

# County awaits word on safety corridor

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The Polk County Board of Commissioners is awaiting word from the Oregon Department of Transportation on a request to re-establish a safety corridor on Highway 22.

The request is for the portion of the highway from the Willamette River bridges in Salem west to Oak Grove Road.

Highway 22 from the Willamette River bridges to Rickreall was a safety corridor from 1993 to 2010, when it was decommissioned due to lower crash rates.

“Fast forward to today, with more vehicle traffic/congestion, virtually no safety improvements in the last seven years and support crash data for that problem area, consideration of a safety corridor is more than justified,” the commissioners’ letter to ODOT said.

Safety corridors impose greater fines for speeding and place signs to inform drivers to slow down.

The request was made in August. ODOT hasn’t decided anything yet, but the agency and Polk County Public Works are slated to meet later this month.

A stretch of road must meet standards to qualify as a safety corridor — including a serious or fatal crash rate that is 150 percent higher than similar roads in the state — and the availability of police patrols, said Nicole Charlson, with ODOT’s Region 2 Traffic Safety division, in an email about the request.

“We have requested the crash data and we’re looking into whether or not it qualifies as a safety corridor,” Charlson wrote. “ODOT has been closely monitoring traffic on Highway 22, and every fatal crash is reviewed by our traffic safety staff.”

She said if the section of highway doesn’t qualify for designation, ODOT can seek other solutions, including grants to Oregon State Police and Polk County Sheriff’s Office for patrols in the areas most prone to crashes.

“Police enforcement is one of the best ways to reduce crashes, because drivers slow down and pay better attention when they see a patrol vehicle,” Charlson wrote.

## Fatal crash near Sweet Home

Itemizer-Observer staff report

LINN COUNTY — A Willamina man died Oct. 3 afternoon in a motor-vehicle crash on U.S. 20 near milepost 34.5 in Linn County east of Sweet Home, Oregon State Police reported in a press release.

Preliminary investigation by OSP troopers revealed a green 2002 Harley Davidson Motorcycle was travelling east on U.S. 20 near milepost 34.5. The motorcycle was rounding a right-hand curve when the operator, Robert DeLong, 74, of Willamina, crossed the center line and struck the front of a white Toyota Tacoma pickup, driven by Kevin Schaffer, 27, of Santa Ana, Calif., who was travelling westbound. The motorcycle came to rest in the west-bound lanes, according to OSP.

DeLong was wearing a helmet and was pronounced deceased on scene by emergency medical personnel. Schaffer was not injured. Both vehicles were towed from the scene. The investigation is continuing.

OSP was assisted on scene by Sweet Home Fire Department, Sweet Home Chapel and Oregon Department of Transportation.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Zelma Edwards shows off her 143-pound watermelon, which won a prize for its weight and size.

# Extreme growers in Dallas

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Zelma Edwards calls the watermelon she’s been nurturing all summer and fall “the baby.”

It doesn’t live up to its name. It’s 143 pounds, far bigger than most babies, excluding infant elephants and whales.

Edwards’ baby won a title suitable to its size on Oct. 7: The largest watermelon grown and weighed in Oregon.

Her watermelon crushed the competition by 41 pounds, and it wasn’t the only giant in her garden. The next biggest weighed 124 — that too, would have broken the record, but she only entered her largest in the contest at Bauman’s Farm & Garden in Gervais, part of the farm’s annual Harvest Festival.

“I don’t think I’ve gotten over it yet,” said Edwards, of Dallas, last week. “I knew that it was going weigh big,

but I didn’t know I was going to take the Oregon record. It was fun growing it, and it was fun at the end of it. I’ll do it again.”

Edwards and her husband, Ron, have been growing large vegetables and plants — pumpkins, tomatoes, sunflowers and watermelons — for about seven years. Ron took sixth place in the giant pumpkin contest at Bauman’s with his own more-than-1,300-pound baby.

They do care for their growing giants like they are “a bunch of kids,” Zelma said. Her watermelon wanted for nothing.

“We work hard at it,” she said. “It takes your whole summer.”

She followed some common principles of “extreme vegetable growing,” as Ron puts it, to raise her hefty watermelon.

“You have to take all the small ones off, and it has to be fed every day,” Zelma explained. “They are a very high eater. The sun gives

them sugar and the sugar gives them the energy to grow at night.”

Every two or three days, she would see a noticeable difference in the watermelon’s size.

“It was hard not to go out there and measure every day,” she said.

During the hot days, she made sure the watermelon patch had shade, and when the nights got colder, Zelma’s “baby” was tucked under a blanket.

Her state record-breaking season began with the hope of topping her personal record.

“I grew one once before and that was only 61 pounds,” she said. “That was a few years ago.”

Serious about the endeavor, she searched for the right seeds and found them by joining a giant watermelon club based in Tennessee, which sends its members seeds.

She was sent seeds from a monster 305-pound water-

melon grown in Tennessee. “Can you imagine one that big?” Zelma said.

Ron said the hot nights in that region of the country produce those larger-than-life watermelons.

“It’s warm all night. They have a lot of days that will be 80, 90 degrees all night long,” Ron said.

He said the hot summer in the Willamette Valley this year provided an assist to Zelma’s record-breaker.

Zelma’s season began with ambitions to grow a giant pumpkin and giant tomatoes in addition to her giant watermelon.

The pumpkin ended up being “small” at 807 pounds, and the tomatoes, while firmly in the large category, weren’t on par with what she’s grown in the past.

“Then I could see it (the watermelon) growing and I could see the progress in it,” she said. “I kind of lost interest in everything else and put all my energy into the watermelon.”

## Dallas Downtown Merchant

# TURKEY GIVEAWAY

Enter the Drawings for your chance to win one of 35 Turkeys!

**35 Turkeys!**

Look for Posters & Drawing Boxes at These Businesses Now!

**Drawing at each store listed below:**

- A-Team Locksmith 869 Main St.
- Brixius Jewelers 837 Main St.
- Capitol Auto West Valley Chevrolet 812 SE Jefferson St.
- Cedar Salon and Lash Bar 131 SW Mill St.
- Country Insurance 141 SW Court St.
- Court Street Hair 155 SW Court St.
- Courtyard Coffee House 156 SE Mill St.
- Dallas Antique Mall 811 Main St.
- Dallas Chamber of Commerce 168 SW Court St.
- Dallas Cinema 166 SE Mill St.
- Dallas City Cleaners 144 SW Washington St.
- Downtown Barber Shop 194 SW Mill St.
- First American Title 807 Main St.
- Grandma’s Attic Sewing Emporium 167 SW Court St.
- Harvest CrossFit 761 Main St.
- Heartstrings Florist & Artisans 137 SW Court St.
- Home Comfort 1827 S. Main St.
- Jake’s Garage 161 SW Washington St.
- Just Stuff 947 Main St.
- Main Street Emporium of Dallas 939 Main St.
- M.D. Tats & Oddities 143 SW Court St.
- Old Mill Feed & Garden 1313 Main St.
- Polk Co. Itemizer-Observer Newspaper 147 SE Court St.
- Pressed Coffee & Wine Bar 788 Main St.
- Sassy’s Kegs & Eggs 186 SW Court St.
- Some Things 857 Main St.
- Tater’s Cafe 683 SE Jefferson St.
- The Decorated Wall 186 SE Mill St.
- Tim’s Automotive Specialties 172 SW Washington St.
- Tipp’s Copy Center 164 SE Washington St.
- Tony’s Place 127 SW Court St.
- Ugo’s Pizza 967 Main St.
- Van Well Building Supply 1650 SE Uglov
- West Valley Taphouse 957 Main St.
- World Gym 887 Main St.

**Drawing will be held Nov. 17th.**  
**Turkey winners will be contacted beginning Nov. 17th.**

# FREE

## Community CARNIVAL

Tuesday, October 31<sup>ST</sup>  
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
for kids grade 5 and under

INFLATABLES    LOTS OF GAMES    PONY RIDES    LOTS OF CANDY

## 1795 SE Miller Avenue Dallas, Oregon 503-623-4116