

## Housing programs lift clients toward self-sufficiency status

Reducing dependence on public assistance is a primary goal of many of the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority programs. The agency supports low-income Gorge individuals and families in affording reliable, safe housing through federal and state funding, and rental assistance is supplemented by the Bridges to Health Pathways and Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) teams, which help them become independent.

Bridges to Health provides community health workers helping clients walk through the journey and offers support for life issues that can improve a client's physical and mental health. Josh Sendejas and Jeannette Gutierrez bring their lived experience to this role, and it helps them relate to clients.

When a new person comes to the agency seeking assistance, they are paired with a caseworker to review their overall picture. Sendejas says their role is to help work toward housing stability. "We're able to provide a lot more than traditional programs," he said.



Mid-Columbia Housing Authority courtesy photo | Skamania County Pioneer

**From left, Silvina Bustos, FSS coordinator; Jeannette Gutierrez, CHW; Joshua Sendejas, CHW and Sonia Chavez, FSS coordinator.**

"I get to be one-on-one with clients," Gutierrez said. She is happy to be part of a team that helps people apply for housing, find resources to help pay for applications, and make referrals to help clients improve their lives and take away some of the burden of stress that low-income individuals struggle with.

The Pathways checklist helps identify where clients are struggling and need assistance. Housing is always a main factor alongside employment issues, but there may be other factors like healthcare, mental health needs, disabilities, household size and more that cre-

ate challenges to be able to afford the ever-rising costs of housing in the Columbia River Gorge.

The duo is always excited when a client successfully qualifies for rental assistance and finds a suitable home that helps them live a better life. The programs are not meant to be permanent. It is a step toward housing stability, with the goal of eventually coming off assistance.

Once clients have obtained housing with vouchers sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), they are invited to

**Continued on p. 2**

## Both sides ask court to dismiss the charges against Lauser

By Emily Harris  
Courtesy of Uplift Local

The months-long indecent exposure case against former Stevenson City Council member Lucy Lauser for appearing topless in public appears likely to be dismissed, after both sides told the Skamania District Court they support such a decision.

Their arguments weigh heavily on a Washington State Supreme Court Feb. 26 ruling in a closely related case – an effort to recall Lauser from her city council seat due to a separate incident when she also appeared topless in public.

That recall effort was based on Lauser's actions at a March 31, 2025 demonstration supporting rights of transgender people. Lower courts said that the recall could go forward. But when the state supreme court weighed in, justices decided Lauser's public nudity at that demonstration was constitutionally protected free speech.

The state Supreme Court's decision wasn't about the criminal case, which stemmed from Lauser's later July 4 topless appearance and led to her arrest. But Skamania County prosecutors said the circumstances of the two

events are so similar that they don't believe they can win an indecent exposure conviction.

"The circumstances and legal issues are similar enough that proceeding with such a case ... is not an efficient use of criminal justice or judicial resources," deputy prosecuting attorney Elise Howard wrote in a motion filed with the court April 13. "Even if a local fact finder were to find Ms. Lauser guilty, we do not believe that such a finding would survive" an appeal, the motion said.

Last July 4, Lauser was arrested after appear-

**Continued on p. 2**

## Forensics used to ID Martin family remains from wreckage found embedded in river

The Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office has identified the remains of Kenneth Martin, Barbara Martin and Barbie Martin following DNA analysis by Othram, Inc., a forensic genetics laboratory specializing in advanced DNA analysis, of remains located in the Columbia River within the wreckage of the Martin family car. The Hood River County Sheriff's Office has concluded its investigation, having found no evidence of a crime.

The Martin family originally disappeared in December of 1958 while reportedly visiting the Columbia River Gorge to collect Christmas greenery. The remains of Virginia Martin, 13, and Susan, 11, were found downstream months later, but the parents, Kenneth and Barbara, and oldest daughter Barbara ("Barbie," 14) were never found despite extensive searching and diving.

In 2024, a private diver located what he believed to be the Martin family car in a catch-basin area within the original locks in Cascade Locks, Oregon. In early 2025, the Hood River County Sheriff's Office contracted a crane to attempt to pull the vehicle out of the river.

Due to the extent to which the vehicle had been encased in sediment, only the frame and some of the attached components were able to be pulled from the water. Analysis of those items along with other items retrieved by the diver allowed investigators to conclude that this was in fact the Martin vehicle.

Later in 2025, the diver located human remains, which were turned over to the Hood River County Sheriff's Office, and subsequently to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office.

To assist with identification, the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office and the Hood River County

Sheriff's Office partnered with Othram Inc., which used an identity inference method, which allows scientists to identify individuals from DNA evidence even when no direct comparison sample is initially available. Recovered forensic evidence from the case was submitted to Othram's laboratory in The Woodlands, Texas.

The successfully generated profile was directly compared with family reference standards obtained from known relatives of the Martin family. This comparison enabled investigators to evaluate biological relationships with a high degree of accuracy.

Through this process, Kenneth Martin was positively identified and based on the totality of the circumstances in which the remains were recovered, and the anthropological assessment of the remains, Barbara Martin and Barbie Martin were also identified.

Following the successful identification, the Hood River County Sheriff's Office notified next of kin, who wish for privacy and have requested no media contact.

The Hood River County Sheriff's Office would like to thank the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office for their support with locating relevant records to assist with the investigation. We would also like to thank the members of the Columbia Gorge Major Crimes Team and the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division for their support. For the identification efforts, special thanks goes out to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office, Othram, Inc., and the Research Triangle Institute, as well as to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System for their financial assistance in funding the genetic testing.

Source: Hood River County Sheriff's Office

## News Briefs

### Downtown Association plans Spruce Up Stevenson day

Gather your family and friends. Spruce Up Stevenson is part of Skamania County's America250 Day of Service! Stevenson Downtown Association is bringing neighbors together to strengthen community connections and celebrate the shared pride in Downtown Stevenson. Join in the fun from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 25.

Meet at the Stevenson Downtown Association office (shared with the Chamber at 167 2nd St., Stevenson) to check in, gather for announcements and get area assignments. Bring tools and wear your Spruce Up T-shirt from past years. We will have more shirts available.

Stevenson Volunteer Firefighters Association will provide pancake and sausage breakfast sandwiches for all volunteers starting at 8:30 a.m. Plus, all volunteers receive an SDA water bottle and \$15 lunch coupon to use at the following participating downtown establishments: Big River Grill, Clark & Lewie's, El Rio, Gotta Hava Java, The Cabin Drive-Thru and Walking Man Brewing.

Pre-register online to choose a preferred task at bit.ly/2026SpruceUpSpring

A Clean Up Carson day, sponsored by the Wind River Business Association will also take place on Saturday, April 25, starting at 9 a.m. Volunteers are encouraged to grab a green bag and pick a road to gather trash.

Source: Stevenson Downtown Association

### Education Foundation hosts adult Prom fundraiser

The Stevenson-Carson Educational Foundation is excited to host an Adult Prom fundraiser, 7 to 11 p.m., on Saturday, May 9, at the Skamania Lodge. This nostalgic, community-centered evening will feature a DJ, dancing, hors d'oeuvres, games and a silent auction.

Proceeds will directly fund enrichment opportunities for students of the Stevenson-Carson School District that include teacher grants, AP fees, field trips and various student programs. Tickets are \$45 per person and includes admission and one drink. There will be a DJ, dancing, hors d'oeuvres, games and a silent auc-

**Continued on p. 2**

## Forest Service announces \$248M in Secure Rural Schools payments for rural services

The U.S. Forest Service recently announced it will be issuing \$248 million in Secure Rural Schools payments for 2025, delivering critical funding to eligible states and counties with National Forest System lands. These payments help sustain public schools, maintain local roads, strengthen wildfire preparedness, and support other essential services in rural communities. "Secure Rural Schools payments reflect our strong partnership with the counties and communities that surround national forests," Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz said in a press statement. "These funds support critical infrastructure, while advancing active forest management and restoration that keep

forests resilient and communities safer. We remain committed to deliver this support directly to rural communities that depend on these resources." The 2025 payments include Title I, Title III and 1908 Act allocations, which help fund education, transportation infrastructure and critical community services in rural areas. They also enhance wildfire readiness at the local level by supporting Firewise Communities programs, reimbursing counties for emergency services on national forests and supporting the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans – making communities safer and improving coordination with Forest Service wildfire response efforts.

Since 1908, 25 percent of Forest Service revenue from timber sales, mineral leases, livestock grazing, recreation fees and other sources have been shared with states and counties containing national forests. By the 1990s, long-term reductions in timber revenue significantly reduced these payments, prompting Congress to enact the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 to provide more stable funding for at-risk local services. Over the past decade, the Forest Service has distributed \$2.4 billion through the Secure Rural Schools program.

Source: U.S. Forest Service

## Skamania Sip & Stroll returns to downtown Stevenson May 16

The Skamania County Chamber of Commerce invites visitors and locals alike to experience one of the Gorge's most anticipated spring events, Skamania Sip & Stroll, returning to downtown Stevenson from noon to 5 p.m., on Saturday, May 16.

This popular event offers a unique opportunity to explore Stevenson's charming downtown while enjoying tastings from regional wineries and beverage makers, all hosted inside participating local businesses. Designed as a walkable experience, Sip & Stroll encourages attendees to dis-

cover local shops and enjoy flavors of the Columbia River Gorge.

For \$30 per person, attendees receive a souvenir tasting glass, six tasting tickets, swag bag and a map highlighting all tasting locations and activities. Check-in will take place at the Skamania County Chamber of Commerce, located at 167 NW 2nd St., in Stevenson.

This is a 21-plus event, and attendance is limited to 400 participants, making early ticket purchase highly recommended.

"Skamania Sip & Stroll

**Continued on p. 5**

**Northwest Cherry Festival fun run**

8 a.m., Saturday, April 25 with start/finish at Polehn Farms, 2121 Dry Hollow Road, The Dalles, Oregon. 3k, 5k and 10k runs.

Info: [cgcc.edu/fun-run](http://cgcc.edu/fun-run)

**Inside:**

- Letters to the Editor..... **Page 3**
- Of interest to senior citizens ..... **Page 3**
- Classifieds and legals ..... **Page 5**
- Support groups ..... **Page 5**

**This day in history**

- 1876 First National League baseball game played.
- 1915 Germans introduce poison gas.
- 1945 Hitler admits defeat.
- 1967 McDonald's Big Mac debuts
- 1970 The first Earth Day.
- 1989 100,000 Chinese students gather at Tiananmen Square, demand to meet Li Peng.