



Jason Littleton recalls living homeless in a park in Falls City for two years. He now has a roof over his head.

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS NEWS

Heroes. Teammates. Champions. Those were the words that repeatedly came up when the Dallas Community Awards' planning committee tried to come up with a theme for this year's ceremony, scheduled Friday evening at the Oregon National Guard's Nesmith Readiness Center. "We just looked at the purpose of the awards, who we are giving them to, and why," said Chelsea Metcalfe, Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce executive director. "We just kept coming back to these are the champions of our community who often pull a team together to make things happen."

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FALLS CITY NEWS

Gerald Melin is the new face on the Falls City City Council, filling the vacancy left when former councilor Terry Ungricht was sworn in as mayor in January. Melin was appointed on a 4-to-1 vote Thursday following an interview with members of the city council. He was sworn in immediately and participated in several votes Thursday. A Falls City resident for 10 years, Melin is the part-time clerk at the town's post office. "I have plenty of time to get in here and help," Melin said. "I will be listening and trying to help people understand what is going on."

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INDEPENDENCE NEWS

Sgt. Tino Banuelos led a discussion about the state of policing in the U.S., but more specifically, in Independence. About 20 people sat in on an open discussion format at Friday's Latino Roundtable, a monthly gathering to discuss topics of importance to Independence's mixed community. Banuelos said with so many police incidents, particularly the race-fueled shootings in places like Ferguson, Mo., and most recently in Pasco, Wash., the Independence Police Department wanted to open communication with its community. "We would like input from different perspectives," he said.

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MONMOUTH NEWS

Whether you're new at gardening or a regular green thumb, there's one thing all planters need: seeds. Monmouth Public Library's new Seed Lending Program provides a plethora of seed packets for the pleasure of gardeners young and old. With no strings attached — no library card is needed — people may take home up to five seed packets per adult each day, said Vivian Byers, library aide. "The object is to get people interested in growing their own food," Byers said.

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POLK COUNTY NEWS

Polk County has joined more than a dozen Oregon counties in approving a resolution supporting the Second Amendment and opposing restrictions on gun rights. In a unanimous vote during its Feb. 11 meeting, the Polk County Board of Commissioners passed the resolution, which was brought to the board by Dallas resident and American Outdoors owner Micky Garus. Garus said the resolution is in response to bills expected to come up for votes in the Oregon Legislature this session that would restrict gun rights.

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NO PLACE TO CALL HOME

Issue of homelessness a hidden problem in Polk County

HOMELESS BY THE NUMBERS

130

Number of homeless students reported in local schools in fall 2014.

0

Number of beds available in Polk County for a homeless person not coming out of incarceration, escaping domestic violence, or without an intellectual or developmental disability.

15

Miles from downtown Dallas to Union Gospel Mission in downtown Salem, the nearest homeless shelter.

325

Number of people considered either homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless who attended January's Polk Community Connect event.

204

Individuals arrested or cited by Polk County Sheriff's Department and Monmouth Police in 2014 who were homeless.

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The worst part is the loneliness. After he lost his wife of 28 years in a divorce and his kids had all grown up, Jason Littleton of Falls City found himself homeless, spending nights in Fay Wilson Memorial Park, aka Lower Park. "Everybody was real nice," he said. "I've lived here (in Falls City) my whole life. Nobody messed with me or anything, which was good. They kind of adapted around me." For two years, the Falls City native crept into the park after dark to hunker down, leaving again at dawn. "Once you get into that realm, it's hard to get out," Littleton said.

Homelessness could happen to anybody, but is more likely to affect those living from paycheck to paycheck. A sudden family illness could mean missing work, which could result in losing a job. No job means no way to pay rent or a mortgage. Utilities are cut off for nonpayment, followed by eviction. A series of illness and injury led to San Hewitt and his father, Turner, struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Turner Hewitt suffered a stroke that led to job loss. He was an assistant professor at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. After San took him in to take care of him, San lost a good deal of teeth in a bike accident.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

San and Turner Hewitt look for a dry place to spend the night on a rainy day Jan. 30 after a hotel is no longer an option. San takes care of his dad, Turner, as best he can.

"It's a condition of circumstances," San said. "We had a place, people were going to let us stay with them, then they took our money and kicked us out." San lugged a giant suitcase filled to the brim with their belongings. They had spent a couple nights in the Riverside Inn in Dallas, but couldn't afford to stay there anymore. Getting to the Union Gospel Mission shelter in Salem would not be easy, nor practical. "That place down there is scary," San said. "It's horrible. You have a lot of crazy people down there, and they kick you out at 5 in the morning. He (Turner) can't walk that far, either." Because of Turner's stroke, his movement is limited, and

the son and father were unsure they'd find shelter from the late January rain. Now what? Options are few In Polk County, it probably means a referral to Salem shelters in adjacent Marion County. If you have a family, it means you'll most likely be separated if you can find shelter. "In Polk, besides Sable House, there are no other shelters or locations for families — or anybody," said Michelle Bornfleth, service integration coordinator for Polk County Health and Human Services. The closest shelters, found largely in Salem, are often full, she added. See HOMELESS, Page 17A

THE NEXT
7
DAYS
PLANNING
FOR YOUR
WEEK

wed
How 'bout a game of bingo? Rogue Farms Hopyard hosts its monthly bingo night open to all ages.
6:30 p.m. Free.

Fog; Mostly Cloudy
Hi: 55
Lo: 42

thu
The nationally-ranked Western Oregon men's basketball team plays host to Western Washington in a GNAC matchup.
7 p.m. \$4-\$6.

Cloudy; A Shower?
Hi: 55
Lo: 39

fri
The red-hot Dallas girls basketball team plays another key Mid-Willamette game when it hosts Crescent Valley.
7 p.m. \$5.

Fog; Mostly Sunny
Hi: 55
Lo: 37

sat
The Oregon Winter Poultry Swap gathering takes place at the Polk County Fairgrounds & Event Center in Rickreall.
10 a.m.-3 p.m. Free.

Sunny
Hi: 56
Lo: 37

sun
It's the final day of the annual Polk Home and Garden Show at the Polk County Fairgrounds in Rickreall.
10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free.

Sunny
Hi: 57
Lo: 36

mon
Help save a life. There's an American Red Cross blood drive scheduled at First Presbyterian Church in Dallas.
12:30-6 p.m. Free.

Sunny
Hi: 57
Lo: 37

tue
James2 Community Kitchen hosts meals for everyone in the area every Tuesday at St. Philip Catholic Church in Dallas.
4:30-6 p.m. Free.

Partly Sunny
Hi: 58
Lo: 40