

Wirkkala: 'I feel like I've become a stronger person because of this,' he says in interview

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The state, represented by the Oregon Department of Justice, asked jurors to convict because Wirkkala's account, as prosecutor Kristen Hoffmeyer said repeatedly, "simply could not be believed."

All 12 jurors declined requests to explain their votes. One said only the state hadn't made its case.

Representatives of Ryder's family also declined to comment.

Many of the witnesses were back from the first trial and offered, in large part, the same testimony, the facts of the case remaining essentially the same.

Wirkkala and Ryder were friends, though not good friends, having only hung out a handful of times. Wirkkala and his then-girlfriend tried to wrangle friends to attend a Super Bowl party at the Hideaway Tavern in Bend, but in the end, everyone backed out except Ryder.

Wirkkala testified he drank throughout that day — before and throughout the game and then back at his house, where he and Ryder drank a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer.

Wirkkala's girlfriend, her son and her nephew went to bed between 10 and 10:30 p.m. Around 2:30 a.m. they were awoken by a shotgun blast in the living room.

Police arrived to find Ryder dead on the floor inside, Wirkkala sobbing nearby.

Then-Deschutes County District Attorney Patrick Flaherty charged Wirkkala with murder, and the case went to trial in 2014.

Wirkkala always said he awoke that night to Ryder sexually assaulting him. He retrieved his shotgun from his bedroom, returned to the living room and ordered Ryder to leave.



Luke Wirkkala greets supporters outside the Deschutes County jail following his acquittal Monday in his retrial for a murder charge.

Garrett Andrews/The Bulletin

Wirkkala said he racked a shell to show Ryder he was serious but instead a "twisted smirk" crossed Ryder's face and he charged Wirkkala, forcing him to fire.

The original jury did not accept that explanation and voted to convict. In 2018, the Oregon Court of Appeals vacated his conviction. It's customary for courtroom attendees to

stand when a jury enters and exits a courtroom. On Monday, after Deschutes County Circuit Judge Randy Miller excused the jury from service, Wirkkala was first to stand. He steeped his fingers before his chest and rocked his hands back and forth, as if saying thank you.

Miller told the onetime defendant: "Mr. Wirkkala, you are free to go."

From there, guards transported Wirkkala from Redmond back to the Deschutes County jail in Bend. They wheeled out a tub containing Wirkkala's belongings, including the flip phone seized when he was arrested in 2013.

Around a dozen well-wishers were there to greet him and take pictures. Many had supported him through his first trial. The party intended to caravan to Portland, where Wirkkala hoped to eat a "real" meal for dinner after years of jail food.

As for what's after that, Wirkkala said, "life begins at 40." He'd like to resume writing and photography, which he pursued prior to his conviction. He hopes to publish a book he started in prison about his experience being wrongfully accused.

He thanked God, his family and friends who supported him, his attorneys Thad Betz and Joel Wirtz, and the jury.

He said that while locked up, he committed to pursuing positive growth.

"I told myself if I didn't come out of this experience a better person than when I went in, then I've failed," he said. "I feel like I've become a stronger person because of this. And I'll never take anything for granted, that's for absolute sure."

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Marijuana

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Redmond city code forbids giving business licenses to companies that violate federal or state law, and marijuana is still illegal federally, despite being allowed within Oregon.

"If the feds legalize marijuana, then guess what? We no longer have a prohibition against giving them a business license," Endicott told The Bulletin. "Then it's, where do you put a marijuana business?"

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumersaid recently

that the U.S. Senate will push to lift the federal restrictions on marijuana.

Redmond city staff drafted a series of dispensary regulations, which will be discussed by city councilors Tuesday. These proposed regulations — which can be found at the Redmond City Council website — include not allowing marijuana businesses in residential zones. These businesses must be farther than 250 feet from any publicly owned facility like a park, transit center or day care facility, and more than 1,000 feet from a school or another

marijuana business, the proposed regulations state.

The proposed regulations would also require marijuana businesses to use an air filtration and ventilation system to confine the plant's odor to within the store as much as possible.

In the recent past, Endicott has said that he's in favor of allowing dispensaries in Redmond, but only if the federal government legalizes it nationwide.

Lindsey Pate, CEO of craft cannabis company Glass House Grown and president of the Cascade Cannabis Associ-

ation advocacy group, said she finds the City Council's further discussion on marijuana encouraging.

"I don't know if we're in the right position to do a retail store in Redmond, but if I had the money, I would 100% jump on that," said Pate, who lives outside Redmond.

It is unlikely that the City Council will take final action on marijuana business regulations at the Tuesday meeting, said city spokesperson Heather Cassaro.

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Venues

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In addition, a coalition of events groups sent a letter to the governor's office seeking inclusion in reopening plans like churches, restaurants or other gathering spaces. Among the organizations pushing the governor for guidance was the Les Schwab Amphitheater.

Les Schwab Amphitheater Director Marney Smith said the letter also asked the governor's office to allow for consistent "ramp up time" to book artists and create events, that venues be allowed to operate at full capacity with appropriate safety measures 30 days after a county hits the lower-risk category and the vaccine has been made available to all adults. If capacity restrictions are necessary, to base these on science and data "rather than a simple integer."

Churches, retail stores or grocery stores are allowed to open at 75% capacity at the lower-risk category. Currently, at the lower risk level, indoor

and outdoor entertainment establishments can have 50% occupancy and must close at midnight. Deschutes County is currently in the moderate-risk category.

"We're responsible operators with plans in place to mitigate risk of transmission: additional cleaning measures, additional entry and egress lines, additional sanitation stations and bathrooms, added signage, vaccinated staff, masks on all venue/event staff," said Beau Eastes, Les Schwab Amphitheater marketing director. "We truly are the best industry to handle the management of crowds safely."

But a follow-up email sent by Alex Campbell, regional solutions coordinator for Oregon's Southern Region, to David Schmitz, executive director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, provides different information. "I would encourage your event planners to plan for contingencies, but it is not unreasonable to be planning more "normal" events for the second half of the summer — perhaps earlier," Campbell

said in the email, which was forwarded to The Bulletin by Smith.

"That is specifically what we were asking for, is acknowledgement that we have to plan ahead," Smith said, "and that we're going to be mobilizing and taking some — I don't know if leap of faith is the right way to say it, but we're going to take some educated guesses based on scientific data on what is going to be safe moving forward based on vaccine availability and infection rates and hospitalization rates and all that fun stuff. ... We've got to plan in April for July. That's still cutting it pretty close, so we're happy to have acknowledgement of the timeline it takes to mobilize these events and the value that they have with the community. That made me a little lighter on my feet this morning."

With booking for late summer events already well underway in nearby states, many are worried Oregon will be passed over, and that the damage to reputations could be catastrophic.

"We're not financially able to move forward with planning a normal festival until we have some sort of reassurance from Oregon that there is at least a possibility that we can be looking somewhat back-to-normal once all adults have had a chance to have that vaccine," said Crista Munro, executive director of the Sisters Folk Festival.

Liz Merah, press secretary for Brown, said via email that the state recently expanded outdoor entertainment capacity by removing hard caps and transitioning to the 50% limit reflected in the lower-risk category.

"The current risk level framework was designed to be sustainable over the long term while we work to stop the spread of COVID-19, and it will remain in place for the time being," she wrote in the email. "We will continue to assess the situation and plan for what is next should case numbers decrease and vaccine availability increase."

Bulletin reporter Suzanne Roig contributed to this story.

DEATH NOTICES

Cecil L. Curry of Redmond, OR July 25, 1945 - March 30, 2021

Arrangements: Arrangements Entrusted To: Redmond Memorial Chapel, 541.548.3219; Please visit www.redmondmemorial.com to View Obituary and Service Information when available or to leave a thought, memory, or condolence for the family. Services: Services will be planned for a later date Contributions may be made to: Local Charity of your Choice

Sharon Lee Doggett of Terrebonne, OR May 6, 1946 - March 27, 2021

Arrangements: Autumn Funerals - Redmond is honored to serve the family. 541-504-9485. Condolences may be conveyed to the family at www.autumnfunerals.net Services: Service will be held at a later date.

OBITUARY DEADLINE

Call to ask about our deadlines 541-385-5809 Monday-Friday 10am-3pm Email: obits@bendbulletin.com

OBITUARY

Norma Wells-Young

February 26, 1939 - February 15, 2021



Norma Wells-Young, 82, passed away February 15th in Middleburg Florida. She was born in Plano, Texas on Feb. 26, 1939 and graduated from North Texas State University & had a career in

finance as well as being an educator for the deaf. She finished her career as an education specialist in the California penal system.

Norma was an avid quilter, dedicating much of her time and resources making quilts for the chemo patients at St. Charles Hospital as well as a great many quilts for the Mt. Bachelor community quilt program. She also made many Quilts of Valor.

Norma is survived by the entire Young family as well as her many friends.

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