

Sunday
Statesman Journal

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2018 ■ STATESMANJOURNAL.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

LIFE AND DEATH
IN SALEM'S WALLACE MARINE PARK

Homeless housing success, other factors sow turmoil

Connor Radnovich Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

It was her frostbitten foot and toes that convinced Joann she wouldn't last another winter in Wallace Marine Park, with the unforgiving rain, 20-degree nights and mud so thick it sucks the shoes from homeless campers' feet. • Five and a half years outdoors was enough for the 61-year-old. • For Don Blocker, this year marked his 40th in the park. He had no interest in a house — he wouldn't stay even one night indoors if he could help it, unsettled by the encroaching walls. • Both Joann and "Stretch" — one of the street names for the 6-foot-8-inch 59-year-old — had pathways indoors.

See PARK, Page 5A

OUR HOMELESS CRISIS is an occasional series by the Statesman Journal on homelessness in Marion and Polk counties.

See the entire series at StatesmanJournal.com/homeless.



Top: A group of formerly homeless people and advocate Art Scaglione cart supplies to people living in the woods around Wallace Marine Park on Dec. 8. Above: Scaglione, left, reads a phone number for Toni to copy down while standing in her camp in the park. PHOTOS BY CONNOR RADNOVICH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Salem commission may disband over ethics report

Jonathan Bach Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Salem commission that advises the City Council on how to award millions in federal grants may disband after the federal government criticized potential conflicts of interest, only three years after the commission was created.

Councilors are expected to decide Jan. 14 whether to

dissolve the nine-member Urban Development, Community Services and Housing Commission.

The commission was set up in 2015 to recommend how Salem should allocate money from the Community Development Block Grant Program and HOME Investment Partnerships Program, a set of federally funded grants worth about \$2 million a year.

The crux of the problem is that former and current commissioners also represent organizations that have

received the federal money.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which allocates the money, found the appearance of possible conflicts of interest problematic.

In one example, St. Francis Shelter — whose executive director Kim Lemman sat on the commission — was awarded \$85,000 for a homeless shelter roof re-

See ETHICS, Page 4A

USA TODAY

Government shutdown extended until at least Dec. 27 as Senate adjourns. **1B**

Mid-Valley

Salem man needs help identifying the Civil War soldier in a photograph. **1D**

Weather

High 52° ■ Low 42°
Rain. Forecast, **6C**

Volume 167 | No. 254
Home delivery pricing inside
Subscribe 800-452-2511
©2018

Sunday **\$2.00**
0 40901 07402 1

2018 FORD ESCAPE S

STARTING AT
\$17,999



ALL 2018 SUVs
\$1500
IN TRADE ASSIST

BUILT FOR THE HOLIDAYS

SALES EVENT
FINAL DAYS



Serving Salem Since 1962

2018 FORD F-150 SUPERCAB 4X4 XLT 302A

\$13,800
OFF MSRP



OR **\$1,000**
PLUS
0% x 72
ON ALL 2018 FORD F-150s

MSRP \$44,315. Sale price \$39,046 after \$5,269 Skyline discount. Final Price \$30,496 after \$3,750 Manufacturer Rebate, \$1,500 Bonus Cash, \$1,000 Certificates (4x\$250 certificates, while supplies last), \$300 EcoBoost Cash, and \$2,000 Trade Assist. Plus tax, license, title, documentation fee. Must Trade 95 or newer. 0% x 72 = \$38,046 to finance after \$1,000 certs. Must finance through Ford Motor Credit tier 0-1. OAC. 1 at this price. VIN#C96859, Sk#182676, Expires 12/31/18. Art for illustration only.

skylineforddirect.com

Salem 503-581-2411 Keizer 503-463-4853

Park

Continued from Page 1A

For Joann, who asked the Statesman Journal not to use her last name for safety reasons, it was Salem's new homeless housing program.

She got an apartment in February and 31 campers have since followed her out of the woods, a testament to the program's success and the respect Joann earned as a camp leader.

Their exodus coincided with an influx of homeless people from out of town or other parts of the city who were uninterested in following or enforcing the rules. They filled the camps with up to about 150 people — more than the space had ever held.

Long-time residents say it looks worse now than it ever has, with garbage piling up and spilling out of the woods, a visual marker of their presence to passers-by.

The vast majority of campers actually live on private quarry land bordering the park, but they're still referred to as park campers.

Over the last six months, the culture the woods people built — one of looking out for each other, being respectful, following the rules and keeping a low profile — has come into conflict with the more individualistic "concrete campers."

As tensions rose so, too, have incidents of vandalism and theft at nearby businesses. The invisibility that kept campers safe from eviction has started to dissolve.

Don preferred to keep to himself in the park.

He had somewhere else to go, had he wanted. His older brother, Richard, bought a house last year in Vancouver, Washington, and begged Don to join him. Start a new life. Get inside.

"I love my family here, and I love my freedom," were Don's words to him, Richard told the campers and homeless advocates at Don's recent memorial service.

"Stretch" died the day after Thanksgiving, unable to get warm after falling into a pond near his tent.

The service was set on a knoll beneath three tall pine trees overlooking the park's softball fields. Don used to sit and watch games from this perch. He was quiet and standoffish. Like many living in the park, he was distrustful of people he didn't know and took a long time to warm to outsiders.

And there are only a few people walking into camp to help.

Outside forces reshape camp

No two people who live around Wallace Marine Park became homeless the same way.

Some got sick and couldn't keep up with work or medical bills. Some fled domestic violence. Some lost their jobs. Some have mental illnesses. The path is often from a home, to a car, to a tent.

Campers are engineers, mechanics, artists and teachers. Talented people, advocates often say, with the resourcefulness to live out the post-apocalypse, if it ever arrives.

There is a lot of meth use, sometimes for recreation, but often as a way to cope with trauma or to keep warm. It's impossible to stay clean or dry most of the year.

Most folks collect rocks; it's one of the few hobbies available.

But over the past six months, outside forces have started to break down the camp structures that kept this group of capable, yet troubled people living in relative harmony.

There was always some trash on the ground mixed with the mud, branches and fallen leaves, but long-time campers say it's never looked as bad as it does now.

Pockets of ramshackle structures line the pathways and all manner of garbage lies strewn about: plastic shopping bags and storage bins, bicycle parts, shopping carts, a wheelchair, mannequin heads stuck onto stakes.

Someone new to camp will keep their area spotless for a few weeks, advocates say, but soon they stop caring as their shame and anger begin to project externally.

Tensions are at an all-time high, according to the campers who have been there the longest. It's coming from a potent mix of new people moving in who don't know or care about the rules, less space to live because of evictions and police sweeps of other camping areas and camp leaders either getting worn out or leaving.

Some established campers don't feel safe anymore. Businesses have reported more burglaries and vandalism — even businesses that help the homeless and were previously considered off limits.

There's a justice system, though the comparison may make a judge blush. Before the leaders began leaving and things started to come apart, misbehavior was met with punishment. No stealing, no preying on the weak, no disrespecting, don't mess with anyone's bike or tent. No fighting in camp under most circumstances. What happens in the quarry, stays in the quarry.

Punishment could be violence directed by camp leaders or expulsion from the park. In extreme cases, tents were lit on fire.

Follow the rules, and everyone gets along.

But this year, camp tensions have spilled out in ways that drew increasing attention to the community in the woods.

Finally, in mid-November, a gas can was stolen out of a service truck on quarry property and the truck was moved. Since then, rumors of an impending eviction have spread through camp. It isn't the first time campers thought an eviction was on the way. But combined with everything else that's happened, some fear this could be the final straw.

Campers warn that there is nowhere else for them to go. The places they used to stay have been swept by the owners, and many rendered inhabitable through bulldozing.

If eviction notices are posted now, they said many are going straight across the bridge into downtown Salem.

Joann says she will pitch the first tent on the Capitol steps if the quarry is cleared out.

Aid for homeless becomes mission

Bringing supplies to the homeless camps surrounding Wallace Marine Park is treacherous.

The rutted, muddy path and jutting tree roots can send a cart loaded up with hundreds of pounds of food careening into the underbrush. It's one aspect of a typical Sunday for Art and Reggienia Scaglione.

For more than four years, the couple has been taking supplies to people living in the park. It started with a dozen doughnuts and coffee but has ballooned to



Art Scaglione draws in the dirt the City of Salem and Polk County boundaries as they intersect in Wallace Marine Park on Dec. 7. Most people living around Wallace Marine Park live on private property owned by a quarry that is within Polk County jurisdiction. CONNOR RADNOVICH/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Left: Carolina Johnson, a manager at a West Salem Subway, spreads the ashes of Don Blocker as his brother, Richard Blocker, 61, and great-nephew, Darrick Blocker, 20, both of Vancouver, Wash., look on at Wallace Marine Park in West Salem on Dec. 13. Right: Richard Blocker spreads Don Blocker's ashes in the Willamette River. PHOTOS BY ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL



hundreds of pounds of food including bread, cheese, eggs, tortillas, full pies and assorted pastries. There's also a backpack full of clean, white socks.

They know just about every person living in or near the park, and plenty more homeless throughout the city.

Retired from construction work, Art is on-call 24 hours a day for camp emergencies. He's there up to five days per week. But Reggienia is the "silent strength" behind what they do, he says.

They are the only consistent, long-time advocates for the Wallace community.

On their Sunday trips, Art also answers questions about Salem's "housing first" rental assistance program, signs people up for an all-expenses-paid holiday retreat, organizes deep sea fishing trips and, critically, badgers people into following through on applying for housing.

Trying to get anyone out is much more difficult than bringing anything in.

One Saturday night this month, Art and three former campers — Dean, Kim and Joann — hit a bike path that leads to the forest trail.

They cart with them a couple dozen recycled blankets, several boxes of packaged doughnuts and an orange water cooler full of Joann's fresh homemade turkey and rice soup. They also carry life-changing news.

Flashlights illuminate the way through thick fog, and Joann soon finds herself at the back of the pack.

She stops for a rest and takes three puffs of her rescue inhaler.

Asthma and COPD.

Not 20 minutes ago she was smoking Marlboro Black 100s while stringing her cart with festive blue lights.

"It's the only vice I have left," she says, ruefully.

A chastisement of her former camp-mate Dean for not offering to take the cart and a short phone call later, Zach the Kid appears out of the darkness to keep the party moving. At 22, Zach is one of the youngest adults in camp and a good friend of Joann's grown son Jeremy, who still lives outdoors.

Zach's a helper, he takes pride in being around to support everyone else.

Art has worked the last four years to build trust, so he too can help and support the campers trying to get to a better place.

"We live life with them as much as they'll let us," he says.

In turn, Art gives all the credit to God for leading him to this community where he can make a difference and for sustaining his efforts. A grey hat he often wears reads "Armor of God" on the front and the Bible passage EPH 6:10-16 along the brim.

If it weren't for Art, Joann said she would still be living outdoors. When Art signed up a bunch of campers to interview for housing, Joann stood him up. So, after dropping off the others, Art drove back to the camp and bugged her until she relented "just to shut him up."

Toward the end of the night, with most of the soup and doughnuts eaten and the blankets distributed, a woman approaches the group.

"How are you doing, Amy?" Art asks.

"I'm OK," she responds. Crestfallen and bundled up to her chin, her body suggests the opposite. Her face is thin and almost tinged grey.

"So, do you want to tell her?" Joann asks.

"No, you tell her. I just want to see her face," Art responds.

Amy's eyes open a little wider and she starts to grin. "I talked to Jimmy Jones yesterday," Joann starts. "Yeah? And?" Amy says, excitement building in her voice.

"You're going to get your house."

"Are you serious? Are you serious? Oh my God, are you serious?"

Amy embraces Joann, burying her face into her shoulder. When she pulls back, her face is alive and she's crying.

Art believed there wasn't a person in camp with a situation as dire as Amy's. He was convinced she wouldn't survive past a few months.

And no one wants another death this winter.

Homeless life difficult to shake

After years outdoors, the transition inside doesn't happen with the turn of a key.

Advocates tell stories of campers sleeping in tents set up in their living rooms, of others spending nights in the park despite having a dry place to stay. It can take months before someone is comfortable living in what is effectively a box compared to the Wallace woodlands.

See PARK, Page 6A









Join Our Rewards Program!

FOOTWEAR EXPRESS

www.footwearexpress.com

290 Commercial St NE, Salem
503-589-9794

2252 Santiam Hwy SE, Albany
541-926-2955

OR-GC10080447-13



"Why didn't I do this sooner"

That's what patients say when they complete Non-surgical spinal decompression.



Call Today for a **FREE** Consultation

503-362-8892

You're never too young to fix your back

Dr. Terrence Hansen
Chiropractic Physician
3962-D Center St. NE, Salem



HANSEN
CHIROPRACTIC

OR-SAL008127-34



Art Scaglione pets Falcon in a homeless camp at Wallace Marine Park in Salem on Dec. 7. PHOTOS BY CONNOR RADNOVICH / STATESMAN JOURNAL



Joann, right, pours soup into a container while talking with her son in her apartment on Dec. 8. After more than five years homeless, Joann moved into her apartment in February through Salem's Homeless Rental Assistance Program.

Park

Continued from Page 5A

The change was easier for Joann; she knew she was ready to come inside. She credits park life with making her stronger after multiple cancer diagnoses but is sure it would have killed her within the year.

Even so, she never turns off her television — the silence of the apartment complex is foreign and unnerving. Also, she doesn't want her cat Sara to sit in silence all day.

In January, she will transition to Section 8 housing and graduate from Salem's rental assistance program. She will have to find a way to pay for her bus pass and other necessities, and hopes her Social Security disability application is approved.

Her older son Chris is a different story.

He still spends much of his time in camp and sees the apartment he got as a handout he doesn't deserve. Chris despises handouts.

Then there's the distance. While Joann lives as close to the park as she can, Chris' apartment is one of the furthest from the camp.

But Chris has only been indoors since mid-October.

As one of the first, Joann has been critical to the success of the city's Homeless Rental Assistance Program. After she got her apartment, other people in the park could see that it wasn't just another lie or unfulfilled promise — that this program actually works.

Since February, 31 have followed her through the program.

Dean's transition began six months before he got housing when he entered an intensive rehabilitation program through the Salvation Army in Portland.

He almost walked out more than once, and few thought he would get clean.

Even for the people living in the camp, Dean has lived a hard, violent life with a past in biker gangs in California.

But Dean did get clean, and about a month and a half before graduation, Art called Sonya Ryland with the Salem Housing Authority and said they needed to get a place ready for him.

With about a week to go, Sonya found a place.

They cleaned and furnished the apartment. Nothing fancy, but more than he had.

When Art picked Dean up in Portland, he told him they were going to Joann's place to hang out.

It was there, standing in the kitchen, that Art passed Dean the keys, and told him it was his.

Art was sure Dean would not have survived going back to the park.

Brothers tied to Wallace park

The Blocker boys came to Salem in the early 1970s searching for their biological father.

Instead, Richard said, they found a homeless "wino" who didn't want them.

So, they fell into homelessness, too. Don was 12 years old and infatuated with his eldest brother Ken, three years his senior. Richard was the middle brother.

All were homeless for a few years, working as day laborers at farms and sleeping at the Union Gospel Mission or Salvation Army whenever they could. Don liked hanging around the park.

In late 1976, Richard got a small apartment in town and married weeks later.

A few months after that, Ken and his buddy were horsing around in the Wil-

lamette River near the Union Street Railroad Bridge. Witnesses said it was dusk when the pair tried to swim across the river.

Ken went under near a concrete piling; his friend called a nearby boater for help.

Ken's body was found 14 miles downstream two weeks later.

He was 20 years old.

After returning from burying his brother in California, Don began his 40 years in Wallace Marine Park.

Richard said Don felt safe there, closer to his brother, though he didn't really understand why.

Every attempt Richard made to help him get indoors was rebuffed. Richard always worried in the wintertime that Don would freeze to death. Don didn't ask for anything from anyone. Friends tell stories of him walking his bike from Eugene to Salem because he had a flat tire and couldn't ride it.

Wallace campers say Don refused to get dry clothes after falling into the pond around Thanksgiving.

Three weeks after Don was found dead in his tent, Richard, his grandson and Carolina Johnson — a West Salem Subway manager who religiously gave Don her employee meals — walk toward the grey truss bridge in Wallace Marine Park with a package of ashes in a green gift bag.

As they approach the river, Richard gestures to an area of strong current and tells Carolina what happened there.

They stop upstream from the bridge and Richard slices open the clear bag of ashes. He hands it to Carolina to pour into the water.

Richard says it touched his heart that she had been looking out for his brother.

Don's ashes sink to the riverbed and slowly drift downstream.

Despite change, campers will remain

Chances are there will always be people living in the woods around Wallace Marine Park.

Even if an eviction comes, trail-heads are bulldozed and the undergrowth is cleared out, advocates say some campers will move deeper into the woods while others may return in a matter of weeks or months.

There are some who live there by choice, and others who will never be selected for housing because of disqualifying felony convictions. Others aren't ready to move inside and have to be cajoled into making a change.

"A lot of the clients will say that: 'You saved my life,' but, no, they save themselves," Ryland with the housing authority said. "We just gave them the tools to be better and to do better. And I remind them of that: 'You're the reason why you're still alive, because you made choices to change.'"

But as successful as Salem's Homeless Rental Assistance Program has been moving people into apartments, it cannot accept any more applications at this time.

So as long as campers remain, Joann, Art and Reggina will continue trying to help those left behind.

Connor Radnovich covers Oregon government and politics for the Statesman Journal. Before joining the newsroom in 2017, he worked as a reporter and photojournalist for news organizations in Phoenix, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

Connor has a master's of mass communication from Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. He can be reached at 503-399-6964 or cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich

Kuebler's FURNITURE & MATTRESSES "Furnishings for Life" **Five and 1/2 hours only!** 12/24/18 11:00 AM-4:30

The Kuebler Family wants to THANK YOU and give you and your family A MERRY CHRISTMAS



40% Off*

Our **WHOLE** inventory!

Christmas Eve is your last chance to get them what they really want!

*Discount is taken off regular prices only

Redding, CA
1894 Churn Creek Rd.
(530) 221-9898

Kuebler's
FURNITURE & MATTRESSES
"Furnishings for Life"

Salem, OR
230 Chemeketa St. NE
(503) 315-1290

Ask About Our Convenient

Hours: Mon - Fri 9:30am to 6pm • Sat 10:00am to 6pm • Sun 11:00am to 5pm • In-Store Financing

Open 11:00 AM-4:30 PM Christmas Eve

