

Top Local News Stories of the Year

By The Chronicle

They are the stories that moved us to tears, provoked us to action or reminded us of both the good and the bad that makes up life in our portion of Southwest Washington.

These are the stories of the year, as chosen by managers of The Chronicle.

We present these stories in no particular order.

Historic Progress on Flooding Fix

Never has there been more meaningful forward progress on the decades-long hunt for a fix for chronic flooding than in 2014.

In November, Gov. Jay Inslee endorsed a Chehalis Work Group plan for taking the edge off devastating flooding and improving fisheries with a collection of proposals that include a dam on the upper Chehalis River. Supporters say the structure would protect against the level of destruction seen in December 2007. Inslee included up to \$30 million for the efforts in his proposed budget released in December.

State Rep. Richard DeBolt, R-Chehalis, is spearheading a plan in the Legislature that would provide \$4 billion for flood and water projects throughout the state.

Taken together, the development means this story could reach new heights in 2015.



Richard DeBolt
R-Chehalis

Aquatic Center, Sports Complex Complete

Two cities. Two projects. Two success stories.

The Lewis County Sports Complex came to fruition after years of debate and many starts and stops within the Public Facilities District. In the end, it was a partnership between Thorbeckes owner Dale Pullin, the city of Centralia and the Centralia School District that resulted in the completion of the 76,500 square-foot asset in the Hub City. In the years ahead, stakeholders hope to see an increase in tournaments that could bring business for hotels and restaurants and tax revenue for the city.

In Chehalis, the Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatic Center opened to long lines of thankful users in August. The state-of-the-art facility includes water slides, a beach-style entry pool and more amenities previously not available in Lewis County. It's hard to believe the project started as an attempt to upgrade some pipes.

In the end, more than \$2 million was raised, largely by the Chehalis Foundation.

Three Police Shootings in Centralia

The use of force by law enforcement officers has been a hot debate on the national stage.

In the Hub City, there were three police-involved shootings in 2014. The first two resulted in the death of the suspects, and were deemed justified by investigators and the Lewis County Prosecutor's Office.

Centralia Police Officer Phil Weismiller fired a total of eight shots at Joseph R. Wharton on Feb. 13 near 1215 Elm St. in Centralia after Wharton had refused to obey repeated orders to drop the knife he was holding.

Officer Ruben Ramirez shot and killed 43-year-old Paul Edmundson on the morning of June 29 after responding to a shoplifting call in the 600 block of South Tower Avenue. Edmundson pulled a handgun from his waistband while wrestling with Ramirez.

On Dec. 16, Centralia Municipal Court officer Steve Howard fired a single round at Phillip Pinotti as the Adna man allegedly attempted to strike the officer with his vehicle. Pinotti was not struck by the shot. He remains in Lewis County Jail as his case progresses.

Wrangling With New Marijuana Laws

All across Lewis County, local governments have wrestled



Julie Spencer led W.F. West to a state basketball championship in Yakima hours after attending her father's funeral in Toledo.



A Centralia Police Department officer puts up crime-scene tape around the Anchor Bank parking lot where a man was killed after an altercation with a Centralia police officer in June.

with exactly how to approach the sale of recreational marijuana, which was made legal via a voter-approved initiative in 2012.

Centralia was sued by a would-be businessman for banning the businesses, and later enacted zoning regulations allowing it. Chehalis was threatened with legal action. Vader resisted the advances of a man looking to build a large marijuana processing facility. Moratoriums barring the activity were enacted by Lewis County, Napavine and other municipalities.

As the year comes to a close, it's a topic that will remain active as entrepreneurs seek to build businesses on formerly illegal foundations.

The Death of Gail Shaw

Few individuals can claim a larger role in the growth of their communities as Gail Shaw, who died June 7 at 96 years old.

Considered a mentor to many, Shaw was among the founders of the Chehalis Industrial Commission in the 1950s and the driving force behind many developmental and charitable efforts in the Mint City.

Even in death, Shaw remains relevant. His estate has donated a \$1.9 million parcel of land to the Chehalis School District in hopes that a new school can be built there.

More Than a Championship for W.F. West

The Chehalis fans were brimming with pride after the Bearcats defeated Mark Morris 48-37 to win the first girls basketball state championship in the school's history.

They may have been fighting back tears at the same time.

After a victory in the semifinals, Julie Spencer traveled from Yakima to Toledo to be at her father James Spencer's funeral. The same day, she hopped aboard a flight back to Yakima to play in the championship game.

Emotionally drained and lacking sleep, Spencer played inspired basketball, scoring 20 points and hauling in seven rebounds on the way to winning the tournament's Most Valuable Player Award.

"I got all of the hardship out

the way and I could focus on doing my best," she told The Chronicle. "I wanted to play for my dad and God. I wanted to help my team."

Big Changes at Centralia College

College campuses are highlighted by change as a new crop of students arrive each fall.

This year, though, there were more than just new students.

Centralia College welcomed new president Robert Frost as James Walton retired.

The college's second bachelor's degree program was launched, providing unprecedented opportunities for those seeking an education in the diesel technology field.

The federal government awarded Centralia College's Pacific Northwest Center of Excellence for Clean Energy, along with two other Centers of Excellence and eight community colleges, nearly \$10 million to give students the skills they need for careers currently in demand. The money will go toward a project called Washington Integrated Sector Employment, otherwise known as WISE, which will be led by Centralia College.

Riverside Fire Authority Loses Chief, Passes Levy

The once intense talks over a potential merger between the Riverside Fire Authority and the Chehalis Fire Department have now devolved to a low rumble.

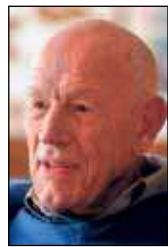
Talks took a big hit when longtime chief Jim Walkowski asked to be laid off as a way of sending a message to voters before a proposed levy.

The fire authority has been smarting from a reduction in tax collections, most notable from TransAlta, where an agreement to move away from coal and the possibility of closure has led to a steep drop in assessed value.

Ultimately, The Chronicle disclosed that Walkowski would be in line for a large payout had he been laid off. He decided to



Robert Frost
Centralia College president



Gail Shaw
died at the age of 96



Jim Walkowski
former Riverside chief



With two rags in his hands to wipe down the waterslides, Chehalis Parks Department maintenance technician Adrian Franks takes the inaugural trip down one of the two recently installed waterslides at the Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatic Center.



Wendy and Tim Bostwick sit silently at a table covered in pictures of their son Cole Bostwick at Tim's parents' house in Winlock. Cole died in a logging accident while working on the same crew as his father. He was one of four logging deaths in 2014.

resign instead, taking a job in the Spokane area.

For their part, voters decided to approve a levy that provided about \$800,000 in funding for the fire authority, which had been facing a shortfall of about the same amount.

Lewis County Tops State in Logging Fatalities

In a dubious distinction none would wish for, Lewis County had more logging-related fatalities than any other county in 2014.

The four logging deaths in Lewis County this year were nearly double the annual state-wide average, according to the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries.

Cole Bostwick, 18, Winlock, was setting chokers off of Pe Ell.

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