

# State board revokes license of former teacher and coach

## Teacher had inappropriate relationship with student after she graduated

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
Staff Writer

Former Irrigon and Hermiston teacher and coach Jake McElligott's license has been revoked by the state's Teacher Standards and Practices Commission after a lengthy investigation and review.

McElligott's license was revoked Jan. 26 due to an inappropriate sexual relationship with a former student from Irrigon High School back in 2013, whom he had also coached in softball. The former student said she had a sexual relationship with McElligott that began the day of her high school graduation. According to the TSPC report, the student was 18 years old at the time.

McElligott, who had been licensed since 2003 and teaching in Irrigon since 2004, coached softball and basketball at Irrigon High School, and led

the teams to state titles in both sports. In July 2014 he was hired as a sixth grade teacher at Hermiston's Armand Larive Middle School and began coaching the high school boys basketball team.

The commission, which determines discipline for educators in Oregon, received a report from the Morrow County Sheriff's Office in early October 2014, informing them of an investigation due to allegations of inappropriate conduct between McElligott and the student. The criminal investigation was closed soon after but the commission continued to investigate professional malfeasance. It concluded that McElligott's behavior constituted gross neglect of duty in violation of several Oregon laws, and subsequently revoked his teaching license.

The former student initially told a Morrow Coun-

ty detective she began a sexual relationship with McElligott a year after she graduated, but later admitted the affair began the morning of her 2013 high school graduation. The woman said she was not a minor at the time, and that she had initiated their first sexual encounter.

She said McElligott insisted she wait until she graduated before discussing her feelings for him. According to the woman, McElligott said he followed a code in which he never got involved with a student before they graduated. According to the police report, at the time of the interview McElligott was also involved with another former student, who was also over the age of 18. That former student did not respond to reported attempts by the police to contact her.

Further investigations by the TSPC revealed that McElligott and the student had exchanged personal phone calls and text messages during the 2012-2013 school year, and in

spring 2013 the two met in the softball dugout before school because the student had to make up time from a practice she missed.

McElligott talked with the student about some personal conflicts she was facing. He told her he cared about her, and that he disapproved of her date to the prom and some of her lifestyle choices. Before leaving, McElligott gave the student a "full-on hug," the report said, and told her again that he cared about her.

Several administrators in Morrow and Umatilla counties were also investigated for their response to the incident, but cleared of any wrong-doing.

McElligott was placed on leave by the Hermiston School District in August 2015 and let go from his high school coaching duties when the investigation by the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission came to light. He resigned his teaching position in December 2015.

Dr. Monica Beane, the executive director of the

TSPC, said some cases take longer because of the availability of new witnesses in a case. She said if a case is also being investigated by a law enforcement agency, the TSPC's investigation can be delayed so it doesn't interfere with law enforcement.

"In this case, we had to wait for other factors," Beane said. She added that McElligott initially requested a hearing, but the case was settled before the hearing.

Beane said Oregon is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher and Education Certification Clearinghouse, a national educators' system that is required to report individuals on whose records actions have been taken, so if someone whose license is revoked in Oregon applies for a license in another state, they will be investigated in that state as well.

Heidi Sipe, the Umatilla School District superintendent, also serves on the TSPC. While she recused herself from the McElli-

gott case, Sipe said her district has very specific policies on grooming and sexual misconduct.

"In the handbook, it shows that state law requires all school districts to provide training on sexual misconduct, including grooming," Sipe said. She added that employees also receive training about how to report behavior they think might constitute sexual misconduct, including making anonymous complaints.

Sipe said a key point in preventing this kind of incident is having staff recognize what grooming looks like, in order to raise alarm about it.

Dirk Dirksen, the superintendent of Morrow County School District, said the district does a lot of training and professional development around the definitions of grooming.

"We stay alert and ask people to report it," he said. "We investigate. Every time we get a report we do an investigation and turn it in — but the process is slow."

## HOTEL:

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a pool, meeting rooms, fitness center and complimentary breakfast. It had its soft opening Dec. 7, opening the top floor for guests while the rest of the hotel was finished.

The hotel is now the tallest building in Hermiston, and in the city's urban renewal district. It is expected to increase revenue to other businesses in the downtown area.

Steven Arrasmith, the

hotel's general manager, said the building took almost a year to construct. He said the company chose to come to Hermiston because they wanted to be a part of the vitality of a growing place.

"We wanted to be a part of the growth and up-and-coming success," Arrasmith said.

He said business has been good since the soft opening.

Arrasmith said most of the employees — there are currently 35 — are from Hermiston. He said he ex-

pects they will hire more as the business starts to grow, and offer the jobs to locals first.

Richard Boyles, the president of InnSight Hotel Management Group, which owns the hotel, said he was excited to provide this service to Hermiston.

"We saw a market that was underserved in terms of this quality of product," he said. "We aim to deliver a higher level of service."

Holiday Inn staff said roughly 150 people attended the open house over the two-hour period.



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Community members enjoy refreshments in the dining area of Hermiston's new Holiday Inn, which had its grand opening Friday.

## PLAY:

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McClanahan and Bemrose-Rust, who are both in their first year at Hermiston, convinced Dana Mercer, the school's longtime drama director, to stage Fiddler.

It didn't take much prodding, Mercer said. In her 25-plus years heading up the drama program at Hermiston, it's been Mercer's experience that students come out in droves for musicals.

"They like the singing, they like the dancing," she said. "Also, there are more parts."

Among those auditioning for "Fiddler on the Roof" was a newcomer to Hermiston High School's drama stage — senior Noah Roberts.

The talented singer landed the role of the musical's lead character — Tevye. Although previously unfamiliar with the play, Roberts watched the



STAFF PHOTO BY TAMMY MALGESINI

Members of the cast sing "Anatevka" during a Feb. 21 rehearsal for the Hermiston High School production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

film after he heard about auditions.

He said the biggest challenge has been memorizing his lines. The most enjoyable aspect of the production, Roberts said, is working with everyone in the cast.

Mercer said the winter weather caused problems, which resulted in a short timeline in putting the production together. Despite the hiccups, McClanahan said the rehearsals are going well.

"The choir is doing a fantastic job," he said. "And, Noah does a really good job as Tevye."

Clarissa Nitz was thrilled to get the part of Fruma Sarah. The senior previously performed in "The Music Man."

"I think it's fun because it incorporates both acting and music," she said about musicals. "It makes me

more comfortable with the play."

Bobby Crane, who plays Perchik, also performed in "The Music Man." He said the energy with Fiddler is phenomenal. He likens the cast to a big family that's been pulling together to succeed. Crane said he looks forward to rehearsals.

"It's like the light at the end of the day," he said.

"We have somewhere good to go after school and we support each other."

The storyline centers on Tevye and Golde, who have five daughters. Life in the Russian village of Anatevka in 1905 is said to be as precarious as the perch of a fiddler on a roof.

While attempting to maintain his Jewish religious and cultural traditions, Tevye has to deal with several strong-willed daughters. Despite arrangements by the matchmaker, the older daughters

have their eyes on men they wish to marry for love.

"It's fun and it's whimsical and it's sad and lovable," Bemrose-Rust said. "It's all the emotions rolled into one. It hits them all and there's great dancing and singing."

The play opens this weekend with performances Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m. in the school's fine arts auditorium, 600 S. First St., Hermiston. The final two shows are March 10-11. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$6 for youths and senior citizens.

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Movie Night: "Moana" (all ages)

www.pendletonparksandrec.com

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- 3/19 - Taste of Nordic
- 3/27-3/31, open daily for Spring Break!

for event details and information  
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Wee Bit O' Ireland Annual  
St. Patrick's  
Celebration

**Join us** for a great weekend every March in Heppner for "A Wee Bit O' Ireland" St. Patrick's Celebration. "Always held the weekend closest to St. Patrick's Day" (for 2017, March 17-19), you will find lots of activities and events to keep you busy; enjoy the great Irish community and start a new tradition in coming back again and again. **The weekend starts with** a 3 on 3 basketball competition on Friday night; Saturday begins with the Sheep Dog Trials, KUMA Coffee Hour, CEILI, Bouncin Leprechauns Fun Zone for Children, Lot of Arts and Crafts on display, Cruz-In Cars on display, Great Green Parade, the Welly toss, just to name a few. The main Saturday evening entertainment will be "The Gothard Sisters" and "The Old Time Fiddlers". All entertainment is free to the public due to funds provided by the Morrow County Unified Recreation District. **The weekend ends with a "Road Bowling competition!"** We extend "Caed Mile Failte" (Gaelic meaning 100,000 Welcomes) to all our visitors! You don't have to be Irish when you come, but you'll be Irish when you leave!

Call the Heppner Chamber for a schedule at 541-676-5536; or email at [heppnerchamber@centurytel.net](mailto:heppnerchamber@centurytel.net).  
Check it out online at: [heppnerchamber.com/stpattysday](http://heppnerchamber.com/stpattysday).  
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