

WOU students spread joy to local youths

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Homelessness is difficult to define or quantify, but in the latest report by the Oregon Department of Education, Marion and Polk counties had 1,449 students in the K-12 system who were considered homeless.

Of those, 24 in Polk County were listed as “unsheltered.” In Marion County, 257 were living in a shelter, or going without.

People who are homeless are transients by nature, coming and going where they can find work or a roof over their heads for a night.

Children can get lost in the system, but, thanks to a nonprofit group in Marion County — there are no shelters in Polk County — they don’t go without a birthday party, not if Simply Birthdays can help it.

“Simply Birthdays started last year,” said Shannen Brouner, Western Oregon University student in Molly Mayhead’s event planning class. “Every month it provides a birthday party for every kid in that shelter.”

On Sunday, the class will take over the party at a shelter. Students have been coordinating and planning the event for months. Each party includes games, prizes, goodie bags, cake and ice cream, and presents for each child who has a birthday that month.

“We just found out there would be two kids,” said Amanda Ditzhazy. “At the homeless shelter, there’s a lot of transitioning.”

The class had to raise money and plan activities for the children.

Students hosted bake sales and information booths to gather donations. They



MOLLY MAYHEAD/for the Itemizer-Observer

Western event planning students take on two projects this term to help youths.

raised more than \$1,500 — exceeding their \$900 goal.

Rather than throw one extravagant birthday party for the lucky May children, Ditzhazy said they will throw a great party and give any leftover money to Simply Birthdays for future celebrations.

Students in Mayhead’s class have taken on another event to plan this term: a summer dance party for all the youth in Polk County, through Nite Court.

“The Nite Court kids actually picked the theme and gave suggestions for what they want to see at the dance: fog machines, strobe lights, a disco ball, glow sticks,” said Nicole Keidel.

The dance, which will be on June 3 at 7 p.m. at the Independence Elks Lodge, will be open to all Polk County students in middle and high school. Nite Court is for students in middle school, but

Riley Anhuluk said they wanted to extend the outreach to include more kids.

The chance to plan events that helps the community is something Mayhead’s students enjoy.

“We never would have heard of Simply Birthdays or Nite Court,” said Jenni Bowker. “We can see the difference it makes.”

Anhuluk said Nite Court was originally a partnership between the Monmouth and Independence police departments to combat the gang problem.

“It evolved into giving kids more inspiration to get higher education, and help women realize they can be more than just a wife, they can have a job and have something else to be proud of,” he said.

Keidel added that young chaperones set a good example for continuing education.

“Plus they provide supervised activities on Friday nights, which is crucial to at-risk youth,” she said.

It’s the difference these Western students are making in the lives of local youths that make Mayhead’s event planning class unique from other offerings at WOU.

“You don’t find classes that can bring happiness to people,” said David Ribich. “I honestly don’t think of this as a class; it’s a job.”

The class is still raising money for the Summer Nite Club. They have a sponsorship from Mangiare and are looking for more.

“Extravagant party requires extravagant expense,” Bowker said.

To contribute: gofund.me/nitecourt. Pre-sale tickets are \$5, available at school offices; \$8 at the door. Occupancy is limited.

Fire: More staff, funding needed

Continued from 1A

Parrott said the length of “turnout time,” how long it takes to get volunteers on a truck, is a concern because of what is called “flashover.”

Flashover describes when a fire has been burning long enough to create enough heat and flammable gases that the entire environment combusts, Hertel said.

At that point, the fire is harder to get under control and rescuing someone trapped in that environment may be impossible. Flashover occurs between six to eight minutes.

“Our goal is to try to get water on the fire to begin cooling that environment before flashover occurs,” Parrott said. “We know it makes a difference.”

Dallas City Manager Ron Foggin said the objective of the report was to find out how the agencies were performing, not to make them look bad.

“Now we know where we stand and now we can set goals and standards to move forward,” Foggin said.

Included in the report were a number of recommendations to improve performance. The first for the city and the Southwest board to provide performance goals for each agency.

He said the financial situation for Southwest is getting critical fast and recommended the agency have a comprehensive study done.

Based on his forecasting, the agency would be in the red by 2020 and would need an operating levy to prevent cuts.

“It’s time for you to have a conversation with the community,” he said. “Really sit down with them and say, OK, this is our reality. This is what is going on. If we don’t fix this, we are going to have to start backing away from services.”

Parrott also suggested having Dallas and Southwest work more as one agency from an operational standpoint, which would eliminate cost inefficiencies for both departments.

To reduce turnout time in Dallas, he suggested more in-station staffing through on-call volunteers, a resident volunteer program, or additional paid firefighters.

For Southwest, he suggested building another station on Salt Creek Road.

Currently, the only paid staff members are those on the administrative team. In the 2016-17 budget, the department will be able to hire two seasonal firefighters to assist with wildfire season.

Hertel said adding more firefighters will be a decision for the Dallas City Council and will require a significant investment from taxpayers.

“We want the citizens to decide what they want,” Hertel said. “If they want better than that, then we have to have a discussion about how we get there.”

Foggin said the city has no plans of changing its proposed 2016-17 budget to address concerns raised in the report.

For information about Emergency Medical Services (EMS) performance and recommendations, see the May 18 edition of the *I-O*.

Chen’s Family Dish reopens

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The reopening many in Dallas were waiting for happened last week: Chen’s Family Dish welcomed customers back starting May 3.

The popular restaurant’s new, larger location is at 165

Orchard Drive next to Safeway in the former Bert’s Restaurant.

Chen’s remodeled the building inside and out to prepare it for the new business.

It had been vacant since late 2010 when Bert’s closed.

Restaurant staff said with

more room, they can seat people faster and provide better service than was possible at the old location at 184 SE Washington St.

Chen’s hours are Sunday through Thursday 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For more information: 503-623-7080.

Indy PD to spend extra time on seatbelt, DUII patrols

Itemizer-Observer staff report

INDEPENDENCE — The Independence Police Department, along with other regional law enforcement agencies, will participate in extra DUII and seatbelt saturation patrols during the month of May, with special focus on the Memorial Day weekend.

The DUII High Visibility Enforcement period will begin on May 27 and run thru May 30.

The seatbelt blitz period will begin on Monday and run thru May 29.

During the seatbelt blitz, special attention

will be given to proper seatbelt usage and minors riding in open pickup beds.

The ultimate goal of the Independence Police Department in conducting these types of operations, is to educate our citizens and to promote a safer driving experience for everyone to enjoy, said Officer David Oliveros.

These operations are made possible through funding that is administered by Oregonimpact.org, an agency dedicated to providing educational experiences that will end impaired and distracted driving.

The Dallas Street Bond: Yes or No?



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A “Yes” vote will repair 22 miles of streets and create a much more attractive and inviting community for industry and commerce (jobs!).

A “Yes” vote will save Dallas property tax payers BIG dollars in the long run. Neglected streets will eventually need total reconstruction at a staggering cost.

A “No” vote passes on a massive, unpaid bill to the next generation.

TAX REALITY — Dallas has low taxes and if this bond measure passes it will still have low taxes.

Annual taxes on a \$200,000 home in:
Dallas = \$3,222 (with the bond)
Monmouth = \$3,590
West Salem = \$3,668
Independence = \$3,932

A vote for Dallas streets is a vote for our future.

Vote “YES” with the confidence that you are doing the right thing for this generation and the next.