

Cottage Grove Sentinel

SOUTH LANE AND DOUGLAS COUNTY'S MOST AWARD-WINNING NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1889



SPORTS

Cottage Grove swimmers and wrestlers compete at state. **B1**

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WED
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For a complete six-day forecast please see page A5.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2018

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Fire highlights zombie house dangers

By Caitlyn May
cmay@cg sentinel.com

Usually, when Cottage Grove Mayor Jeff Gowing calls for public comment for items not related to the council's agenda, there's silence. But on Feb. 12, there was Jon Stinnett.

Hours before the meeting, Stinnett's afternoon was interrupted when smoke started drifting by his house. "My wife had left to go to the gym and she came back in," he told the council. There was a fire.

Stinnett described the heartbeats he had to decide what was important in his house. What, of the dozens and dozens of items his

family had amassed over the years, was worth saving as local law enforcement urged neighbors to leave their homes. With his daughter beside him at the podium, Stinnett recalled his sleeping seven-month-old, his hurried decisions on what to take and his anger.

"I'm terrified," he said. "My child is terrified and that's not ok."

The city council is not permitted to enter into discussions during public comment. But it didn't matter, there was nothing the members could say on the issue that they hadn't already said.

Just week before, the body had voted to allow the city to begin addressing the source of the Feb. 12 fire. In a tangled, out-of-the-box approach, city officials managed to take possession of an aban-

doned house on 6th St. and relayed their success to the council that finally, there seemed to be a path to alleviating the problem that had begun popping up shortly after the 2007 financial crisis. But less than 30 days later, a garage went up in flames and Stinnett appeared before the board. Zombie houses, it seemed, had not been vanquished.

"Two problems collided in one spot," said city manager Richard Meyers of the fire on Adams Ave. The house had been abandoned years before and a source of complaints from neighbors ever since. It qualified as a zombie house but city code, prior to November's council discussion, didn't adequately address the designation and

Please see **ZOMBIE PG. A9**

They know what you call them...

"BAD KIDS"

But they're taking back the title because this is their school. And their story.

On an early September morning, the staff of Al Kennedy High School gathered in a room at the South Lane School District offices. The Sentinel had approached the district in the prior weeks about chronicling the teachers and students at Kennedy to tell the story of alternative education through the lens of those on the ground. District administrators thought it was a great idea. Kennedy staff had questions. Eight educators sat in a room with a newspaper editor and had a conversation. At the end, they'd come to an understanding: The truth is the truth and the kids come first. Over the course of the 2017-2018 school year, the Sentinel will tell the story of these educators and their students as they navigate a location change, funding gaps and the unfortunately true narrative that sometimes working hard isn't enough and an education doesn't fix everything. We'll tell stories of triumph, tragedy and truth as the tribe at Kennedy makes the most with what it has in its continued effort to slingshot students up and over the barriers to progress through understanding, commitment and engagement while acknowledging the reality that some kids won't make it.

By Caitlyn May and Zach Silva

IV

Speaking in front of the South Lane School Board is part of the prize for earning student of the month at one of the community's two high schools. It's meant to be an honor but for most, it's nerve-wracking. Students approach the dais and sit before the board to give updates on their schools and tell the seven board members and superintendent how they've grown, what they've learned and how they got there.

On Nov. 6, Kalie Heiser detailed her long road. She told the board she had struggled with and beat addiction. She'd faced homelessness and family tensions. The Kennedy senior shared her hopes of becoming a beautician and, with her belly rounded under the table, that she was scheduled to take her GED exam the next day and give birth shortly after. She

Please see **KENNEDY PG. A8**



Amanda Mullen and her son Weston

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

COMMUNITY

Crabfeed

Habitat for Humanity's annual crabfeed held. **PAGE A7**



GOVERNMENT

Second dog park

The city purchases land near the high school for second dog park. **PAGE A9**

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cgnews@cg sentinel.com
(541) 942-3325 ph • (541) 942-3328 fax
P.O. Box 35, Cottage Grove, OR 97424
Corner of Sixth and Whiteaker, Cottage Grove

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COFFEE WITH THE EDITOR

Have a news tips? Want to talk about community events? Have a question? Stop by Backstage Bakery.

The LAST THURSDAY of every month from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.



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RainCountryRealty.com • raincountryrealty@gmail.com
1320 Hwy 99 • 541-942-7246