



Student  
homeless  
on the rise

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The Oregon Department of Education released its annual homeless student report last week, showing two Polk County school districts with more homeless students and two with fewer.

Both Dallas and Central found more students met the federal definition of homeless, while Falls City's and Perrydale's tally dropped slightly.

The definition of homelessness for the purposes of the report is: students who "lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence." That includes those with no shelter, families sharing homes with other families and students living in shelters or motels.

Falls City, however, remains in the top 10 in the state by percentage of students considered homeless at 17.71 percent. The district count dropped from 35 in 2015-16 to 31 during last school year.

Dallas saw a jump from 60 in 2015-16 to 81 in 2017-18. That number accounts for 2.5 percent of students enrolled.

Central's count of homeless students rose from 81 to 88, or 2.66 percent in 2016-17.

Perrydale School District had no homeless students in 2016-17 and not enough to report in 2015-16 (the state doesn't list numbers in the 1-5 range due to the risk of identifying those students), according to the report.

Salem-Keizer School District, part of which is in Polk County, has the fifth-highest number of homeless students at 1,162.

That accounts for 2.79 percent of students enrolled in 2016-17.

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JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Ken Brown, the co-owner of Westwinds Farm in Dallas, talks about the trees at his farm that are ready to sell.

Oh Christmas tree

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Christmas trees, particularly the Noble fir variety, may be in short supply nationwide this year, but local tree farm operators say there should be plenty of trees to choose from this holiday season.

If you have your heart set on a Noble, though, you might want to start your search early this year.

"We are going to run low on Noble firs," said Don Beal, of Beal's Christmas Tree Farm in Dallas. "We haven't been able to replace any for the last three seasons."

He said the farm lost most of its young Noble fir trees due to recent hot, dry summers.

"We lost 95 percent," Beal said. "That was a tough."

The best-selling Christmas tree variety has had a difficult run lately.

There wasn't a good crop of Noble fir cones from 2001 to 2015, said Bob Schafer, at Noble Mountain Tree Farms in Polk County. No cones mean no seeds, no seedlings and no trees, he said.

Schafer said production of Noble firs on his farm is down 25 percent this year. The farm has tried to fill the hole with other varieties, such as Douglas fir, the second-highest Christmas tree in sales.

Still, the result has been scaling back on the number of customers the wholesale grower can serve.

"It makes for easier harvesting season," Schafer said. "We've cut out our overseas business. It's nice to say you ship to the Pacific Rim, but we wanted to take care of our U.S. customers first and foremost."

The business won't be shipping to Texas this year either — the Lone Star state is as far east as is cost-efficient to ship — and California will be getting a different mix of trees, including fewer Noble firs.

That may be the situation for several years to come, industry wide.

Ken Brown, co-owner of Westwinds Farm in Dallas, said that an overabundance of trees over the last decade and resulting

lower prices drove growers out of the market or forced them to plant fewer trees.

That trend has caught up to the industry.

"There has been an excess of trees for 10 years," Brown said. "Last year, it turned around, and it turned around really fast."

The good news is 2016 marked the first year of healthy Noble fir crop, Schafer said.

"We are getting some seed in the pipeline, more in line with what the industry is used to," Schafer said.

It will take about seven years for those young trees to grow to Christmas-tree standard — about six-feet tall — though.

Noble Mountain may be something of an exception to that as Schafer anticipates higher production in the variety over the next few years on his farm.

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IN  
YOUR  
TOWN

DALLAS

Parents are filing a lawsuit against Dallas School District over transgender student's use of restroom.

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FALLS CITY

Jeremy Gordon gets sworn in as Falls City's new mayor.

»Page 2A

MONMOUTH

Western Oregon University's men's basketball team enters season with great expectations.

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SPORTS

Falls City's football team eliminated in the 1A semifinals.

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Dallas family  
wins college  
savings plan

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Stephen Miller, of Dallas, and his family won an Oregon College Saving Plan account after participating in Dallas Public Library's summer reading program.

Miller's family entered his name into the summer reading campaign, "Read a Book. Save for College. Build a Better World." Stephen's family was one of 15 whose name was randomly drawn, and will receive a \$529 Oregon College Savings Plan account.

As the host library, Dallas library will also receive a \$500 cash prize from the Oregon College Savings Plan.

"It is important for students to continue reading and improving their language skills during the summer months," said Mark Greenhalgh-Johnson, librarian at the Dallas Public Library. "While the Summer Reading Program is fun, it is more than a way to entertain kids. Through this program kids find that learning takes place all year long whether they are at home, in school, in the library, or even in the park."

According to the Oregon State Library, 64,545 youth from birth through age 18 signed up for this year's summer reading program at public libraries throughout Oregon; collectively, they read 323,441 books over 880,104 hours.

www.polkio.com

Olsons take giving to 'a new level'

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — It takes a village, or so the saying goes. In the Monmouth-Independence community, one of the driving forces behind the success of the "village" is Stacy and Neal Olson.

They're credited with saving marriages, literally putting shoes on people's feet, keeping youth sports programs going when money was scarce, feeding young athletes, and positively influencing the lives of those around them.

The Olsons have blessed the Monmouth and Independence communities for nearly 20 years, though they would tell you they don't do anything spectacular or out



of the ordinary.

"They're great role models," Central High School Athletic Director Shane Hedrick said. "They're very unselfish. And you hear about people giving — they just take it to a whole new level."

Hedrick said he first noticed the Olsons about eight years ago when Central School District had to cut



NEAL OLSON/for the Itemizer-Observer

Stacy and Neal Olson help Monmouth any way they can.

middle school sports.

"The one name that would come up in any con-

versation was Stacy Olson," he said. "Because she basically kept that middle school

program up and running. She was the organizer in getting parents together to make that happen. She just kept it together. Absolutely huge for us, and she got nothing for it."

Neal said he and Stacy were passionate about keeping the program, not just for their kids, but for the community. Without sports, what would the youths do in the afternoons?

"That's the most impressive time of their lives," Neal said. "It's where you kind of make or break kids, in middle school. So we figured we better put our action where our mouth was — a little more action, a little less talk."

Like so many things, Stacy said they didn't do it alone.

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<p>THE NEXT <b>7</b> DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK</p>	<p><b>wed</b></p> <p>Come bring your favorite brew and learn about New Testament figures at St. Thomas Episcopal church. 7 p.m.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 61 Lo: 53</p>	<p><b>thu</b></p> <p>The Itemizer-Observer wishes everyone a happy, relaxing and safe Thanksgiving Day. Our office is closed today.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 58 Lo: 43</p>	<p><b>fri</b></p> <p>After a day filled with food and family, why not enjoy some music at the Guthrie Park jam session? 6:30 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Showers Hi: 53 Lo: 42</p>	<p><b>sat</b></p> <p>The Polk County Craft Festival offers a chance to find unique holiday gifts for loved ones. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 52 Lo: 45</p>	<p><b>sun</b></p> <p>The Darr family will be collecting warm clothing through Jan. 8. A drop box is located at Starlite Lanes, 394 Main St., Dallas.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 53 Lo: 42</p>	<p><b>mon</b></p> <p>Orquestra Brasil and Western Hemisphere Orchestra will team up for a concert at Smith Music Hall. 7:30 p.m. \$5.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 50 Lo: 40</p>	<p><b>tue</b></p> <p>Have a sweet tooth? A See's Candy sale runs through Dec. 15 at Salem Health West Valley Hospital. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. M-F</p> <p>Partly cloudy Hi: 50 Lo: 41</p>
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