



## A word from the Editor: In support of the Chronicle

By Caitlyn May  
cmay@cgsentinel.com

More often than not, the *Creswell Chronicle* is the only news source in the room covering the Creswell School District. The only way Creswell residents know what the board is discussing and deciding is by reading what the *Chronicle* reports. It's the only way any of us know what any board is doing—community reporters sit-in on meetings that start well after the work day has ended and stretch into the night. They race back to newsrooms to write stories or file from the parking lot on a laptop that they hope gets them through another six months from the driver's seat of a car they pray makes it another year.

*Chronicle* Editor Erin Tierney was reporting from a parking lot on March 14 — but she wasn't filing a story. She was making phone calls and checking state statute because she was kicked out of a meeting she had every right to be in.

The state of Oregon allows press to attend executive sessions of public boards. Tierney was settling in for the March 14 executive session of the Creswell School Board when she was reportedly shooed from the room by board chair Mike Anderson. According to Tierney, superintendent Todd Hamilton later told her press access was denied due to the nature of the

conversation, which included a student's medical records. However, ORS 192.660(4), which legally bars the media if a school board intends to consider matters that pertain to a student's confidential medical records, was not listed on the March 14 agenda.

Instead, the board's agenda included ORS 192.660(2)(b) and ORS 192.660(2)(f), which address complaints brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent who does not request an open hearing — all of which are open to the media in order to assure transparency.

Though for-profit entertainment publications, corporate-funded media machines and brand-obsessed reality show anchors can fabricate and manipulate information to support their narrative, journalists at small community newspapers are working hard to do much more with much less in an effort to keep their readers informed and up-to-speed on what's happening in their communities.

That's why what happened next, according to Tierney and the *Chronicle*, is concerning. Public bodies have an obligation to the tax-paying public to provide a certain level of transparency. This is mandated at both state and federal levels and cannot be discarded or manipulated at the whim

of an individual simply because they currently sit in the chairman's seat.

So, when Tierney requested the minutes from the March 14 meeting she was thrown out of, she should have received them. Instead, what she got was a regurgitation of the board's agenda. According to the *Chronicle*, the minutes — required to be recorded by state law — that were finally provided by the district did not include motions or the result of any vote that took place that evening. And while the *Chronicle*, like any newspaper, must follow certain restrictions when it comes to what can be reported on in an executive session, state law has made it clear that those meetings are imperative to providing a comprehensive understanding of board decisions, and it allows the confirmation of facts outside of executive session by reporters.

All of that was made impossible by the Creswell School Board's decision to deny access to the *Chronicle*.

What happened during those 45 minutes the board met behind closed doors?

I don't know. And neither do you.

The freedom of the press cannot be separated from the right to bear arms. It was considered by our founders to be so vital to the fabric of what

they were building that they put it at the top of the list. Amendment #1.

Reporters sitting at the Eugene City Council meeting, or the Yoncalla basketball game, or the Creswell School Board are there asking questions because you deserve to know what's happening in the community you live, work, play and vote in.

What is your city council doing? Where does your high school team stand in the state rankings? What was that thing happening on over on Main St. the other day? Is there a fundraiser this weekend? What is the school board doing?

The *Chronicle*, like *The Sentinel*, works with a small staff and doesn't always get to every story on the list. It's simple math for newsrooms like ours.

But when public bodies make it harder for small newsrooms to do their jobs, they are doing a disservice to their community — and someone should say something about it because the only way any of this works is if everyone plays by the rules and newspapers are allowed to inform the public, no matter the size of their reporting staff.

So, we're saying something and supporting a neighboring, small community newspaper whose readership, just like this one, deserves to be an informed one.



## Cottage Grove Sentinel

(541) 942-3325

### Administration

Jennifer Bartlett, Group Publisher

Gary Manly, General Manager ..... Ext. 207  
gmanly@cgsentinel.com

Aaron Ames, Marketing Specialist ..... Ext. 216  
aames@cgsentinel.com

Jana Stelle, Marketing Specialist ..... Ext. 203  
jsteele@cgsentinel.com

### Editorial

Caitlyn May, Editor ..... Ext. 212  
cmay@cgsentinel.com

Zach Silva, Sport Editor ..... Ext. 204  
zsilva@cgsentinel.com

### Customer Service

Mandi Jacobs, Office Manager ..... Ext. 200  
Legals, Classifieds ..... Ext. 200  
mjacobs@cgsentinel.com

### Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor ..... Ext. 215  
graphics@cgsentinel.com

(USP 133880)

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Swinging Bridge benefit

Dear Cottage Grove Community,

We want to congratulate you on the highly successful "Swing the Bridge" Benefit for the Swinging Bridge held in the Armory March 24. Swinging Bridge lovers of every stripe made their way across the replica Swinging Bridge and onto the main floor of the event. Nobody was keeping count but from the advance ticket sales, the number of tables we had to put out and just looking around, it had to be over 300 Bridge Lovers who came with their families and friends. We had some great music starting with the Huckleberrys, who got the room and mood warmed up early in the evening with their good old timey tunes.

They passed the torch to The Rockin' Reveleers who got folks off their feet and onto the ever-shrinking dance floor where they boogied the shine off the floor. For a sweet close to the night's music the Flies with Honey unpacked their rich comb of tunes. KSOW's Donnie Sevilla managed the stage and the music flawlessly flowed through the night.

Thank you everyone who brought a part of the delicious pot luck or enjoyed the same as we fellowshiped together for a good cause - getting our Bridge back! There were a number of great items donated by local businesses and individuals that made up the Silent Auction and Raffle. Sujo donated prints and cards of her beautiful painting

of the Swinging Bridge, which has become a symbol of our cause, so fans of the bridge could donate and take the image home and remind them of better days & what is to come. There were many interesting items of Swinging Bridge lore on the History display from the Cottage Grove Historical Society & Museum.

One of our biggest goals was to support the grant writing efforts by the City of Cottage Grove. You could see the love the people have for the Swinging Bridge as they sat down and shared their stories in letter after letter. There was a stack at least an inch thick.

Besides having fun for a good cause, and raising awareness for the Swinging Bridge, we had hoped to raise some money towards its rehabilitation. Well, we were

blown away at the generosity of everyone who came. Between all the auctions, donation jugs, merchandise sales and ticket sales, "Swing the Bridge" raised about \$5,000 that was put into the Special City Trust Fund for the Swinging Bridge, bringing the total to over \$8,400! You can still donate by going to City Hall or on your Water Bill.

We put our money where our mouth is Cottage Grove. We will be at Earth Day, Coiner Park, next and we will have another Benefit about every three months until we can cross the bridge again!

Dana Merryday for Friends of Cottage Grove Swinging Bridge

**Have something to say?**  
Send letters to [cmay@cgsentinel.com](mailto:cmay@cgsentinel.com)

### Letters to the Editor policy

In order to ensure that your letter will be printed, letters must be under 300 words and submitted by Friday at 5 p.m. Letters must be signed and must include an address, city and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be printed. Letters must be of interest to local readers. Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary. To avoid transcription errors, the Sentinel would prefer editorial and news content be sent electronically via email or electronic media. Hand written submissions will be accepted, but we may need to call to verify spelling, which could delay the publishing of the submission. The Sentinel reserves the right not to print letters that may contain libelous content.

### IN BRIEF APRIL 4-APRIL 20

- Opal Center's "Good People" starts this Friday at 7:30 p.m. Shows Saturday (7:30 p.m.) and Sunday (2:30 p.m.).
- Cottage Theatre's "Legally Blonde: The Musical" begins this Friday (8 p.m.) and runs through April 29.
- April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Main St. is decorated in blue pinwheels and ribbons to mark the month.
- Relay for Life's Spaghetti Western will be held at the Elks Lodge on Saturday at 6 p.m. Adult tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door.
- The annual dinner and auction held by the Cottage Grove High School Athletic Department will be held on Saturday at the Cottage Grove Armory beginning at 5 p.m. with a social hour. Dinner will be held at 6 p.m. and the auction will begin at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$45.