

Polk County Itemizer-Observer

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Grand jury clears sheriff's office in shooting

Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — A Polk County grand jury cleared Polk County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Kevin Haynes and Deputy Kelly Lorence in the shooting death of Baltazar Escalona-Baez, 17, of Silverton.

On Nov. 21, the grand jury unanimously found the offi-

cers were justified in using deadly force during the incident, which happened on Oct. 28 near Fort Hill in Polk County.

Following the announcement of the grand jury's decision, Sheriff Mark Garton issued a letter to the citizens of Polk County.

"I would like to spark a conversation about officer-involved shootings, a sensi-

tive topic and an unfortunate reality our law enforcement officers face every day," he wrote. "I believe that every life is precious, and it is extremely tragic when someone's life is lost. This letter is not intended to minimize those events."

He describes the challenges his deputies face while on duty, protocols followed in officer-involved

shootings, and issues a plea for people to not make judgements without seeing all the evidence.

"Not all citizens will agree with the grand jury's decisions, but I would ask everyone to keep in mind that the Polk County citizens who serve on the grand jury review every piece of evidence, talk with witnesses and then decide based on

the facts of the case," he wrote.

He posted the letter to the office's Facebook page.

"A lot of times, I want to be able to say something, but I can't because of the investigation, and ethically, I can't," he said, explaining his intent in writing the letter. "I want people to understand that there is more to it."

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IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS

CTE is changing education at Dallas High School.

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INDEPENDENCE

After a short absence, the Panther Auction returned.

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MONMOUTH

Building permits will cost 10 percent more in 2018.

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FALLS CITY

The Wagner Community Library will remain open until Aug. 31.

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SPORTS

New coach is ready to lead Dallas' girls basketball team.

»Page 11A

Fatality in crash south of Monmouth

Itemizer-Observer staff report
MONMOUTH — Oregon State Police Troopers responded to a two-vehicle crash on 99 W/Parker Road just south of Monmouth Thursday at 7:58 p.m.

Preliminary investigation shows a 1999 red Chrysler Sebring operated by a 79-year-old male from Carlton pulled out in front of a 2015 white Ford F150 pickup, operated by Dennis Yoder, 29, and occupied by Jennifer Yoder, 25, and their two children, 1 and 2 years old respectively.

The Yoders were uninjured.

The roadway was closed for about three-and-a-half hours. Polk County Sheriff's Office, Polk County Fire District No. 1, and the Oregon Department of Transportation assisted OSP.

This is an ongoing investigation and the identity of the deceased driver will be released when next of kin notification is completed.

Social media

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Teal steps away from post

Sue Teal retires after nearly three decades at the Monmouth Senior Center



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF MONMOUTH
Sue Teal has worked at Monmouth Senior Center for nearly 29 years.

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — A lot has changed in the nearly 29 years since Sue Teal first took the job as the director at the Monmouth Senior Center.

"It was so quiet, I used to call my friends up and say, 'please come have lunch with me,'" Teal, 67, recalled. "In the summer, it was so quiet, no one came in the door."

When she started, she was 38 years old; the building was two years old; and the senior center had about 85 members, Teal said. The center had no newsletter, no calendar, and few programs.

"I was replacing someone who was 80," she said. "They didn't know if it would work out because I was so much younger than they were."

But Teal said God gave her a love for seniors.

"I have looked at it as a ministry more than a job," she said. "When I first started, I said I want everybody that comes through this door to know they're cared for, that we love them, and we want to meet their needs."

She started talking to people to see what programs they'd like and what they'd like to do at the senior center. Twenty-nine years and four remodels later, a calendar packed with classes and potlucks, collaborations with Western Oregon University, community breakfast and a lively travel program and it's clear: Sue Teal was just what the senior center needed.

"We probably average 100 (visitors) a day," Teal said. "To get down time, I have to leave the building."

Her favorite activity is the annual Victorian Tea.

See TEAL, Page 5A

Bon retirement

What: A retirement reception for Sue Teal.

When: Thursday, 1 to 3 p.m.

Where: Monmouth Senior Center, 180 Warren St. S, Monmouth.

Admission: Free.

Of note: Refreshments will be provided by the city of Monmouth.

Pena brings people together

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — She's been pivotal in bringing the community together for a fiesta for 35 years.

She connects the community to much-needed resources and helps anyway she can, whether it's filling out forms with people, translating, or showing them how to eat healthy meals made from limited ingredients.

"She's been really active in the community for a long time," said friend and collaborator Lucy Villastrigo. "Everybody knows her. Everybody knows who Elena Pena is. She really likes the community, that's why she's really active."

A Central High School graduate, Pena said her volunteerism started with her

parents and the example they set for her growing up.

"They're the ones who taught me all I know for caring for people," Pena said. "A lot of people in the community helped me become what I am. A lot of good teachers. A lot of good role models."

Pena added that her parents were always helping people in the community.

"Basically, that's how I got involved, because they helped," she said. "I thought, 'oh, this is something I like doing.'"

She connected with volunteers in the '60s, people who were out in the community helping people learn English, training people how to help themselves, Pena said.

"I used to work with food services through OSU Extension Office," she said.

Pena taught people how to



create meals with government-provided flour, sugar, powdered milk, butter and other items.

"People didn't know how to use them," she said. "So the folks that connected with the community when I was in high school would get me involved in the stuff, and I liked being around them. They were beautiful people."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ELENA PENA

Elena Pena said husband Raul is a big supporter.

THE NEXT
7
DAYS
PLANNING
FOR YOUR
WEEK



wed

The deadline to apply for Adopt A Family is today. Applications are available at the Academy Building in Dallas.



Partly sunny
Hi: 48
Lo: 36

thu

Western Oregon University's women's basketball team opens conference play by hosting Saint Martin's. 7 p.m. \$7/adults



Rain
Hi: 47
Lo: 40

fri

The winter sports season kicks off this week and Central and Dallas' girls basketball teams both host games. 7 p.m. \$6.



Mostly cloudy
Hi: 50
Lo: 39

sat

The River Gallery in Independence celebrates its holiday art show with an opening reception at the gallery. 6 to 8 p.m. Free.



Rain
Hi: 48
Lo: 37

sun

The Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce will hold its annual member celebration at Crush Wine Bar. 2 to 4 p.m.



Mostly cloudy
Hi: 47
Lo: 37

mon

If there's a break in the weather, try your hand at pickleball at the new courts across from Roger Jordan Park. 9 a.m. to noon.



Partly sunny
Hi: 47
Lo: 36

tue

A free class on dealing with challenging behaviors common with older adults is offered in Salem at 12:30 p.m. For more info, 9A.



Sunny
Hi: 48
Lo: 34