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Dallas woman files against co-workers' threats

Housing authority employees allegedly joke to kill Beehner, get clients arrested

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — An employee of West Valley Housing Authority filed a tort claim notice alleging she was the victim of a co-worker's "jokes" about killing or harming her.

A tort claim notice serves as a warning that a lawsuit could potentially be filed.

The notice claims that Sheri Beehner, the family self-sufficiency coordinator at WVHA, was the target of jokes by co-workers Rick Batie, Jeff Berry and Liz Sylva.

The notice that said between May 2017 and August 2017, two or more of those employees allegedly made jokes about workplace shootings, shooting Beehner, suicide, Beehner's health, and jokes that used "sexist and highly offensive terminology."

In one conversation, they allegedly joked about giving

her a horse tranquilizer "that would cause her head to explode and her to die," adding that Beehner needed a "frontal lobotomy." Batie also distributed a cartoon that depicted Beehner as bat used to hit a WVHA manager with, the claim said.

"Jokes were made about a variety of other co-workers and clients, which included references to the co-workers and clients in highly offensive and derogatory terms," the notice said.

Christian Edelblute, the executive director of WVHA, said he would like to respond to the allegations in the complaint, but can't.

"We are not in a position to do so at this time due to the fact the allegations concern an internal, personnel issue and the potential that litigation may ensue," he said in a statement. "The WVHA takes complaints of personnel issues seriously, and this complaint is being

processed according to the WVHA's policies."

Beehner, through her attorney, Nelson Hall, of Portland firm Bennett, Hartman, Morris & Kaplan, sent the tort claim notice to Blair Wasson, the housing authority's board chairman, and legal counsel, Morgan Smith. It alleges, "intentional infliction of emotional distress, gender discrimination, retaliation against a whistleblower, and spoliation of evidence."

WVHA administers two housing assistance programs in Polk County, the Housing Choice Voucher Program and Public Housing Program. Both are paid for by the federal government.

Edelblute also is named in the notice, which alleges that, after learning of the comments and listening to the conversations — which were recorded phone conversations — Edelblute took no action to discipline the

employees or to protect Beehner.

On Aug. 12, Beehner told Edelblute that "she could no longer handle the stress of feeling threatened at work by WVHA employees, including Batie, Sylva and Berry. She notified him that she would be seeking medical attention," the claim said.

On Aug. 15, Beehner's union, Oregon American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 75, informed Smith of its concerns about "serious and time-sensitive misconduct taking place at WVHA, including employees discussing violence during recorded phone conversations."

On Aug. 16, Smith listened to a selection of those recordings, the notice said.

The notice also provided details on an Aug. 29 staff meeting during which employees allegedly joked about "arming WVHA clients

with guns and knives dripping in blood in order to ensure that they were arrested or harmed by the police."

Beehner's husband, also a WVHA employee, was a witness to this conversation, the notice said.

Beehner additionally claims the WVHA didn't prevent those accused of misconduct from deleting, destroying or manipulating evidence.

Oregon AFSCME spokesman Ross Grami in statement called the incidents described in the notice as "appalling."

"It is unacceptable to threaten or joke about threats against a coworker, and it's disturbing this situation was allowed to go on so long," Grami said.

The notice said if a lawsuit is filed, "Ms. Beehner will pursue any and all damages available to her, including both economic and non-economic damages."

IN YOUR TOWN

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Dallas School Board approves union contracts.

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FALLS CITY

Volunteers clean up around town.

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INDEPENDENCE

Council considers utility rate increases.

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MONMOUTH

Classic auto show rolls into town.

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SPORTS

Perrydale's volleyball team is off to a strong start.

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The quilt that took more than 100 years

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — How long does it take to finish a quilt? For the Cheesman family descendants, the answer is four generations.

"Jumping Mouse" Mary Elizabeth Cheesman, a Cherokee Indian, started a quilt in the mid-1800s.

"Fabrics used were from cotton flour sacks," said Mary's great-granddaughter, Patti Utter. "I was told this is one of three quilts she was working on."

Before she could finish it, Mary Elizabeth lost her sight and passed her projects on to her daughter, Utter's grandmother, Rachael.

"Rachael was not a seamstress, but did add a few pieces from her daughter's clothing," Utter said.

Rachael passed it to her daughter, Marie, Patti's mother, who was not a quilter.

Regardless, Marie added a few pieces and passed it to Patti — who also is not a quilter.

"I do stained glass," Utter said.

The quilt — and its



Patti Utter stands with Blanche McCaw in front of Utter's family quilt. Her great-grandmother "Jumping Mouse" Mary Elizabeth Cheesman started the project in the 1800s.

story — has been stored away since 1983, until Utter

asked a friend if she'd be interested in finishing it.

"We have a class together at the pool," Utter said. "We

all became friends at the class, and I found out that she's a quilter."

At a potluck, Utter showed Blanche McCaw the quilt and asked if she would finish it.

McCaw agreed, thinking it would make a nice wedding gift for her grandson. She didn't realize how old the quilt was or its family history.

Once she heard the story, McCaw offered to give it back to Utter once it was completed, but Utter declined.

"I'm glad to see it finished," she said. "And it will be used now. I think it's great."

To complete the work, McCaw picked up special fabric from a quilt store in Paisley. She put a backing on it, made a binding, and hand-stitched the quilt.

"You put a lot of work in on it," Utter said. "I'd be afraid to use it. I would have to store it away. This way, hopefully it will be used."

McCaw said her grandson and his new bride will get copies of the history of the quilt as part of the present.

Last chance for eclipse stamps

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Thursday is the deadline to get an exclusive pictorial cancellation stamp to celebrate the Great American Eclipse that occurred on Aug. 21.

The Dallas Post Office offered the stamp is designed by Dallas City letter carrier John McMillian and city of Dallas employee Jeremy Teal.

Anyone can bring a postcard or envelope with first-class postage and have a postal employee mark it with the commemorative pictorial cancellation. Postmaster Tina Smith said if you are mailing the letter or postcard to someone outside of Dallas, to bring an additional envelope, or the special cancellation will be marred with a Portland cancellation, as all mail goes through Portland for processing.

For that reason, these special cancellations are not available if dropped in a regular mailbox, even if it is within the Dallas ZIP code.

People may enclose stamped envelopes or postcards to Darkside Station, Special Cancellation, 768 SW Church St., Dallas OR 97338, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the materials. Mailed requests must be received at the Dallas Post Office by Thursday.

For more information: Tina Smith, 503-831-00503.

Falls City councilors vote to close Wagner

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — The city of Falls City voted to close Wagner Community Library effective June 30, 2018 if a solution to long-term funding is not found.

That would leave a little more than \$42,000 left in the Wagner Fund that could be used to reopen the library later.

Mayor Terry Ungricht said the vote doesn't mean the library must close, but the city needs to begin the closure process soon to make sure it

meets all state requirements for closing a public library, which includes holding hearings.

"We would start the process and then if an agreement came through that we could afford and that the council is comfortable with, we could just cancel," Ungricht said. "On June 29, we could say never mind."

The council had discussed putting the issue before voters to decide whether they wanted to pay to keep the library open.

Ungricht has said the council also needed to consider the need for

levies for street maintenance and firefighting equipment.

The estimated cost for the library levy would be \$1.30 per \$1,000 of assessed value on properties.

Before the vote, Councilor Jenn Drill asked if minutes of the past meetings indicated the council made a promise to put a levy on the ballot.

Councilor Dennis Sickles, who also expressed that concern, said he believes the council did not after reviewing those discussions.

"I'm satisfied that we did not make that promise," Sickles said.

"Is the school aware that we are talking (about closing the library)?" Drill asked.

Ungricht said he had notified the Falls City School District and Wagner Library Director Andy Rommel that the city was considering a vote to begin closing procedures.

"The process that we have to go through has to be initiated, so I think we need to do what we are doing," Sickles said. "As the mayor said, we can stop at any time if something comes up."

The vote to close the library was unanimous.

THE NEXT 7 DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK

wed Pick up a racket — or just show up — to the Roger Jordan Community Park to play a match of Pickleball. 9 a.m. Free. Showers Hi: 59 Lo: 46	thu Perrydale FFA will host an all-you-can-eat corn feed at 7445 Perrydale Road, benefiting members of the FFA. 7:30 p.m. \$4-\$25. Showers Hi: 63 Lo: 45	fri Even though the rain we've had all week makes it feel like fall already arrived, today marks the first day of autumn. Partly cloudy Hi: 66 Lo: 47	sat Polk County Folklife will host a concert of traditional Appalachian music at the Monmouth amphitheater 1:30 p.m. Free. Mostly sunny Hi: 70 Lo: 48	sun Last Sunday at River Gallery takes place River Gallery in Independence. Check out the reception for corner and window artists. 2 p.m. Free. Mostly sunny Hi: 70 Lo: 49	mon Bring your brew of choice to St. Thomas Episcopal Church for a discussion and lecture on New Testament figures. 7 p.m. Free. Partly sunny Hi: 75 Lo: 51	tue Indoor Play Park returns to First Presbyterian Church in Dallas, just in time for the rainy weather. 9:30 a.m. Donation. Partly sunny Hi: 76 Lo: 54
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