

Former Hermiston resident found dead in Lincoln City

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Jeana Beck wore many hats, as an autism advocate, a Board of Realtors member and a friend to many in Hermiston. But according to her son, one role really stood out. “She was ‘mom’ to all my friends, she was friends with all my friends,” said her son Jesse Smith. “Exactly what you’d want out of a mom.”

Beck was found dead in Lincoln City on Friday, after her son, Jacob Smith, reported her missing the night before. There were no visible marks on her when she was found, and the cause of death has yet to be determined. The circumstances surrounding her death are still unclear, and family and friends are searching for answers. According to the *Lincoln City News Guard*, she went out to have a cigarette on Thursday evening, and did not return to the Rodeway Inn where she and her son were staying. She was found in a canal behind the motel.



Jeana Beck

Smith said his mother was in Lincoln City accompanying Jacob to a job conference.

“We’ve heard multiple things,” Smith said. “We’ve heard everything you can think of. The truth is, we don’t know.”

Lincoln City Police Chief Keith Kilian said the circumstances of Beck’s death are still under investigation, and that they are waiting for the results of the autopsy report from the medical examiner’s office.

“Foul play is not suspected at this time,” Kilian said. “We are chasing down some leads as to where she could have gone before her death.”

Kilian said he hopes to receive the report by this week.

Smith said they don’t know much about the events that preceded his mother’s death, but they know she visited a bar that evening. He said someone did see her at the bar, but he’s not sure who.

Smith said his father, Darrell Smith, was the one who found his mother after getting a call that she was missing. Smith said his father spotted her body in the canal and called the police.

Beck had lived in Hermiston until June of this year, when she moved to Gresham. Two of her children, her son Jacob and daughter Julianna, lived with her in Gresham.

While in Hermiston, Beck became known for her work as an autism advocate. Jacob has autism and Beck founded a non-profit organization called Unlocking Autism. Last December, she donated Christmas gifts and a visit from Santa for autistic students at West Park Elementary, raising money through her membership with the Hermiston board of Realtors.

She was also active in helping Jacob go to a national zookeeper’s conference by making and selling jambalaya in the community.

Smith said he spoke to his mother a few hours before she went missing.

“She was excited to be at the coast,” he said. “Her friend was about to go there, and she was happy to spend time with Jacob.”

A family friend has set up a GoFundMe page to raise money for funeral expenses, and to help support Beck’s four children, ages 23, 21 and 18.



Angie Connell, Heidi Carver, Blair Larsen, Steve McCoy, Kim Guzman, Bennett Christianson and Ilah Munro, holding her daughter Kimber, 3, are all concerned citizens that want a four-way stop installed at the intersection of Feedville Road and Edwards Road due to the high volume of vehicle accidents at that intersection.

STAFF PHOTOS BY E.J. HARRIS

Residents make case for four-way stop at Feedville and Edwards

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
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Residents on Feedville and South Edwards roads are growing more anxious about the intersection where those roads meet, after a crash earlier this month sent two teenagers with serious injuries to the hospital.

The four-way intersection is in rural Umatilla County between Hermiston and Stanfield. South Edwards Road has a stop sign, but Feedville Road does not.

The intersection has been the site of several collisions over the past few years, including fatal ones in March 2014 and September 2016.

Heidi Carver, who lives in the area, said she has been trying to talk to county officials for years, but so far has had no success in getting a four-way stop put in at the intersection.

Carver’s husband, Dustin Scott, still remembers the events that led to his accident in September 2016. Scott, driving a Ford pickup west on Feedville Road, T-boned a Chevrolet Impala heading south on South Edwards. The driver of the Impala, a 55-year-old woman, died at the scene. The passenger, a 58-year-old man, was seriously injured.

Scott suffered a shattered tibia and several lacerations.

“I was driving into town, it was about 7:45, not quite dark,” he said. “I kind of saw the car coming from the right, and it looked like they had their tail lights on and were stopping.”

But the car, which was supposed to stop at South Edwards, didn’t. Blowing through the sign, they drove out in front of Scott’s car before he could brake.



Pieces of wrecked vehicles, accident reconstruction paint, and a deep rut in the dirt are the remaining evidence of a two vehicle crash that injured two people November 9, 2017, at the intersection of Edwards Road and Feedville Road south of Hermiston.

“I remember thinking, ‘Are you kidding me?’” Scott said. “Where we ended up is where all the little graves are.”

Angela Ditchen, who also lives near the intersection, said her husband, Darren, and her sons were involved in a crash in March 2014 where an elderly woman passenger died, and the driver of the car was taken to the hospital. Ditchen said her husband’s car flipped, he tore a muscle in his hand, and her youngest son had a seatbelt burn. But other than that, they had few injuries.

“They were lucky,” Ditchen said. “I don’t know how my boys are alive.”

Residents don’t understand why county officials haven’t added another stop sign at the intersection.

“We have five boys and (the Ditchens) have three kids getting close to driving age,” Carver said. “As people who live out there, we want to know — why hasn’t there been a traffic revision out there?”

Sheriff Terry Rowan said they had been looking at the intersection, and comparing it to others in the area.

“The intersection at Loop and South Edwards, that’s a four-way stop sign,” Rowan said. “And there have been no fatalities there.”

Rowan said that off the top of his head, he couldn’t think of an intersection in the county that had seen as many accidents as the Feedville and Edwards intersection.

According to Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office records, since 2012 there have been 11 crashes at that intersection. Two were fatal, two have resulted in major injuries, three yielded minor injuries and four were non-injury accidents. One resulted in a DUI arrest.

County commissioner Bill Elfering said he is aware of the problems at the intersection and that commissioners have discussed it before and will do so again at their board meeting Wednesday.

He said drivers don’t seem to heed the stop sign that’s already there — even after a larger one was installed recently — making him question if they would pay attention to another one.

“We’ll take testimony from the sheriff, from public works about what works and what doesn’t,” Elfering said.

There are several potential solutions to that stop — a four-way stop, a blinking light or a blinking stop sign, as some intersections in Hermiston have.

But he said the commission is concerned that a blinking light would become an object of target practice in a more rural area.

“One shot to those, they cost \$1,500 apiece,” he said.

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