was a "big factor" in her disappearance.

Further details surrounding Helenius' disappearance were not made public by law enforcement or family members.

# Pay it Forward shuts down warehouse, fundraiser

By Caitlyn May  
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Local group Pay it Forward (PIF) is closing its doors.

The announcement came late Monday afternoon just hours after reminders for the group's fundraiser on August 27 had gone out on social media. That fundraiser has since been canceled as well.

"It's with a heavy heart that I'm announcing the cancellation of the fundraiser and the closing of PIF warehouse. I'm not willing to add extra burden on our members and the community, in an effort I feel will not accomplish our ultimate goals of providing a warehouse for PIF that will accommodate a free store. It has been an honor to serve our community for the last four years with the warehouse on my private residence," PIF Founder Mindy Beer wrote on the group's Facebook page. Beer did not return a request for comment.

The group sent out a call for help earlier this year noting that it was running out of storage space for items it collected for the community. The website was started by Beer and her daughter Jennifer Neil as a way for residents to give back to each other. Items could be donated to PIF which would then allow Facebook users to claim items it had collected and pick them up from Beer's residence on designated days. Beer also allowed individuals who needed baby formula to request it without first laying claim to it on the website. It also hosted a "free day" that let residents come onto the property and pick from a pile of items without having to first request them and each fall, the group donated school supplies and clothes to children around the city.

However, both Beer and Neil reached out to the community for space to be donated or otherwise offered so the operation could move into town and off Beer's property.

Sentinel staff member Aaron Ames organized a fundraiser for the group, scheduled for August 27 to help raise funds for a space in town. It had plans to include a silent auction with prizes that included passed to Disney.

Despite the effort, Beer and Neil opted to forgo the move with Neil posting to Facebook late Monday night, "Thank you everyone for all your support. This has been a very challenging decision to say the least for my mother and I. We built this non profit from the ground up and it took years to gain the trust of our community. We didn't want to beat around the bush to anyone on why we're closing. Within the last two years (our busiest time) my parents have went with an empty fridge to sustain PIF cause it's so costly to run, have permanent physical issues due to excessive carrying heavy loads of furniture and a fight or two within our family because of having zero privacy and couldn't even sit down and have a dinner as a whole. It's time. We've tried for years to get a off site building and the truth is, it's not going to happen. So thank you everyone for the donations and tremendous support over the years. We will see you the 27 for our last free sale and back to school giveaway."

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