

REVIEW *from AI*

stretched into 2018 from the previous year after she was accused of having a personal relationship with a district employee. The school board determined, through a third-party investigation, that there was no district policy barring the relationship.

In January of 2018, after nine months of back-and-forth over the personal relationship, the school board and Parent agreed to the terms of her retirement after 33 years in the district.

The agreement came after a handwritten note that was delivered to the school board but which the board took no action on, was given to a handwriting expert by a local resident who funded the analysis.

According to the expert, it was possible Parent wrote the letter. More than 100 South Lane School District employees signed a letter that asked the school board to investigate the issue further.

In April, the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (the state licensing agency for educators) reviewed a preliminary investigation report regarding the allegations and dismissed the complaint filed against Parent clearing her of misconduct.

The retirement was effective June 30 and the board installed Dr. Larry Sullivan as an interim superintendent, informing the community it would begin looking for a long-term superintendent. Earlier this year, the board extended Sullivan's contract by an additional year.

Parent has since taken a position with the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) as the director of leading and licensure.

Bad Kids

The Sentinel embarked on

a partnership with the South Lane School District to tell the story of its alternative high school. Kennedy had recently undergone a name change — dropping 'alternative' for its moniker — and was under new leadership with first-time principal Halie Ketcher. The school had a different approach to teaching at-risk students and students who learned well in smaller classrooms and had seen success in the past.

Together with Ketcher and her staff, *The Sentinel* told 10 stories overall ranging from the school's approach to learning, class configuration, teen pregnancy and parenthood, equality and mental health. The series followed students throughout the school year up until and including graduation.

Kennedy students earned \$122,000 in scholarships and earned 20 GED certificates and 22 diplomas.

"Some of us struggled at other schools. That doesn't make us bad kids," said student Star Posthumus as she addressed the crowd gathered at the graduation. Posthumus, who contended with homelessness nearly her entire high school career, thanked her teachers and said Kennedy gave her the second chance she needed. She said she learned to check her facts, the importance of patience and to work for what she wanted. "For all the people who thought we couldn't do it, look at us now," she said.

The final installment of the series ran under the headline "Good Kids" noting that the students at Kennedy had always been "good" but were aware of the way residents had labeled them as "bad kids."

Mildred Whipple Library

The library in Drain was one of 11 shut down after the Douglas County Commission voted to close the entire county's

library system due to a lack of funding. The decision came after a Nov. 2016 ballot measure that asked county residents to tax themselves 44 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value in order to fund the library. That vote failed in all of the communities in Douglas except three— including Drain.

The Friends of the Mildred Whipple Library group started a grassroots effort to place another measure on the ballot in 2018 to fund the community's library.

The same 44 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value was overwhelmingly approved by more than 70 percent of voters. Volunteers logged hundreds of hours to clean and catalog the books they had been granted ownership of by the county and on Oct. 10, the doors reopened.

The library joins Roseburg and Reedsport in having a sustainable, secure funding source while the remaining Douglas County libraries are currently operating on volunteer hours.

Changes to Bohemia Mining Days

"For the first time in its 58-year history, Cottage Grove's Bohemia Mining Festival will end on Saturday night and not Sunday afternoon," a press release issued Friday, Feb. 9 from the Bohemia Mining Days (BMD) board read.

The four-day festival that runs every summer and is billed as Cottage Grove's biggest tourist draw, cited carnival and vendor schedules, as well as operational costs for the change.

"BMD is all about tradition," said board president Cathy Simmons. "Yet as we go forward, circumstances force us to make changes like this one with an eye on our bottom line."

Simmons previously noted that it cost approximate-

ly \$50,000 to host BMD each year. Last month, the board approved its 2018 budget of \$55,450.

The change marked the first major alteration to the festival in decades and was attributed to a decrease in volunteer hours, the work load of volunteers and revenue.

Zombie houses

On Feb. 12, there was a house fire. Just off Adams Ave., an empty house's garage caught fire and sent neighbors running on evacuation orders from South Lane County Fire and Rescue. The house, was a zombie house — a home abandoned or foreclosed on and left to sit empty and fall into disrepair.

Just weeks before the fire, the Cottage Grove City Council had voted to allow the city to begin addressing zombie houses in a tangled, out-of-the-box approach that allowed city officials to take possession of a zombie house on 6th Street.

After the February house fire, City Manager Richard Meyers informed the board that the city was continuing to explore options for dealing with zombie houses including leasing the houses from the owners of record.

Harrison Elementary

The old gave way to the new this year as Harrison Elementary School closed its doors and moved up the road to its new location — a \$23+ million school built with funds from a \$35 million bond passed by voters in 2016.

The new Harrison Elementary School opened its doors in September to welcome a new class that would benefit from a new library, cafeteria and grade pods that were decorated with unique Pacific Northwest themes.

The original Harrison was built in 1949 for approximate-

ly \$250,000 but had since outgrown its student population. Plans for the old Harrison building have not yet been addressed by the school board but the building did get a proper goodbye with a celebration that saw old students and teachers return in addition to a book brigade that garnered 300 volunteers to move thousands of books by hand from the school's old library to the new facility.

Whitsell Mill

The Whitsell Mill burned to the ground on May 27. The fire that destroyed more than 180,000 square feet was ruled accidental. "While the exact cause of the fire remains undetermined and may likely never be known, fire investigators located an area inside the mill where they believe the fire began," a press release on the fire read. The mill employed approximately 100 workers, some of whom turned to mill jobs around the state.

The local chamber of commerce, however, helped Whitsell owners secure office space in Cottage Grove while they worked on rebuilding the business.

Reader's choice:

The search for Anna

In the final weeks of 2018, the community became enamored — if not obsessed — with a dog named "Anna."

Anna had been visiting Cottage Grove over the Thanksgiving holiday when she became separated from her new owner — Cassie Asleson — and an 18-day search was launched.

Asleson had recently rescued Anna after her eight-year-old dog Roxy had to be put to sleep. She said she had found Anna — a white pit bull just like Roxy — after weeks of looking and just hours after she made the call to euthanize Roxy.

But after six weeks, Anna didn't know her name and was still skittish so when she went missing near the Village Green in Cottage Grove, it could have been for good.

Enter Cottage Grove.

Asleson credits the community with helping to find the dog — who emerged from a tangle of blackberry bushes less than a mile from where she had disappeared.

Posters plastered the city and residents took time out of their day to drive the streets looking for Anna. The dog's Facebook page garnered hundreds of followers and thousands of engagements until she was finally found by accident.

A clerk at the Chevron station on Gateway Blvd. saw a flash of white on an embankment in the blackberries just below the highway. He made a phone call to Asleson and within an hour dozens of volunteers showed up at the station to lure the dog from the bushes and eventually return the dog to its owner who drove from Washington for the reunion.

Honorable mentions

- Cottage Grove turned 131 years old in 2018
- Habitat for Humanity dedicated its 13th and 14th houses in Cottage Grove
- The Warren H. Daughtery Aquatic Center closed to begin renovations utilizing the \$35 million bond approved by voters in 2016. The pool is expected to re-open in 2019.
- The weekly dinner for homeless and low-income individuals dubbed "Soup's On" changed hands after longtime resident and volunteer Sharon Jean left Cottage Grove to retire in Hawaii. Jean had manned Bohemia Mining Days and various other projects around the community for decades and ultimately turned over Soup's On to resident Kris Allen.

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