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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2018

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Mill begins process of deciding what's next

By Zach Silva
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While the fire is out, the damage done by the fire at Whitsell Manufacturing Mill in Drain that occurred May 27 continues to impact the Cottage Grove community. The immediate concern for owner Walter "Fred" Whitsell are the more than 100 jobs that were lost in the blaze. "Our goal, of course, is putting people back to

work. We're going to do that," he said on Saturday. So far, Whitsell estimates that 25 employees are back at work, some at other mills in the area while others are now working in Medford. While the hope is to one day rebuild the 194,000-square-foot mill, it is not yet a guarantee. "We're optimistic. You have to be. What else are you going to do?" said Whitsell. "It's like 40 years of your life is gone in a moment. Something I built from nothing, with like six people. I don't

even like to stop and think about it. I really don't." The property was handed back to Whitsell after South Lane Fire and Rescue, and other agencies from around the state, closely examined the

See FIRE A11

Remnants of last week's Saginaw mill fire continue to smolder as the long process of assessing damages continues.



ZACH SILVA/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

They know you call them...
'Bad Kids'
But they're taking back the title because this is their school. And their story.

Kennedy instructor Aimee Cooper informs student Zach Chee that he passed his math essential skills test on May 24, the biggest obstacle standing between him and graduation. With just 3.75 credits left to earn, Chee is expected to graduate on June 9.

CAITLYN MAY/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Editor's Note: This is part of an ongoing series that began after a conversation with staff members at Al Kennedy High School in early September. The Sentinel had approached the district 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. 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 has been telling the story of the educators and their students as they've navigated a location change, funding gaps and the honest narrative that, sometimes, working hard isn't enough — and an education doesn't fix everything. Kennedy's stories are of triumph, tragedy and truth as the tribe at Kennedy continues its efforts to slingshot students up and over the barriers to progress through understanding, commitment and engagement... all the while acknowledging the unfortunate reality that some kids won't make it over.

By Caitlyn May & Zach Silva
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"We're not bad kids."

Star Posthumus, 18, is a senior at Kennedy High School. She arrived in Cottage Grove five years ago from Michigan after she was caught drinking at school. But life here hasn't always been easier. There were the times she was without a home; the time her clothes were stolen; or the time, while living with a relative, she had to climb out of her window one night to avoid a drug-fueled argument. "Sometimes life isn't all great and we're trying to make the best of it," she said.

Over the span of 45 minutes, Star shared her story, dotted with the traditional themes shared by many Kennedy students: a mental health diagnosis, sexual assault, homelessness.

"That's what we're trying to do, we're trying to make life better for ourselves. That's why we came to Kennedy," she said.

equality. noun equal-i-ty. : The quality or state of being equal: as. a: sameness or equivalence in number, quantity, or measure. b : likeness or sameness in quality, power, status, or degree.
equity. noun eq-ui-ty: justice according to nat-

ural law or right; specifically: freedom from bias or favoritism.

Enrollment is down at Kennedy. The high school started the year with 94 students and, as of last month, was down to 78. Some kids stop coming to school, reaffirming their decision to drop out despite how their chances at receiving a diploma improved when Kennedy caught them on their way out of Cottage Grove High School. Meanwhile, others graduate. There may be fewer kids but it's never quiet at Kennedy. A group of

See KENNEDY A10

Testing deems Cottage Grove water safe

By Caitlyn May
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Early last week, officials in Salem warned residents under the age of six not to drink the city's tap water after finding an unhealthy level of toxins in the water supply. A public safety alert was sent out via robo calls and text alerts from Salem to Eugene causing panic in three different counties and triggering price gouging for clean, bottled water.

The city of Cottage Grove released a statement on Friday assuring residents that the city's tap water was safe to drink, citing its source.

City water is garnered from the Dorena Reservoir, managed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

"Dorena Reservoir has experienced algal blooms in the past," the statement read. "Some of these blooms have resulted in a recreational health advisory to be issued for the users of the reservoir, due to the presence of toxins being produced by the algae."

The toxin causing the health alert in Salem and Marion County is known as a cyanotoxin and is created by harmful algal blooms. Boiling tap water increases the danger of the toxin. Governor Kate Brown has issued a state of emergency for Salem, sending in clean water while city officials reportedly knew of the heightened tests for four days before reporting the issue to the public after a May 23 test showed 6.96 parts per billion of the toxin. Children under six and individuals with weakened immune systems should not consume water with more than 0.7 parts per billion. Healthy adults should not consume water with three parts per billion.

According to the statement from the city of Cottage Grove, tests conducted at Row River have sometimes detected the presence of very low levels of cyanotoxins.

"We do not expect that the harmful algal blooms issue will go away but it will continue to be more common so we are pursuing alternatives to prevent toxins in finished drinking water, should the increased levels of cyanotoxins be detected in Row River," the statement read. "Should toxins be detected in Cottage Grove drinking water at a level that would require a 'Do Not Drink' health advisory, the city would work closely with the local and state public health and emergency response agencies as the city of Salem is currently doing, to address the situation and quickly reduce cyanotoxin levels in the tap water."

The city of Salem lifted the restriction on drinking water on June 2.

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