

Three administrators cleared in TSPC investigation

By JENNIFER COLTON
Staff Writer

The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission is still considering the fate of a local educator accused of a sexual relationship with a student, but recently dismissed the cases of three administrators that were part of the investigation.

A former student report-

ed she had a sexual relationship with Jake McElligott, a former math teacher and coach at Irrigon High School, that began the day of her high school graduation in 2013. The student was an adult at the time, according to a Morrow County Sheriff's Office report. The sheriff's investigation was closed because there were no allegations

of criminal conduct, but the case was forwarded to the TSPC for investigation in September 2014.

Four individuals were confirmed under investigation in the case: McElligott; Dirk Dirksen, superintendent of the Morrow County School District; Craig Bensen, former Irrigon Junior/Senior High School principal; and Blaine Gan-

voa, former athletic director in Irrigon and current athletic director at Hermiston School District.

This month, the commission cleared the cases against Dirksen, Bensen and Ganvoa. TSPC officials stated they can release names of anyone cleared of charges. However, information on any educators still in the disciplinary process

cannot be released until the process is complete. McElligott was not included in the list released by TSPC of regional educators cleared.

The TSPC is a 17-member board of educators appointed by the governor and approved by the state legislature. The commission's mission is uphold professional standards for Oregon educators and is known for

handling investigations of misconduct against teachers and administrators.

By law, every complaint against an educator filed with TSPC must be investigated, and complaints can come from almost anyone, including school districts, parents, law enforcement or community members. TSPC sees between 250 and 300 cases a year.



STAFF PHOTO BY JENNIFER COLTON

Deputy clerk Jennifer Herrera, left, and senior deputy clerk Dalia Velasco nominated Hermiston Court Administrator Rose Emerson, center, as the 2016 Administrative Professional of the Year.

Emerson named Administrative Professional of the Year

By JENNIFER COLTON
Staff Writer

Rose Emerson, court administrator for Hermiston Municipal Court, is the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce 2016 Administrative Professional of the Year.

"I'm shocked," Emerson said after receiving the award on Tuesday. "I had no idea."

Emerson was nominated by her coworkers and cho-

sen by the Administrative Professionals committee. This year's nominees were: Perla Mejia from Advanced Pediatric Dentistry; Diana Baker from Sherrill Chevrolet; Nicole Brown from Nookies Restaurant; Teresa Brower from American West Properties; Amalia Zinni from Umatilla Morrow County Head Start; and Sheri Harper from RE MAX Cornerstone.

LaCosta Noland, the 2015 Professional Assistant of the Year, presented Emerson with a bouquet of flowers and crowned her this year's recipient.

Emerson was honored for her 22 years with the Hermiston courts and for being a role model and leader in her office.

"She excels in her duties as an administrator," Dalia Velasco said in her nomina-

tion. "However, it's her other qualities that really make her shine."

The Administrative Professional Luncheon traces its origins to 1952 as a way to honor professional assistants and office professionals.

The luncheon also included a presentation on magic and leadership by Paul Draper, a professional magician and mentalist.

Fire displaces five families in Umatilla

By JENNIFER COLTON
Staff Writer

A fire that spread inside the walls of a Umatilla apartment building destroyed the homes and many of the belongings of nine adults and 15 children Friday night.

The smell of smoke and burnt plastic still hung in the air around 1521 Second Street on Monday afternoon while volunteers boarded up windows, and the grass around the building was still wet from hours of work by area firefighters.

At around 7:20 p.m. Friday, one of the residents of Umatilla's Marina Apartments noticed smoke coming from the side of the building, according to apartment manager Sara Holford. The resident found the smoke rising from the area of the power box and notified his neighbors, helping everyone get out. The residents attempted to locate the cause of the smoke before calling 9-1-1 around 7:30 p.m.

Umatilla Rural Fire responded and determined there was a fire, but they had trouble locating it.

"It was a very difficult fire because it was in the walls and it was in between floors of the first and second apartment as well," Umatilla Fire Chief Steve Potts said Monday. "Our guys started to get worn out. We just needed more help tearing floors and ceiling apart."

By 7:53, Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District had put out a call for mutual aid, calling in trucks from Hermiston and Irrigon to help. Due to other calls in the district, the Hermiston ladder truck had to wait until off duty staff could arrive before responding.

More than 30 firefighters from Umatilla, Irrigon, Hermiston and Stanfield. It took more than three hours to extinguish the fire and clear out the buildings. After the fire, Potts and Fire Marshal Tom Bohm began an investi-

gation, but Potts said the official determination will likely never be known.

"We've determined at this point that there was no reason to believe it was arson," he said. "All indications are that it's possibly electrical, but our investigation will not determine that completely."

The fire displaced five families; the sixth apartment in the building had been leased on Friday — but nothing had been moved in yet. Most of the residents did not have renter's insurance.

According to the American Red Cross, the multi-family fire affected nine adults, 15 children and multiple pets. Two volunteers from the Red Cross responded to the scene and provided assistance for immediate and basic needs, including temporary assistance.

"When disasters like a home fire strike, the Red Cross

is there. On average we respond to two home fires every single day in our region, providing temporary housing, food and comfort to those affected," said Monique Dugaw, Red Cross spokeswoman. "We also work pro actively to help individuals and families escape a home fire safely by installing free smoke alarms in homes that need them."

While the Red Cross works to provide immediate assistance, Marina Apartments and local volunteers are also gathering supplies for the families. Two families lost everything to the fire, including all household goods, clothing and children's toys. Another apartment on the first floor was flooded with two feet of water during fire suppression efforts.

Holford said she had already received donations of adult clothing but was still in need of children's clothing in:

girls sizes 4T, 5T, 6; and boys sizes 10, 12, 14.

Holford said Marina Apartments has one open two-bedroom apartment they have set aside for one of the families, and they are working with other properties to find homes for the others.

"The community has come together, they've brought clothes, blankets, even on the night of the fire," Holford said. "We're also trying to gather dishes, furniture, toiletries. They'll have to replace everything. The families are all being amazing. They're upset, but they're holding together."

The families are also in need of dog and cat food, and volunteers are working to set up pages on GoFundMe.com for monetary donations.

Physical donations can be dropped off at Marina Apartments in the office or apartment 1500 A.

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