

RV AND HOUSE DESTROYED IN SEPARATE FIRES

Dogs rescued from home that provided adult day care

Hermiston Herald

Two fires in two days kept the Umatilla County Fire District 1 busy at the start of the week.

No one was injured in either fire, and a pair of dogs were rescued by firefighters.

On Sunday afternoon, fire crews responded to a house fire in the 1300 block of Southwest 16th Street in Hermiston. The house served as the home of Roxanne Poulin Holcomb and Richard Holcomb but was also the site of Sandy's Home, an adult day care facility started in 2013 to give short breaks to caregivers of elderly or disabled adults.

Debra Poulin-Foster, who owned the house and ran Sandy's Home with her daughter Roxanne, said the building was a total loss.

"The whole roof is collapsed in on the back end of the house," she said.

She said her daughter and son-in-law were out shopping when a neighbor called 9-1-1 to report the house was on fire and then called her husband. He called her, and she immediately called her daughter to see if they had taken their two Jack Russell terrier mixes with them when they went out.

"I didn't have time to be tactful, because I was worried about the dogs," she said. "I called and said, 'Your house is on fire; do



Umatilla County Fire District 1 put out an RV fire at Pioneer RV Park in Hermiston on Monday afternoon.

STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

you have the dogs?"

The answer was no. The family arrived at the burning house, fearing the worst about the beloved family pets. But firefighters emerged from the home with the dogs in hand and deposited them into the arms of their overjoyed owners.

"Everyone was crying," Poulin-Foster said.

She said they weren't sure what had caused the fire, but it left the Holcombs with nothing but the clothes they had been wearing when they went to the store. They are currently living with Poulin-Foster and she said while they have appreciated offers of new furniture and household goods they won't have room to store the bigger items for at least a few days

until they find a new place to live.

Pauline-Foster said family friend Roxann Fisk has set up an online account for monetary donations at www.gofundme.com/richard-and-roxanne-needs-our-help. If people have clothing, household goods, food or other items they are interested in donating to the family they can email roxiracoon@gmail.com.

She said the whole family is extremely grateful for the support they have received from family, friends and community members and want to show their thanks for the fire and police departments, which have been doing extra patrols around the house to make sure people don't try to trespass.

"The community out-

pouring has been phenomenal," she said. "The police and fire department were amazing. They did everything they could as fast as they could."

Umatilla County Fire District 1 also responded to a second structure fire on Monday shortly before 1 p.m. at Pioneer RV Park, 1590 W. Highland Avenue in Hermiston.

The RV was fully engulfed when fire crews arrived.

The owner, who was staying at the park temporarily, was inside the RV at the time of the fire but escaped uninjured before the fire trucks arrived.

A cause has not been determined.

Contact Jade McDowell at 541-564-4536.

Blazers visit Hermiston boy

By JADE McDOWELL

Staff Writer

Hermiston seventh grader Tanner Gutcher got a surprise visit from the Portland Trail Blazers last week while he was hospitalized at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland.

Tanner, who has a genetic disorder called Angelman syndrome, is in the life skills program at Sandstone Middle School and plays Challenger baseball. His mom, Lacey McElroy, said he was thrilled to meet some real-life sports stars.

"Tanner was crazy, crazy excited," she said. "He could not stop laughing."

Angelman syndrome comes from a missing part of the 15th chromosome inherited from the mother. The more of the chromosome a person is missing, the more intense their symptoms. McElroy said Tanner's case is more severe and keeps him from walking or talking and causes seizures and other health problems. He was rushed to Doernbecher at 2 a.m. Nov. 28 for a digestive complication.

The Mayo Clinic website notes that "Frequent smiles and outbursts of laughter are common for people with Angelman syndrome, and many have happy, excitable personalities." Despite his many challenges, McElroy said Tanner is an "excessively happy" kid.

Still, being in the hospital is never fun, so the visit from the Blazers was a



Portland Trail Blazers Damian Lillard, left, and Shabazz Napier along with mascot Blaze visit Tanner Gutcher of Hermiston in Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY LACEY McElROY

welcome distraction. Point guards Damian Lillard and Shabazz Napier visited Tanner's room first, along with mascot Blaze. Later, several other members of the team and coaching staff came in for a photo, and Tanner got a Trail Blazers hat and signed poster.

"They were great when we asked for pictures and everything," McElroy said.

She said she and Tanner turned on the television and watched the Blazers play the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday.

"It's cool to watch and say, 'Hey, we met them,'" she said.

She said Tanner spent most of the first two years of his life at Doernbecher Children's Hospital and has made many visits since, so she's grateful that the hospital provides not only excellent care but also morale-boosting activities like the Blazers visit.

"Doernbecher is absolutely amazing," she said. "They have saved Tanner's life on more than one occasion."

Back home, she said the Sandstone Middle School staff has also been very supportive in accommodating Tanner's frequent absences due to hospital-

izations. Two other huge supports, she said, are Tanner's grandmother Ginger McElroy and his stepfather Trevor Daughtery.

As of Thursday Tanner was still in the hospital. McElroy said she hoped they would be given the OK to go home soon. But in the meantime, he still had his Blazers hat and poster to cheer him up.

"He likes sports a lot, so having the guys come up was an awesome experience," she said.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

BRIEFCASE

Irrigon chamber hosts farm, dairy

A representative from Threemile Canyon Farms and Columbia River Dairy is the guest speaker for the upcoming Irrigon Chamber of Commerce meeting.

The no-host luncheon event starts with a meet-and-greet Wednesday, Dec. 14, at 11:45 a.m. at Stokes Landing Senior Center, 195 N.W. Opal Place, Irrigon. The cost is \$8 for members or \$10 for non-members.

For more information, contact 541-922-3857 or irrigonchamber@irrigonchamber.com.

Retirement gathering set for 2

A retirement reception is planned for Morrow County Judge Terry Tallman and Commissioner Leann Rea.

The public is invited to celebrate the contributions of Tallman and Rea to Morrow County. The event is Friday, Dec. 16, from 2-4 p.m. at the Bartholomew Building, 110 N. Court St., Heppner.

For more information, contact 541-676-5613 or rlutcher@co.morrow.or.us.

Sushi restaurant open in Hermiston

A grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Monday at Kobe Hibachi Sush.

The celebration hosted by the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce was held at the new restaurant, 1055 S. Highway 395 Suite 100, at the Cornerstone Plaza Hermiston.

The eatery had a soft opening the week of Thanksgiving. Its opening follows a trend of new Japanese restaurants in Umatilla County, with two recently opened in Pendleton and another sushi place on the way in Hermiston.

In addition to sushi, the restaurant also sells steaks, seafood, rice and noodles. It is open 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday through Saturday and noon to 9 p.m. on Sundays. They can be contacted at 541-567-6178.

Stardust takes home hip-hop championship

By JADE McDOWELL

Staff Writer

Hermiston High School's dance team Stardust came out on top in the hip-hop category during a statewide competition this weekend.

Ashley Seibel, who coaches the team along with Laura Sanchez and Jake Royer, said the team had 16 girls and two boys competing in hip-hop, with another four students who only perform in the team's jazz numbers.

"I've been coaching eight years and this is the largest team I've coached to date," she said.

The category championships hosted by the Dance and Drill Coaches Association at Gresham High School on Saturday were invite-only based on scores at prequalifying competitions.

On Saturday the team danced to a medley of hip-hop songs by Beyonce, Drake, Missy Elliot and Lil Jon.

"It's slow and sultry at the beginning and in-your-face crazy at the end," Seibel said of the routine.

The routine was choreographed by senior Alex Anteau, who had impressed Seibel with her choreography work as an intern at the dance studio Dance Unlimited.

"She did really well so I said to her, 'You're really good at this, let's give it a try and see what you

can do,'" Seibel said.

She said Anteau proved her talent is "immeasurable" and she will "continue to have a home with our coaching staff, long after she graduates this year."

Anteau said she loves choreography and dance, and hopes to someday have a job that allows her to do both. She practiced that as both a dancer in Saturday's routine and its choreographer.

"At practice I would be dancing with them, and then step out and see how it was going," she said. "It gets kind of complicated."

Anteau said she wishes more people understood how much hard work dancing takes and how dedicated the members of Stardust are.

In addition to singing Anteau's praises, Seibel also said she was proud of the rest of the team.

"They are projection powerhouses," she said. "They just know how to make you believe them. They know how to sell it."

The first-place prize was an improvement over 2015, when the team took third place at the same competition. Now that the fall dance season is over the team will start working on a jazz routine to perform at the OSAA championships in the spring.

Contact Jade McDowell at 541-564-4536.

Investigation leads to arrest, recovery of stolen property

Thousands of dollars' worth of stolen equipment was recovered by the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office this week.

Clyde Beldon Baker, 36, was arrested and charged with multiple felonies in connection to the investigation.

According to a news release by the sheriff's office, on Nov. 29 a Hermiston resident reported they were missing an increasing number of items from their farm and suspected Baker,

a relative who was acting as a caretaker of the property and had moved to the area around the time of the thefts.

Detectives Erik Palmer and Kacey Ward contacted Baker, a convicted felon, and found him in possession of suspected methamphetamine and a collection of property reported stolen. The property included a horse trailer, industrial generator, air compressor, construction equipment, tools, horse tack, firearms and

ammunition. Among the stolen tools was a concrete saw belonging to Knerr Construction that the company reported went missing from either the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center or a construction site in Walla Walla.

The sheriff's office stated that Baker admitted he was taking property from his relative's farm and other locations in Umatilla County and Walla Walla County, then selling or pawning the items.

Baker was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail and faces charges for several counts of first-degree theft, felon in possession of a firearm, unauthorized use of a vehicle, unlawful possession of methamphetamine and supplying tamperand.

Palmer and Ward are continuing to investigate in cooperation with the Walla Walla Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement agencies and expect more charges to be added.