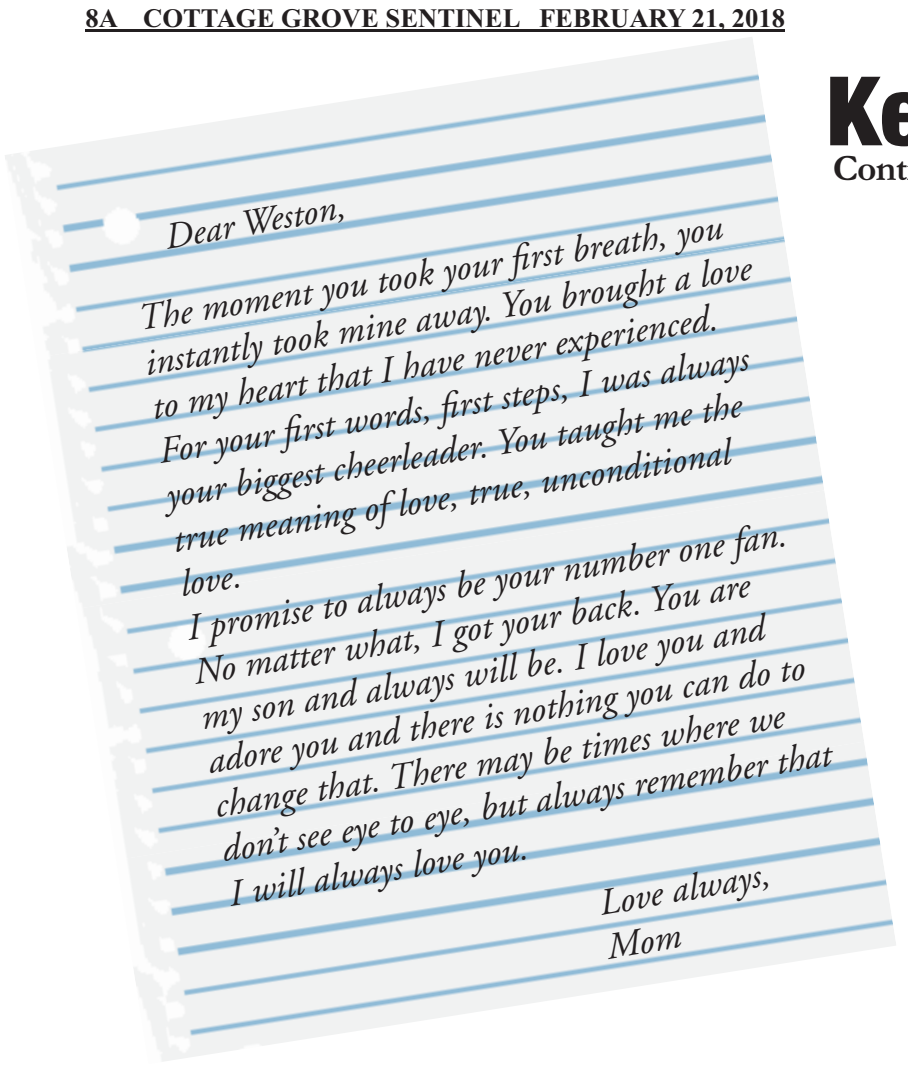

Kennedy

Continued from A1

graduated from Kennedy on Nov. 7th.

*

Delight Valley is difficult to explain to those who have never been there.

When Kennedy High School made the move to the location in the summer of 2017, it was with the understanding that it would be sharing the space with a few dozen preschoolers who utilized some of the buildings as part of the Head Start program. Six months in, it's easy to see the compromises that allow 94 high school students to co-exist with toddlers.

Entry gates have bungee cords for added security and signs asking that visitors ensure the gates are latched to keep little ones inside. The outdoor hallways that lead to crisscrossing paths dotted with one-story, single classroom buildings are adorned with decorations crafted by tiny hands. And just beyond the principal's office, there's a playground. A chain-link fence surrounds the seesaw and slide and on nice days, three-year-olds take turns on the swings and engage in the politics of sharing in the sandbox.

Weston Mullen isn't in the sandbox though. He's not waiting his turn for the swings or standing in line for the slide. The toddler is at a different day-care at Cottage Grove High School where his mother, Amanda, will pick him up after completing her day at Kennedy.

She'll walk into the same school she started her senior year, where she had Braxton Hicks contractions during class that sent her home and where she fell behind in her school work. Cottage Grove High School is one of five high schools Mullen attended between Eugene, Creswell and Cottage Grove before she landed in Delight Valley. Like most of her fellow Kennedy students, she found what she needed there.

"They'll be days where I'm dragging my feet and I just don't feel like a super parent," she said. "One of the teachers will be like, 'Hey you're doing awesome, you're kicking butt. You're going to school and you're a parent.'"

When Mullen became a parent, she was a cheerleader, a good student in Creswell and 16-years-old.

"When I got pregnant everyone was like, 'What?' They didn't expect me to get pregnant," she said.

But, she did. And so did a lot of other teenagers.

The U.S. leads industrialized countries in teen pregnancies with 229,715 babies born to mothers between the age of 15 and 19 in 2015 according to the Centers for Disease Control. However, 2015 marked the sixth straight year the teen birth rate in the country has declined to record-low numbers and it has been on the decline for decades but teens are still having babies. According to the Pew Research Center—a nonpartisan organization that polls the public on trends, demographics and social issues—for every 1,000 teen girls, there were 25 live births in 2016.

In 2015, Weston was one of them.

"He was late!" Mullen said, sitting under the structure that shields Kennedy's outdoor basketball court from the rain. If not for the dozens of photos she scrolls through on her phone to find the perfect snapshot of her son, it would be hard to tell she was a mother.

"People say that. Even new students that come to Kennedy say, like, 'No way you're a mom.' But I am," she said. "They understand that here and Brandi is here."

*

Brandi Baker-Rudicel, the teen parent coordinator in South Lane, Odysseyware and Health teacher at Kennedy, is all things to teen parents in Cottage Grove. She answers questions and provides reading material for curious or confused expectant mothers but she's also driven girls to pre-natal appointments and temporarily cared for a baby when its mother was sick.

More than anything, Baker-Rudicel understands teen moms. She gets them because she was once one of them.

At 16, she found herself pregnant, at Kennedy and looking for a way forward. She found Gay, Al Kennedy's wife.

"She would get me connected with housing resources because me and my boyfriend at the time were out on our own. She would make sure that I was on track for graduation. She would make sure that I would understand where to get WIC. How that all worked. She would make sure I would you know, shots. Just everything," said Baker-Rudicel. "I had somebody to talk to, I know I was dealing with some mental health issues at the time and she would make sure I was connected with counseling, getting ready for college. I don't think I ever would have went to college if it wasn't her idea."

Now, married for 20 years, Baker-Rudicel provides that same guidance for teen parents throughout the district. On call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, she directs students to housing, mental health and other resources in a bid to make staying in school and earning a diploma a possibility when statistics suggest otherwise.

"If it wasn't for Kennedy, I don't think I would be able to do it," Mullen said. In mid-January, she had only a few credits left before graduating and was beginning to plan out her future.

Nationwide, approximately two percent of teen mothers finish college before the age of 30. Mullen has her eye on community college and then, maybe a university.

*

Not every teen mother in South Lane School District ends up at Kennedy but every teen mother encounters Baker-Rudicel who helps them not only with the logistics of contractions during the school day or mothering while studying but with the stigma teen parents still face.

"Teen parents get looked at under the microscope by everybody: by staff, by community members, by friends, family," she said. "And they don't have the prefrontal cortex going yet, they don't have all these things going yet and they're doing the best they can and trying to be a teenager at the same time."

In February, Baker-Rudicel's workload decreased slightly at Kennedy. Mullen graduated, leaving the school without any teenage parents.

"Last year was a big year for teen parents, the district had 21," Kennedy Principal Halie Ketcher said. When asked if they all graduated, Ketcher nodded and added, "Or stopped coming to school."

SLMH director set to leave Feb. 22

A farewell reception for Tom Wheeler, South Lane Mental Health's long-time executive director, will take place on Thursday, Feb. 22, from 3 to 6 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, 216 S. Third St. in Cottage Grove. Wheeler is retiring after 25 years leading the non-profit organization.

The event is also to welcome South Lane Mental Health's new executive director, Damien Sands, who was hired in November following a nationwide search. Sands most recently worked for the Oregon Community Foundation out of their South West Valley office. He comes to South Lane Mental Health with over 25 years in health and human services, working in various roles at the non-profit, county, and state levels.

Wheeler joined South Lane Mental Health in 1992. At that time, there were five staff and 50 clients. Under Wheeler's leadership, the agency has grown to 105 employees serving more than 2,200 individuals and families a year through a wide array of mental and behavioral health services.

South Lane Mental Health, established in 1988, provides counseling, crisis response, substance use disorder services, and case and medication management for Cottage Grove area adults and children. South Lane Mental Health also provides housing and support for individuals with persistent and severe mental illness so they can live as independently as possible in the community. In addition to several offices in Cottage Grove, South Lane Mental Health has an office in Springfield, and also serves residents of North Douglas County. To learn more about South Lane Mental Health, visit www.slmh.org.

Applications for open council seat

The city of Cottage Grove is currently taking applications to fill the council seat being vacated by Amy Slay on Feb. 28. Applicants must be at least 18 years old, have live in Ward 4 at least one year prior to applying and be a qualifed elector. Applications are available at city hall and due by March 5. Interviews will take place during the open, public council meeting on March 12. For more information, or to find the boundaries of Ward 4, please visit cottagegrove.org.

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Worship Directory

DRAIN:

HOPE U.M.C.
131 W "A" St. Drain, OR
541-315-1617
Pastor: Lura Kidner-Miesen
Fellowship & Song: 11:30am
Potluck Lunch: 12:00pm
Worship: 12:30pm

COTTAGE GROVE:

6th & Gibbs Church of Christ
195 N. 6th St. • 541-942-3822
Pastor: Aaron Earlywine
Youth & Families Pastor:
Seth Bailey
Service times: 9am & 10:30am
Sunday School: 9am for all ages
Christian Education
Nursery for pre-k - 3rd Grade
www.6thandgibbs.com

Calvary Baptist Church
77873 S 6th St • 541-942-4290
Pastor: Riley Hendricks
Sunday School: 9:45am
Worship: 11:00am
The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm
Praying Thru Life: Wednesday 6:00pm

Calvary Chapel Cottage Grove
1447 Hwy 99 (Village Plaza)
541-942-6842
Pastor: Jeff Smith
Two Services on Sun:
9am & 10:45am
Youth Group Bible Study
Child Care 10:45am Service Only
www.cgcalvary.org

Center for Spiritual Living
Cottage Grove
700 Gibbs Ave.
(Community Center)
Rev. Bobby Lee
Meets Sunday 3:00 p.m.
cslcottagegrove@gmail.com

Church of Christ
420 Monroe St • 541-942-8565
Sunday Service: 10:30am

Cottage Grove Bible Church
1200 East Quincy Avenue
541-942-4771
Pastor:Bob Singer
Worship 11am
Sunday School:9:45am
AWANA age 3-8th Grade,
Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm
www.cgbible.org

Cottage Grove Faith Center
33761 Row River Rd.
541-942-4851
Lead Pastor: Kevin Pruett
www.cg4.tv
Full Children's Ministry available
Service: 10:00am

Delight Valley
Church of Christ
33087 Saginaw Rd. East
541-942-7711
Pastor: Bob Friend
Two Services:
9am - Classic in the Chapel
10:30am - Contemporary in the Auditorium

First Presbyterian Church
3rd and Adams St
541-942-4479
Pastor: Karen Hill
Worship: 10:00am
Sunday School: 10:00am
www.cgpresbynews.com

Hope In The Grove
700 E. Gibbs • 401-855-5668
Pastor: Wayne Husk
Sunday services:
Worship: 9am
Coffee Fellowship: 10:15am
Bible Study: 10:30am

Hope Fellowship
United Pentecostal Church
100 S. Gateway Blvd.
541-942-2061
Pastor: Dave Bragg
Worship: 11:00am Sunday
Bible Study: 7:00pm Wednesday
www.hopefellowshipupc.com
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Living Faith Assembly
467 S. 10th St. • 541-942-2612
Pastor Rulon Combs
Worship & Children's Church 10:00 am
Youth 180 Mondays 5:30-8pm

Non-Denominational Church of Christ
1041 Pennoyer Ave
541-942-8928
Preacher: Tony Martin
Sunday Bible Study:10:00am
Sunday Worship:10:50am & 5:30pm
www.pennoyeravecoc.com

Old Time Gospel Fellowship
103 S. 5th St. • 541-942-4999
Pastor: Jim Edwards
Sunday Service: 10:00am
Join in Traditional Christian Worship

Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Philip Benizi
Catholic Churches
1025 N. 19th St.
541-942-3420
Father: Joseph Hung Nguyen
Holy Mass:
Tue-Thu: 8:30am; Sat:5:30pm
Sun: 10:30am
Confession: After daily mass,
Sat. 4-5pm or by appointment
St. Philip Benizi, Creswell
552 Holbrock Lane
541-895-8686, Sunday: 8:30am

St. Andrews Episcopal Church
1301 W. Main • 541-767-9050
Rev. Lawrence Crumb
"Church with the flags."
Worship: Sunday 10:30am
All Welcome

Seventh-day Adventist Church
820 South 10th Street
541-942-5213
Pastor: Kevin Miller
Bible Study: Saturday, 9:15 am
Worship Service: Saturday, 10:40
Mid-week Service: Wednesday, 1:00

Trinity Lutheran Church
6th & Quincy • 541-942-2373
Pastor: James L. Markus
Sunday School & Adult Education 9:15am
Sunday Worship 10:30 am
Comm. Kitchen Free Meal Tue & Thur
5:00pm TLC Groups
tlccg.com

United Methodist Church
334 Washington • 541-942-3033
Pastor:Lura Kidner-Miesen
Worship: 10:30am
Comm. Dinner (Adults $5, Kids Free)
1st & 3rd Monday 5-6:00pm
umcgrove.org

"VICTORY" Country Church
913 S. 6th Street • 541-942-5913
Pastor: Barbara Dockery
Worship Service: 10:00am
Message: "WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES"

Worship With Us!

Our Worship Directory is a weekly feature in the newspaper. If your congregation would like to be a part of this directory, please contact the Cottage Grove Sentinel @ 541-942-3325