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Camas principal on leave after Kobe post

CHS leader apologized for her online 'karma catching up with rapist' comment

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record editor

Camas School District officials placed Camas High School Principal Liza Sejkora on administrative leave Tuesday, following community outcry over Sejkora's controversial comments regarding the death

of basketball superstar Kobe Bryant. CSD Superintendent Jeff Snell wrote to Camas High families Tuesday night and said Sejkora, who has led the high school since 2017, had received threats for her Jan. 26 Facebook post likening Bryant's death to "karma catching up with a rapist."

"Our priority is always the safety of our students and staff," Snell wrote in his letter to families Tuesday night. "In light of threats to (Sejkora) and concern from our community, (Sejkora) has been placed on administrative leave today pending the outcome of our investigation."

Snell said he is taking over leadership responsibilities at Camas High School during Sejkora's

leave. Sejkora made the "karma" comment on her personal Facebook page hours after the 41-year-old Bryant's Jan. 26 death in a helicopter crash that also claimed the lives of Bryant's 13-year-old daughter, Gianna "Gigi" Bryant; the family of former



Liza Sejkora
Camas High School principal

University of Oregon baseball player J.J. Altobelli; Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli, his wife, Keri, and their daughter, Alyssa; helicopter pilot Ara Zobayan; Christina Mauser, a defensive specialist for Gigi Bryant's basketball team and the mother of three young children; and Sar-

ah and Payton Chester, a mother and daughter who had ties to Kobe Bryant's Team Mamba girls basketball team.

Sejkora's "karma" comment alludes to a 2003 sexual assault case in which a 19-year-old woman accused Kobe Bryant of raping her in his Colorado hotel room. Bryant, who was a married father of one at the time, admitted

See Apology, page A6

Former Washougal Mayor Jeff Guard dies

1971 Washougal High grad led the city in the early 2000s

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record editor

Former Washougal mayor and councilman George "Jeff" Guard has died. Guard, 66, who served on the city of Washougal's city council from 1987 to 2001, and as the city's mayor from 2002 to 2006, died early Tuesday morning, according to his family.

See Jeff Guard, page A6



POST-RECORD FILE PHOTO

Former Washougal Mayor Jeff Guard (far left) cuts a ribbon for the grand opening of the Washougal Pedestrian Tunnel in 2010. Guard, who died on Monday, Feb. 3, is pictured with his brother, Sean Guard (second from left), then mayor of Washougal; former Third District Congressman Brian Baird (second from right); and retired Pendleton Woolen Mills Manager Broughton Bishop (right).



WAYNE HAVRELLY/POST-RECORD

Students walk into Washougal High School before the start of classes on Feb. 4. A committee recommended against changing Washougal School District's start times at a Jan. 28 meeting.

Washougal school leaders nix possibility of later start times

Survey shows majority of community members prefer current schedule

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

A committee studying possible changes to school start times in Washougal is unanimous in its recommendation: don't change a thing.

The nine-member committee, made up of parents, teachers and other Washougal School District (WSD) staff members, formed in October 2019 to discuss the possibility of later start times designed to give teens more sleep. The move to later school start times is something that is already being done in neighboring school districts, including the Camas School District.

On Jan. 28, the committee's leaders came to a Washougal school board meeting to recommend that Washougal School District (WSD) Superintendent

Mary Templeton not alter the current schedule.

The committee reached that decision after collecting input, reviewing research and feedback from more than 1,300 survey responses and weighing the pros and cons of changing school start times.

"I feel the recommendation to keep the current start times aligns with the responses to our community survey," said school board member Angela

See School start, page A2

Skate park gives youth 'another place to hang out'

Featuring half-pipe and mini-bowl, new indoor skate park set to open Saturday

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

Washougal resident Rochelle Ramos has noticed a change in her son, Timothy, since he took up skateboarding six months ago. "It's really built up his confidence, and now he's all about skateboarding," she said. "He's like, 'Yeah, I like this.' He's really getting into it. And now my 11-year-old daughter is starting to get into it, so they have a shared inter-

est. (Skateboarding) has made them bond."

Fellow Washougal resident John Henriksen knows all about the benefits of skateboarding — he took up the hobby about 30 years ago and has passed it on to his children.

"I can't do it as much now," he said, "but (I love) the adrenaline rush. My son, Porter, is 14, and he's been skateboarding since he was 4. I've always had a ramp at my house, and he just started coming out with me. He was just natu-

rally good at it."

For the past year-and-a-half, Ramos, a human resources director, and Henriksen, a civil engineer, have worked to bring skateboarding to more people in Camas and Washougal.

Their efforts will be rewarded on Saturday, Feb. 8, at a grand opening event for Ramos' and Henriksen's new nonprofit venture, Lunchmoney Indoor Skate Park, featuring live music, a raffle and free food.

"We were just looking for something for our kids to do in our community," Ramos said of the push

to create the new indoor skatepark. "Their highlight is hanging out in the Safeway parking lot until they get kicked out, and you can only do that so much. There is nothing here for teenagers to do, and my goal was to fulfill that market. We want to provide a safe and positive environment for them to hang out and be active. We always talk about our kids sitting at home playing video games. This gives them another opportunity to do something. Sports are great, but this is another niche they can try out."

See Skate park, page A5



DOUG FLANAGAN/POST-RECORD

Rochelle Ramos (center) and John Henriksen, owners of Lunchmoney Indoor Skate Park, observe the form of Ramos' son, Timothy, on Jan. 23, in Washougal.

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EN GARDE!

Former Israeli national champion teaches fencing in Camas: Sports, Page B1

BRIDGING WASHOUGAL'S YOUTH, LEADERS

Washougal High junior represents WSD at city council meetings: Schools, Page B3



Apology:

From page A1

to having sex with the woman but claimed the act was consensual. Bryant's accuser's identity was leaked and she received hate mail and death threats. After she refused to testify, the case was dropped and Bryant settled with the woman out of court, apologizing to his accuser and family but never admitting to the sexual assault.

In recent years, Bryant seemed to be thriving in his new role as the father of four young girls, author of children's books, coach of his daughter's basketball team and avid supporter of women's athletics.

His death — and the fact that his second-oldest daughter was also killed in the crash — left people in mourning throughout the world.

The news that Gigi Bryant and two other teen girls had been killed in the crash occurred after the Camas principal posted her comment on Facebook.

Sejkora soon deleted her initial post and wrote on her personal page: "I just deleted a post. It was deleted because the comments missed my intent. You are free to judge me for the post just as I am free to judge the person the post was about."

Neither post was public, but members of the Camas community, including parents and students, saw the initial "karma caught up with a rapist" comment after it was shared on social media. A man who wished to remain anonymous sent a screenshot of the post to the Post-Record and said he had spoken to Camas High teachers who felt their principal's comment was highly inappropriate.

Several people voiced their complaints to the Camas School District (CSD). The Post-Record contacted the district and Sejkora on Monday for comment, and CSD Communications Director



A Facebook post made by Camas High School Principal Liza Sejkora hours after news broke that basketball legend Kobe Bryant had been killed in a helicopter crash on Jan. 26.

Doreen McKercher said the district was still trying to gather information.

"We've had a handful of complaints, from parents and at least one former student and a current student. It is something that is going around," McKercher said Monday.

On Monday, after being contacted by the Post-Record and speaking to district leaders, Sejkora sent the following to Camas High staff and families:

"You may be aware that a copy of a social media post I made on my personal Facebook page is circulating digitally in our community. Today, I apologized to my staff, and now I apologize to you," Sejkora wrote. "... After news broke (about) Kobe Bryant's death, I made a comment to my private social media, which was a personal, visceral reaction. I

want to apologize for suggesting that a person's death is deserved. It was inappropriate and tasteless. Further, I apologize for the disruption it caused to our learning environment today."

"In education, we remind students to think before they post online, especially when feelings are inflamed. We also teach our students about context. My emotions and past experiences got the best of me in that moment. We also teach our students that what we share online has permanency," Sejkora continued. "While what I wrote was posted on a private Facebook account to people who are my friends and was quickly removed, I acknowledge that private does not always mean private. I love being principal at Camas High School. We have tremendous students, staff and community. I've learned an important lesson, and I hope that I can earn your trust back."

CSD Superintendent Jeff Snell added that the school district takes its responsibility of leading the community seriously.

"As school district staff we strive to model a high standard for students," Snell said Tuesday. "This situation did not meet that standard. We do appreciate (Sejkora's) acknowledgment and will work to support her in rebuilding trust with the community she serves."

By Tuesday evening, the story had gone viral, with thousands of people speaking out against Sejkora's initial comments and some making seemingly threatening comments toward the principal and Camas High School.

"We are aware of and looking into rumors and threats at Camas High School, which are circulating electronically," Snell said Wednesday. "We have investigated each concern with Camas police, and have not found any credible evidence."

Snell added that there would be "increased police presence on campus" throughout Wednesday and said the district would continue to update families.

Jeff Guard:

From page A1

Guard came from a Washougal family that produced two mayors — his brother, Sean, served as the city's leader from 2010 to 2017 — and graduated from Washougal High School in 1971.

"The sudden loss of Jeff today has shocked all of the family," said Sean Guard, Jeff Guard's youngest brother. "Jeff has been working to get back into the community after a number of injuries in the last few years, which really restricted his activities. The day after Christmas he fell and broke his shoulder, which resulted in him being hospitalized and then spending some time in a care center. He had just gone in (Monday) for surgery."

Jeff Guard ran for mayor of Washougal in 2001 and won the primary election with 53 percent of the vote. On Nov. 6, 2001, he beat his opponent, Charles Crumpacker, by a 70 to 30 percent margin.

In his 2001 voters's pamphlet statement, Guard said he believed the city needed to welcome economic growth while understanding the "serious livability issues" posed by the "physical realities of growth."

"Careful planning for public safety and infrastructure is critical," Guard stated in 2001.

Guard served as the city's mayor for four years. He lost to his opponent, Stacey Sellers, in the November 2005 election.

Rose Jewell, assistant to Washougal City Manager David Scott, worked with Jeff Guard during his tenure as Washougal's mayor.

"He was very passionate about Washougal," Jewell said of Jeff Guard. "He had a strong commitment to serving the community. He loved where he lived. He provided strong and

competent leadership, but he wasn't overbearing. He had a humble and calm demeanor. He was always kind, gentle and very respectful."

Jewell added that Jeff Guard was instrumental in the hiring of the city's first city administrator, which she called "a huge thing for the city."

"He was an advocate and proponent of the downtown revitalization. That was something he cared about. He got the wheels in motion," Jewell said. "He fought for what he felt was best. I'll remember him as a happy guy. He was always laughing. He was easy to be around and easy to talk to."

Sean Guard said his brother "lived and breathed Washougal." Aside from serving on the city council and as mayor, Jeff Guard also served on the Washougal Planning Commission, the city's Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Committee, the Washougal School District Foundation Board of Directors and several other committees.

"He was just so proud of his hometown," Sean Guard added about his brother's Washougal pride. "While he could be opinionated and would always speak his mind, he also treated people with compassion and respect. He loved the teachings of Gandhi and always wanted the world to be at peace."

Sean Guard said his brother had a "huge impact on so many people" and that, within a few hours of the news being shared that Jeff Guard had died, he and his family received an outpouring of comments from people remembering Jeff.

"The content of the comments and the private messages that family members have received show the depth of interaction that Jeff had with people from all walks of life," Sean Guard said.

He added that details of a service to honor Jeff Guard's life are pending at this time.

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