

# Crash survivor remembers the love left behind

## SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



**Kenia Esmeralda Martin-Ramirez was killed in a car crash on Feb. 15.**

Friends of Esperanza Martin-Ramirez are issuing a plea for help as she recovers from a crash at Ecola State Park that left her 3 1/2-month-old baby daughter, Kenia, dead.

"Life can change in a blink of an eye," wrote Seaside's Joanna Ramos on a GoFundMe page. "Yesterday one of my closest friends got in a bad car accident where her baby girl of three months lost her life.

"Money should be the last thing a mother should have to worry about after losing a child. I ask our community to come together and help this young woman with her terrible loss. Nothing we say or do will bring that precious angel back but we as a community can come together and support Esperanza in these difficult times."

More than a week after the Feb. 15 crash, Martin-Ramirez, 20, shared her thoughts on the tragedy. Ramos served as her translator.

"She is doing better both physically and mentally," Ramos said in a phone interview.

Martin-Ramirez joined family in the United States from Guatemala looking for better opportunities. "Over there, they don't have much support financially, so she came to the United States looking for a better future for herself," Ramos said.

When her mother died, Martin-Ramirez left school and moved in with a family member to support her siblings.

Martin-Ramirez and Ramos met as co-workers at a Seaside hotel.

"From the first day I met her, I knew that

we would either buy a balloon for her and would tie it to her arm and she would have fun with that," she said. "She also loved baths. Not a lot of babies love baths. She would actually cry when we would take her out of the bath."

Martin-Ramirez shared her Catholic faith with her child, singing church songs and hymns. "Esperanza would play them for her and she would calm down," Ramos said.

On Valentine's Day, the roommates made cards for friends, and Kenia joined them, gluing and playing with the balloons, memories that Martin-Ramirez will never forget. "Those little moments are the ones that stay with us forever," she said.

After the crash, everything changed.

Late in the day on Feb. 15, Esperanza and Kenia were in a Mazda driven by Rony Tomas-Garcia, 23, of Seaside. They were heading southbound on Ecola State Park Road in Cannon Beach when the car veered off the road, struck a tree and came to rest on its top. Martin-Ramirez was taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria before being transferred to Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland.

Tomas-Garcia, who was not injured, was arrested for manslaughter, assault, reckless driving and driving under the influence of intoxicants. He is in Clatsop County Jail. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement lodged an immigration detainer on Tomas-Garcia on Feb. 16.

While Martin-Ramirez declined to speak about the investigation, she reflected on the days immediately after the crash.

She broke bones behind her neck at the top of her spinal cord, which must heal by themselves — a healing that could take at least six weeks.

"I was the first one she called and I was heartbroken," Ramos said. "It was surreal."

At first, Martin-Ramirez was about to give up, but relied on her faith and counseling for inspiration.

"Both her arms and shoulder blades are very sore because of the impact," Ramos said. "She was wearing her belt. Everyone was wearing their belt. She's very sore still, she can't be up for a lot of time." After returning home, Ramos and other roommates have been "super supportive," Martin-Ramirez said.

Co-workers have been in touch and checking up on her.

"She is such a strong woman, it is amazing," Ramos said. "I am amazed. It's crazy how she's been through so much and she still doesn't give up. Everything happens for a reason. Now she's thinking positive, at first not so much, but with our support and a counselor's support, it's helped a lot."

The aim of the fundraiser is to help Martin-Ramirez meet funeral and medical expenses. "We're her support system," Ramos said. "We are here supporting her the whole way but obviously, financially it is very difficult."

The support from the community has inspired Martin-Ramirez to look to the future and give back to the community, just as others are helping her now.

"Honestly, the whole community coming together brings me such joy," Ramos said. "You never know. It was Esperanza today, but you never know who it might be tomorrow."

"I love her like she was my sister," Ramos added. "I loved that baby like she was my niece. A couple of days ago, Esperanza shared a quote that she saw. It said, 'When we lose someone we love, we must learn not to live without them but to live with the love they left behind.' That touched her heart and it even gives me chills."

# Seaside principal outlines school sports guidelines

## GUEST COLUMN

JEFF ROBERTS



Dear Seaside Families and Community Members:

For years, Seaside High School athletics has realized a tremendous amount of support for our student-athletes during their competitive seasons. Whether packing the gyms, lining the track or showing up to Broadway Field for a contest, you have provided consistent and vocal support for our student-athletes.

Our athletic programs came to an abrupt end in March 2020 and our student-athletes have not had the opportunity to compete again until now, almost an entire year later. We are excited for our teams to once again represent our school and community with the start of the 2021 fall sports season that officially began on Feb. 22.

There has been a lot of speculation over what this looks like for our fans who are ready to cheer on their favorite players and teams during competition. In the current environment, watching the games in person is going to be a departure from "normal." We are grateful that our student-athletes will be able to compete again, however, spectating will be markedly different than what we are used to. The Oregon Health Authority has outlined provisions for continued competition and occupancy at our venues that will, depending on current county risk levels, allow for

some spectators but certainly not to the levels that we are accustomed to.

We are working with our Cowapa League partners to develop consistent guidelines that would allow for limited spectators at our respective venues. A complicating factor is that our league spans three different counties which might simultaneously be in three different risk sectors.

I can assure you that the other league schools are as committed to allowing for limited spectators as we are and collectively we plan to do all in our power to make spectator attendance possible while also ensuring we take the appropriate precautions to protect the likelihood of our students remaining in school. Seaside spectators will not be allowed at visiting venues until these guidelines are confirmed by Cowapa schools. I will notify our coaches once that agreement is reached.

When we are able to allow for limited spectators, the following guidelines will be followed with zero exceptions during the Oregon Schools Activities Association season 2 (fall sports) and under current Oregon Health Authority guidelines:

- An allotment of tickets will be designated for each student athlete on a rostered team. Student athletes will be able to distribute these tickets at their discretion for each contest.
- All spectators are required to wear a fitted face covering/mask regardless of whether the activity is indoors or outdoors.
- Spectators granted access will be required to sit in designated areas and

observe physical distancing of 6 feet.

- Spectators that are not granted access will be asked to leave the premises. Spectators that refuse to follow guidelines run the risk of having the competition stopped or cancelled and potentially being trespassed from venues.

- Outdoor venues are limited to 300 persons on-site in lower risk sectors and 150 persons on site in moderate-risk sectors. These limits include all participants, coaches, officials, personnel and spectators. High-risk and extreme-risk sector guidelines strictly prohibit spectators.

We are currently working on ways to provide live streaming opportunities for all of our contests and we will make that information available as soon as possible.

I have outlined the proposed allotment of tickets below that will be available to student-athletes throughout the fall sports season and under the current Oregon Health Authority sector risk level guidelines. Note, again, that the in-person attendee counts include all players, coaches, officials and personnel supporting a team which is why two different sports held in the same venue may then have fewer spectators allowed so that the venue remains under the cap set for total in-person attendees. Prior to the Cowapa League agreement we will allow home spectators under the guideline limitations below.

Additional information to ticket allocations:

- There will not be admission charged at any venue for attendance.

- There will be no concessions at any venues.

- All spectators must be seated in provided stands and adhere to designated home and visitor sections.

- Per Oregon Health Authority, the venue capacity limits include the perimeter fence line, skate park, and parking lot at Broadway Field. Spectating from these locations will not be allowed.

- Cross-country meets will abide by the 300/150 person maximum attendees at an outdoor venue and observe physical distancing protocols.

Our coaches will further communicate this information with our student-athletes and will be the primary contact regarding ticketing to events for their respective sports. Other questions regarding our athletic programs should be directed to Aaron Tanabe, athletic director, at 503-738-5586 or atanabe@seasidek12.org.

I acknowledge that these guidelines and restrictions may be frustrating; however, in order to resume competition they must be followed. I am thankful that the opportunity to resume these activities for our students has been provided. Please continue to partner with our school community through responsible actions to ensure these athletic opportunities continue to be available to our student-athletes throughout the remainder of the year.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation as we continue to move through this challenging time.

*Jeff Roberts is the principal of Seaside High School and Middle School.*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District needs to step up for homeless

I am very saddened and very upset with Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District last meeting report. You have failed to live up to the high caring and helping standards of the people of our area.

First, you did not listen to the many folks that questioned your purchase of the old, unsafe middle school. You paid no attention to professional people telling you how dangerous and in need of repair and the costs associated.

Even as the nation was in a COVID-19 pandemic you felt you could move ahead without truly involving the community and listening. Your director and you had big dreams and big ideas about what you might provide the community. You forgot that our community doesn't have extra funds ready for your use in the coming year.

As the temperatures dipped, rain and sleet were predicted. You did not wish to use your golden purchase as a safe haven for the homeless. While an old building sat empty and you sat in warm homes you general-

ized that you were being pushed, that you did not have the plans done and you worried about what the neighbors might think. So, no action.

The building sat empty as a man slept on the sidewalk next to the public restrooms and others in the damp woods.

Campers know you do not sleep on a cot. You sleep on a mat. Cots allow the cold air to go all around you. Where are the old tumbling mats from the schools? Can they be used?

Your board president needs to call for an emergency meeting. Maybe two or more meetings and get some humane action plans in place.

1. Form committees of members of the public to help speed up the progress and become part of the plan. We certainly feel we have not had our opinions asked for. Don't form huge committees, just action-oriented groups.

2. Use the Bob Chisholm Community Center go you can have your committees come together, and yet safely sit apart. To assist these committees, ask for assistance from staff of the organizations that stepped up to help and use their expertise.

3. Set firm and timely dates for reporting to the board in the big community hall. Report to the community. Put it on Zoom. Be transparent.

4. My own suggestions: Use the big gym so bathrooms and shower are right there. Enter the gym from the back door next to community garden. Should animals be a problem they can be put in fence-pens between the two gyms, already fenced at both ends. Cover with tarps. Personal items place in tagged, black sacks then placed on upper stage by the door.

Send all board members to look at a well-run warming center Astoria. They have it fine-tuned. You don't need to feed or clothe them like they do in Astoria but it would be very easy since the kitchen is right next door and our community would provide clothing.

Forget the classrooms. You have security gates in all the hallways so the gym can be closed off. There is no reason for a homeless person to leave gym area, with seating feet apart, in the stands if needed.

Take temperatures before they enter building

Get COVID shots for your volunteers. Check and see what Astoria uses for

shower towels.

Report weekly to your community what you are doing and how it is working and how we can help achieve success.

Take pride in this program and continue to make it better

Use this as a trial run for the rest of the winter.

It was noted the plans are not done for the building use and this is a reason to not shelter the homeless. That is exactly why your community is upset. There was no master plan. Not even now! You had ideas without any thought on how you as a board were going to pull this off, what would each room be used for, or who would pay for this in yearn to come? So you spend more money to have someone else do the board's work.

In closing, I strongly urge board members to step up and demonstrate the humanity of our community. Provide a warm spot for those less fortunate and definitely in need.

**Kathleen L. Samsel**  
Former Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District board member  
Seaside

**SEASIDE Signal**

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