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Central Point picnic honors those in recovery and those who help

Vince Tweddell

Oregon Legal Journal Staff Writer

It was a cool summer evening, and a breeze slightly ruffled the leaves of the trees in Central Point's Pfaff Park. A crowd had gathered and sat at numerous picnic tables, while smoke from a sizzling grill filtered through the air. From the outside, the 50 or so people sitting or playing basketball or throwing frisbee were just a regular bunch.



But a closer look and conversation would tell you something different. For instance, at a park bench chatting with friends were Betty and Max Frederick, months away from their 50th wedding anniversary. They've got four sons and grandchildren. They're active in their church. They're retired. But what has defined them for the past 23 years has been the loss of their first grandchild, 15-month-old Heather, at the hands of a drunk driver in 1988.

Betty, with Heather in the car, was driving on Vilas Road in Central Point early that February when a truck hit her vehicle head-on. Betty said she remembers only the truck approaching right before the collision. She spent two weeks in the hospital; her granddaughter died.

Years later, the mission that restored her sense of purpose, and her life, was Heather's Haven, a home she and Max started in 1993 for women suffering from and trying to beat addiction. She said the only way she could have gone on was "to learn to love the very people who killed my granddaughter, to learn to understand and care."

The picnic in July was organized to honor those who deal with addiction every day. Many who were there are recovering, some are facilitating that recovery, and others are doing both. Chris McKennett falls into the last category.

McKennett, who works as a peer support specialist at the VA, the Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics, was honorably discharged from the service in 1979.

For more than two decades, he drank heavily and used drugs. At times, he was able to hold down good jobs—at one point in the 1990s, he was the assistant superintendent of a golf course in the Portland area. But in 2003, his using became too much and he came down to the VA to get clean.

McKennett said in the past at picnics such as this one alcohol would always be a

necessity. But he attempts to show and teach that it's still fun without drugs or alcohol. "It's just changing your lifestyle," he said. "I have enough confidence, enough self-esteem back to not have to have that."

McKennett went back to school, first at Rogue Community College and then at Southern Oregon University, earning a bachelors degree in 2008.

Betty Frederick, who was told she'd never walk after the accident, said she sometimes wonders how she has been able to stay with Heather's Haven for so long. The 7-person home is a negative cash flow. "Pretty much, our retirement fund is depleted," she said, adding that the reason she and Max have stuck with it is "because we see successes."

In the years they've facilitated Heather's Haven, thousands of women have gone through the house, and every so often, a woman will approach her or Max and tell them that, "I have a job, a life, kids."

It's certainly not an easy lifestyle, dealing with all of the headaches and the loss of money. About three years ago, Betty said she was burned out and quit.

During the next six months, she said she tried everything to rent the Fourth Street home in Medford. But she couldn't get it rented. She said during those months she prayed, and in the end, reopened Heather's Haven. "I just figured I was supposed to," she said. "It was always supposed to be something good. Max said he lost a granddaughter because someone was driving drunk. Heather's Haven, he said, is trying to stop the next one before it happens.

"Nobody knows whose granddaughter is on the line now."