

Letter to the editor

Officer deserves major apology

The very public destruction of Warrenton Police Officer Robert Wirt's stellar reputation by community members is mind-boggling.

Rumor and falsehoods, perpetuated in a Facebook post by a community member, caused Officer Wirt untold misery by the community's rush to judgment. Moreover, the owner of the establishment where the incident allegedly occurred, summarily banned him (June 19, The Columbia Press front page article). Judge, jury and reputation-executioner of an upstanding community police officer. Talk about vigilante justice!

An independent, outside investigation by a reputable

law firm proved the allegations against Officer Wirt were unfounded and false.

I applaud City Manager Linda Engbretson and Police Chief Matt Workman for their level-headed approach to discern fact from fiction by contracting with an outside entity for this investigation.

Those who perpetrated and perpetuated this travesty need to do the right thing by publicly apologizing to Officer Wirt: the Facebook poster who is a community member, the owner of Bubba's, and anyone else in Warrenton who spread this vile false allegation.

Mary Ann Brandon
Warrenton

Legal ad

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON
FOR THE COUNTY OF CLATSOP
In the Matter of the Estate of DEAN GERALD DYKSTRA, Deceased
Case No.: 20PB04175

NOTICE TO INTERESTED PERSONS
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Daniel G. Hartzell has been appointed personal representative of the Estate of Dean Gerald Dykstra. All persons having claims against the estate are required to present them, with vouchers attached, to the undersigned personal representative c/o Lawrence, Lawrence & Queener P.C., 427 S. Holladay Drive, Seaside Oregon 97138, within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or the claims may be barred.

All persons whose rights may be affected by the proceedings may obtain additional information from the records of the court, the personal representative, or the attorney for the personal representative, Benjamin F. Lawrence, at the above address.

Dated and first published on July 3, 2020.

Benjamin F. Lawrence
Attorney for Personal Representative

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Those who want to write their own obituaries to honor a loved one may do so. These are \$7.50 per column inch and can include a photo. Please call us at 503-861-3331 or send an email to office@thecolumbiapress.com.

Officer: Investigation finds no misbehavior

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side of Wirt's face, then Wirt turns his head and leans back and away from the man's hand. Wirt's hands come off the bar as he leans back to avoid the man's hand.

- In Salcedo's original account, he said a buddy was roughhousing with Wirt and had put an arm to his neck. Wirt put his hands up in the air. In a second Facebook post, Salcedo adds that the officer looked around for someone to challenge him, which appears to be an exaggeration of the movement Wirt made to lean away from the man.

- Several witnesses observed that the friend had been drinking, which is consistent with his movements, which appear unpredictable and unsteady. "This provides a reasonable explanation for why Wirt would back away to avoid him," Starr wrote.

- Although Salcedo is consistent in his view that he heard the words "I can't breathe" multiple times, it was loud in the bar and he was 14 feet away. There was music coming from overhead speakers and plexiglass panels obstructing both his view and the sound.

- None of the other witnesses corroborate the statement, "I can't breathe." In the video,

an unidentified customer behind Wirt turns her head to look at what's going on, but her body language suggests it warranted nothing more than a glance as she does not react or lean over to talk to anyone as if she saw something unusual. Another unidentified customer sits with his back directly to Wirt and has no reaction at all.

- Salcedo's brother, Jesse, was closer to Wirt and heard nothing.

- Before the man put his hand on Wirt's neck, he leaned across Wirt to shake the hand of another customer seated next to the off-duty officer.

"When Juan reviewed the security video with me during the investigation, he stated credibly that he could not see the handshake ... from his vantage point and that it altered his original perception," Starr wrote.

The security camera looks down instead of diagonally across the bar at eye level, which was Juan Salcedo's vantage point. The handshake occurs at or below the level of the bar.

"I also give weight to the fact that Juan volunteered to me that he carries a bias against police and acknowledged that I might choose to give his

statement less credibility as a result," Starr wrote. "He did not wait for me to discover that on my own (perhaps via his social media posts). That leads me to conclude that Juan held the genuine belief that what he posted on Twitter was accurate, although he may have rushed to judgment based on his own perceptions."

Juan Salcedo was surprised about the attention the matter received, Starr wrote. His brother's Facebook posts, which amplified the message, received even more reactions.

"None of the witnesses at the bar recalled hearing any talk from Wirt or his associates about George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, or any of the current political topics to suggest that the comment 'I can't breathe' was at the forefront of their minds that Saturday night," Starr wrote. "Nor did the complainants or any of the witnesses even express a concern about Wirt holding a racial bias when interviewed."

In the radio interview, Wirt said his reputation has been destroyed, he's lost thousands of dollars and a barbecue side business. He'd even run a barbecue on Superbowl Sunday a few weeks before the incident in the parking lot at Bubba's Sports Bar.

WFD: Two longtime firefighters promoted

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to make the department run more efficiently and effectively."

The promotions were made effective July 1.

Shepherd was hired as a training captain for WFD shortly after the merger of the Hammond and Warrenton fire departments.

He excelled as a leader within the department, Alsbury said. Shepherd also is a member of the Clatsop County Fire Investigation Team, using his skills as a certified

electrician to help determine whether the cause of a fire's origin is electrical.

"John comes from a family that is very familiar with firefighting," Alsbury said. "John's father, John Sr., was very involved in the fire department."

John Shepherd Sr., who died in September, retired from the fire service after 28 years, 14 of them as Hammond Fire chief.

Watson became a firefighter while attending Warrenton High School. After grad-

uation, he joined the Marine Corps and served in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. After his service, he returned to Warrenton and quickly became active as a volunteer firefighter.

In 2010, Watson was hired as Warrenton's first paid firefighter.

"Scott, too, excelled as a leader and quickly became the assistant fire chief," Alsbury said. "Scott has been an exceptional employee and has shown his leadership skills daily."