



'We Felt Helpless': Yelm Woman Recounts Home Invasion Robbery

Local Family
Rousted
From Bed,
Held Captive
as Robbers
Ransack House,
Steal Vehicles

BY ERIC ROSANE
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When a group of about five or six individuals barged into a 44-year-old Yelm woman's bedroom in the early morning hours of Friday, June 5 — waking up her and her fiancé — the only thing she could think about was prayer.

"I was praying that God would bring a way that we could get out of the door in my bedroom," said the woman, who asked that her name not be used out of concern for her safety and privacy. "There were so many of them. We felt helpless."

Friday, June 5, will go down as a very traumatic day for the small Yelm family, which lives in the 14200 block of State Route 507.

After putting the woman and her 12-year-old daughter face down on the ground, the group of invaders then tied up her fiancé. They told the family of

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'God Gave Me a Second Chance'

Yelm Man Gets Welcome Home After 75 Days Fighting COVID-19



Paul Dunn / pdunn@yelmonline.com

Yelm resident Mike Conley, 66, spent 75 days in the hospital battling COVID-19 and Friday, June 5, he finally made it home. He chats with friends following an automobile parade Friday night in his honor.



Yelm resident Lynn Sample, 62, helped arrange a parade on Friday night, June 5, to honor her brother-in-law Mike Conley, 66, who spent 75 days in the hospital battling COVID-19 and on Friday finally made it back home.

BY ERIC ROSANE
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"Tough as nails."

Those were just some of the words that friends, family and fellow community members chose to describe 66-year-old Mike Conley after his recent recovery from COVID-19.

On Friday, June 5, Conley received a welcome-home procession as dozens of cars, trucks, motorcycles and police patrol vehicles drove by his residence on Van Trump Street while occupants honked, cheered and smiled.

"I never expected this, and it's amazing," said Conley, an Army veteran, while leaning against his walker and next to his wife,

61-year-old Karen Conley. "I'm already getting better."

The Yelm Police Department, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5580 and the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association were just some of the groups that helped put it together, along with friends, family and Yelm Mayor JW Foster.

Conley is just one of more than 130 residents in Thurston County who have made a recovery from COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Nationwide, more than 108,000 have died from the disease.

"I was very, very scared 'cause I wasn't sure if he was going to

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County Prepares for Phase 3 Application

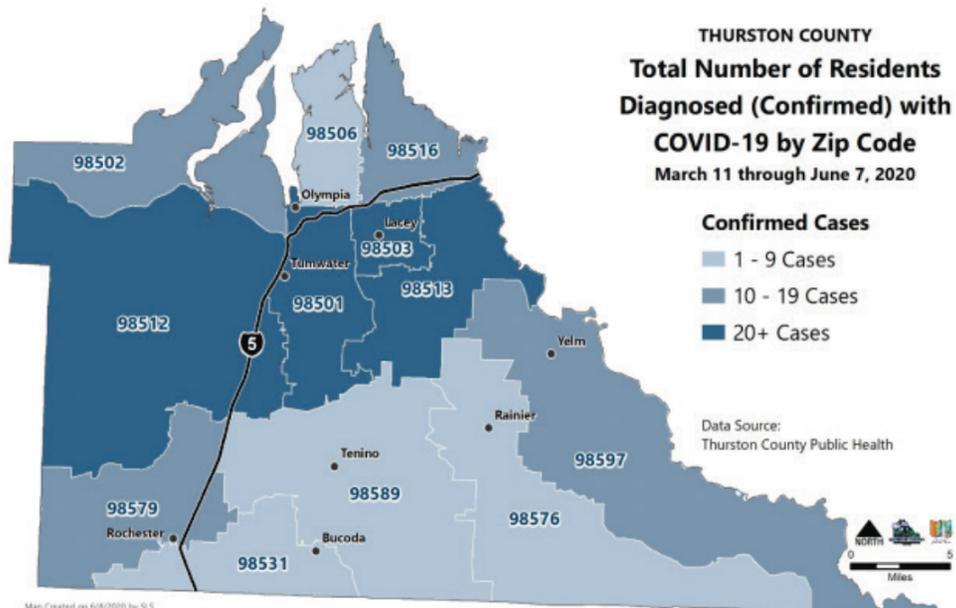
Thurston County
Reports Second
Death From
COVID-19

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Staff with Thurston County Public Health and Social Services are pivoting their attention toward Phase 3 of Gov. Jay Inslee's "Safe Start" plan as outbreak investigations at a pair of care facilities continue.

This comes as a second

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Deeply rooted
in working together.

MOBILE &
ONLINE,
TOO!



HOME

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make it," said Lynn Sample, 62, who was one of the event organizers and is Karen Conley's sister. "It's been emotional, and Mike, to our family, is a miracle."

June 5 was Conley's first day back home after spending 75 days in multiple hospitals fighting the virus. He spent 36 of those days on a ventilator, which severely damaged his muscular system and ability to talk.

Karen Conley — who also contracted the disease and quarantined alone in her home for 40 days without her husband — said Mike was taken by ambulance to Saint Joseph Medical Center in Tacoma in late March. He would later be transferred to Madigan Army Medical Center.

About three weeks ago, Conley was transferred from Madigan to the Good Samaritan Acute Rehabilitation Center to relearn

how to walk and talk. At first, he couldn't even squeeze the call button, but he progressed.

"He has come a long way since that," Karen Conley said, adding that he's lost about 40 percent of his muscle mass.

Sample said the surprising thing was that Mike Conley was on the dance floor of a family wedding just a week before he was admitted into the hospital.

Calling the procession quite humbling, Conley said he's fortunate. He counts himself as "one of the lucky ones."

"I don't know why God gave me a second chance, but I'm hopefully going to use it for good," he said. "It's a very nice feeling to sit on your couch and all, but at the same time it's a little bit of an adjustment. But it's beautiful to be back here with my wife."

During Conley's absence from Yelm, Karen mostly stayed at home and continued to partially keep up with their business, Con-

ley Suites Bed and Breakfast.

Over the last month, contract workers at the Skookumchuck Wind Farm project have been renting out their rooms. Karen Conley said they're thankful for that, because they were set up to close once the virus forced statewide business closures.

While Mike was able to return home, he unfortunately would not be able to say goodbye to one of his housemates. The day before Conley was set to come home, the family's 13-year-old Maltese dog, Levi, died.

Karen Conley said she and Mike would like to thank the community, their family, the Ramtha School of Enlightenment, their family's faith group, and God for getting them through the turbulent time.

As for the future, Mike Conley still has physical therapy sessions to attend and a long road to recovery ahead, but he insists he will dance again.



Paul Dunn / pdunn@yelmonline.com

Yelm resident Mike Conley, 66, spent 75 days in the hospital battling COVID-19, and Friday, June 5, he finally made it home. He and his wife Karen Conley, 61, waved to passers by during a parade Friday night in Mike's honor.

COVID

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person in Thurston County has recently died from complications related to COVID-19, county Public Health and Social Services confirmed Sunday evening, June 7.

The person was a man in his 80s with underlying health conditions who was a resident at Olympics West Retirement Inn in Tumwater, where the county reported the first long-term care facility outbreak.

In a letter on Tuesday, June 9, County Acting Health Officer Dr. Diana Yu said despite a recent increase in the rate of new cases of the virus in the county, residents should not worry about being reverted back to Phase 1.

"Reverting to Phase 1 is unlikely," Yu wrote in her weekly letter to the community. "Right now, we are preparing the information we need to apply to move to Phase 3 and working with the commissioners to develop a time-

line for approvals."

Yu added that a key part of the county being allowed to move to the next phase is its ability to address the surges.

Thurston County's target is to report less than 74 cases in the 14 days prior to is Phase 3 application.

"We do have the capacity. Our public health system can investigate and control transmission of disease in a timely manner. Our hospitals have the capacity to care for sicker patients. Our medical community continues to do testing," she wrote.

The county entered Phase 2 on Wednesday, May 27. The three-week requirement for Thurston County to be in this phase will be up June 17.

The outbreak at Olympics West Retirement is also connected to an adult family living home in Lacey. A staff member who works at both facilities recently tested positive for the virus.

An outbreak is defined as one or more linked cases, according

to the county.

"We want to offer our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends who knew him," Yu said in a prepared statement. "This death reminds us that we must remain diligent in our efforts to protect one another from this virus."

Yu added that the residents in Thurston County must continue social distancing measures, staying home when ill and washing hands regularly as important preventative measures.

As of Tuesday, June 9, at least 30 individuals at the two facilities had reportedly tested positive for COVID-19, according to tallies from Public Health.

As of Tuesday morning's press deadline, 173 people in the county have tested positive for the virus, with 143 of those individuals having reported recoveries and 26 having been hospitalized.

The positive-testing rate currently stands at about 2 percent, with a total 10,166 tests administered, according to the county.

The county is still investigating the recent long-term care facility outbreaks in the two care facilities, and efforts are still underway to test staff and residents. In a letter to the community last week, Yu said that more than 200 individuals at Olympics West were tested for the virus, with more testing expected at the assisted living home.

Monday, June 8, was the first day that all workers statewide would be required to wear a cloth facial mask when working, according to Washington state Labor and Industries as directed by Gov. Jay Inslee. Exceptions to this rule include those working alone, including inside a vehicle or a jobsite, or when a job has no in-person interaction.

Employers are also required to provide facial coverings to employees, unless their exposure dictates a higher level of protection under the Department of Labor and Industries' safety and health rules and guidance.

According to a Public Health

report published Tuesday, the Yelm zip code, 98597, surpassed 10 cases last week.

According to Labor and Industries, face masks play an important role in helping curb the potential to spread COVID-19.

Here are some additional numbers relating the coronavirus situation statewide and nationally:

- Washington state has recorded approximately 24,041 cases, 3,699 hospitalizations and 1,161 total deaths. More than 410,000 tests have been administered to Washingtonians, and the percent of positive cases is at about 5.9 percent. Most cases have been recorded around Snohomish, King and Pierce counties and, in recent weeks, Yakima County.

- Nationwide, positive cases of COVID-19 stand at a total 1,938,823.

There have been approximately 110,375 coronavirus-related deaths, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported as of Monday.

ROBBED

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three to not look at them, simultaneously shining bright flashlights in their eyes.

"They had a light shining at our face. They told us not to look at (them) ... In fact, their first words they said were 'consequences, consequences,'" she recalled.

"They basically advised them that they owed them money and they had some baseball bats and other things with them," Lt. Ray Brady with the Thurston County Sheriff's Office said. "It looks like they were bound and the adult male was struck in the face."

The group of six rummaged through the house, searching for anything valuable they could take, according to recounts from Brady and the victim.

The woman said the thieves led her fiance around the house, making him point out the valuable items such as purses and televisions.

"He was giving them everything," the woman recalled. "Everything they stole and everything they took doesn't mean anything. We're just alive and so grateful to

be with our family right now."

While she and her daughter were uninjured, the woman said her fiance sustained a concussion and fractures to his face.

While the criminals were rummaging around a safe in the family's 2012 black Dodge Challenger, the woman's fiance was brought back to the woman and her daughter by the thieves.

At that point, an opportunity arose, she said.

As the thieves attempted to open the safe, the family of three was able to open the door and run for the neighbor's house.

"We could hear them in the property, we could hear them in the house, as we were running," she recalled.

Once they were away from the home invaders, the family called 911.

Thurston County Sheriff's Office deputies and investigators received the call at about 4:30 a.m., Brady said. By the time law enforcement got to the house, the group was gone and had stolen the family's Challenger, a 2009 white Chrysler Town & Country minivan and a number of valuable items.

Shortly after, Thurston Coun-

ty officers had dispatched a description of the two vehicles, Brady said.

Officers with Yelm Police Department identified one of the vehicles at the Shell gas station near 103rd Avenue heading east and began pursuit. Brady said Yelm officers continued the pursuit across the Nisqually River but lost the vehicle in Roy.

Officers with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department were able to stop the vehicle, identified as the Dodge Challenger, in Spanaway. The department arrested one suspect, 27-year-old Felei Tauave, of Tacoma.

Tauave was booked into Thurston County Jail on Friday on first-degree robbery, unlawful imprisonment, and theft of a motor vehicle charges. He could face additional charges for eluding police, Brady said.

According to Thurston County Jail's roster, Tauave is being held on the following bail amounts: \$50,000 for unlawful imprisonment, \$25,000 for theft of motor vehicle, and \$25,000 for first-degree robbery.

Brady said they believe up to seven accomplices and suspects related to the home invasion could still be at large. As of Tuesday morning, the family's Town & Country minivan, with license plate BME9223, is still missing.

The Thurston County Sheriff's Office is still searching for a white female, two Hispanic males and one black male associated with the home invasion. No age ranges were reported, Brady said, as it's still an active case and law enforcement is working to identify the remaining suspects.

"Home-invasion style robberies are extremely rare in the county and this community. Typically, they're not a random crime. I think sometimes reminding people about that makes people feel more at ease," Brady said, adding that criminals more frequently scout out unoccupied houses.

The woman who spoke to the Nisqually Valley News said these individuals were absolute strangers and added that neither her friends or her family knew any of the people who matched the identification. From what she can

recall, none of them wore masks during the invasion.

Over the last couple days, she said her family has been focusing on spending time together. Worldly possessions can be replaced, she said, and they thank God they still have their lives. The family is also working with law enforcement in hopes of additional arrests being made.

One of the strangest aspects of the robbery, the woman said, was the female robber who looked over her and her daughter while the men in the group were loading items into the vehicle.

Her demeanor was tough and mean, but not like the men's, she recalled. The female robber gave instructions to the men and backed up the woman and her daughter when the men threatened their lives.

"She sat with our daughter the entire time, like really close. My daughter said she was an angel. It was weird. It was strange. Whoever she was, I feel a bit of gratefulness that she sat with us. Even despite the foul banter. It was just strange," she said.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

GARY A. ROWLEY

1954 ~ 2020



Gary loved nothing more than spending time with his friends up on the hill, camping at the beach and listening to rock and roll.

He is survived by his wife, Terri Rowley; brother, Richard; sister, Patty; three bonus children; and several grandchildren.

A celebration of life to be determined sometime in July.

RIP
"Roid-Man"

To view the obituary, please go to yelmonline.com/obituaries.



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