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Auburn loses a community hero

Bobby Vogel was known for his positive attitude.

By HENRY STEWART-WOOD
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Bobby Vogel, Auburn High School's basketball team manager, number one fan and local hero, died Sept. 26.

Vogel, who was 78 at the time of his death, will be



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUBURN HIGH SCHOOL
Portrait of Bobby Vogel for the Auburn High School basketball team.

missed dearly by everyone who knew him, Auburn High School basketball coach Ryan Hansen said.

About 20 years ago, when Hansen became the coach of Auburn's High School's basketball team, Vogel was just their number one fan, Hansen said.

The athletic director at the time told Hansen that Vogel showed up to every game and loved the school, Hansen said. At that point, Hansen decided to hire Vogel as the team manager.

"I invited Bobby to be a part of our program and be our official manager," Hansen said. "So Bobby's been our manager for 19 years, and I was fortunate enough to really get to know Bobby well and hang out with him a lot over the years."

Since Vogel became the manager 19 years ago, he has never missed a game, and only missed around 10 practices, Hansen said. Vogel brought joy to the players and coaches alike,

Hansen said.

"Bobby rarely had a bad day. He was just one of those guys who had a really loving personality and loved people," Hansen said. "He would go out of his way to meet anyone new and make them feel welcomed."

Vogel moved to Auburn when he was a baby, but due to a developmental delay, he was never given the chance to go to school. In 2011, Auburn High gave Vogel an honorary degree in recognition of

the contributions he made over the years.

Vogel's love extended beyond the team or the school. He loved the Auburn community that surrounded him as well, Hansen said.

"He had a heart for our community, he loved Auburn High School, he loved Auburn. He often would say to me, 'I found a good town didn't I?' So he had a lot of pride in our

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Ashes to ashes, humans to soil

Auburn is home to the state's largest human composting company.

By HENRY STEWART-WOOD
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Return Home, Washington's largest "terramation" or human composting company, has been up and running in Auburn since June 2021, but they offer more than just compost.

Return Home also offers grieving family and friends the chance to process their grief in a new way, not only by providing life-giving soil, but by allowing them to be there throughout the process, CEO Micah Truman said.

Traditional processes like burial or cremation happen fast, usually within a few weeks after death. That leaves families scrambling to make arrangements and say their final goodbyes all while processing their grief, Return Home funeral director Katey Houston said.

Terramation at Return Home, on the other hand, takes 60 days before the soil is ready to be used, so people can visit their loved ones at any time throughout the process, Truman said.

The 60 days is closer to a cycle of grief that people go through after the death of a loved one, Truman said. One man stops by



PHOTO BY HENRY STEWART-WOOD/SOUND PUBLISHING

One of Return Home's cells, filled entirely with organic material, demonstrates what the terramation cells look like. Return Home is one of the few terramation companies in the world. They transform people into soil.

Return Home's facility every once in a while to visit with his late wife over a cup of coffee, Truman said.

Return Home prides itself on the quality of care they provide the deceased and their family, Truman

and Houston said.

The process begins when each person is bathed and then dressed in compostable cotton clothing before being placed on top of an organic bed of alfalfa, sawdust and straw in a steel cell, Truman said.

After the person is placed, Return Home covers their body with more organic material, then seal the cell.

After 30 days, the cell is rotated in a giant contraption Return Home had specially engineered and built, Truman said. At that

point the cell is opened, the bones are removed and degraded, then returned to the cell and sealed for another 30 days.

Once those 30 days pass, clean, fertile soil is put into burlap bags stamped with the deceased person's

name and returned to the family to use or spread across a plot of land Return Home owns in Kent.

Return Home aims to be a source of joy and hope that comes to people

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Thrift shop furnishes homes for people exiting homelessness

By HENRY STEWART-WOOD
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Revitalized, a new Auburn-based thrift shop, just opened its doors in the Outlet Collection mall with a mission to help folks who are exiting homelessness.

Revitalized is owned by REVIVE, a local nonprofit church that does several forms of community service, including its "Full House" program, according to the REVIVE website. Full House works with the City of Auburn and furnishes houses and apartments for people and

families who are exiting homelessness.

The money made by the Revitalized thrift shop funds REVIVE's Full House program.

"The proceeds from the store actually go to help furnish first-time homes for families in Auburn exiting homelessness," owner Mars Flannery said.

About three years ago Flannery and other members of REVIVE decided they wanted to help address the homelessness crisis in Auburn and began brainstorming ideas on how they could make that happen, Flannery said.

Then about two years

ago, they furnished their first home for a family exiting homelessness, since then they've been able to furnish 35 homes, Flannery said.

One of the people REVIVE has helped is Gabriella Stott, a transgender woman, who was homeless after she moved to Auburn from Utah around two years ago. Stott said REVIVE welcomed her with open arms and helped her land a job and move into an apartment.

"I moved up from Utah 2 years ago with only a few boxes of stuff and spent time homeless at a hotel and pastor Jessica helped

me with it," Stott said "She helped me locate good work locations to put an application in and I landed a job working in manufacturing soon after I got an apartment."

REVIVE realized in order to help more people like Stott, they would need to figure out a way to raise money to pay for the furniture and other associated costs. They decided on a thrift store, so that way the community could get involved.

"We all know there's a homelessness crisis, but no one knows how to help or how to get involved, but everyone loves thrifting," Flannery said. "So by

donating clothes, by shopping, people can actually help furnish a home."

All of the families that Full House has helped furnish homes for are still in those homes, Flannery said. The work they're doing has a lasting impact on the families they help. Stott said she still uses the furniture they gave her when she first moved into her apartment.

A lot of the furniture Full House uses is donated by other nonprofit organizations or individual community members in Auburn, Flannery said. However, some items such as coffee makers, towels and sheets are bought

new.

Stott said beyond the furniture REVIVE provided, they supported through her transition and helped her get on her feet, which is why Stott works with REVIVE and Full House to help others in situations similar to hers.

"Really it's the support I was given along the way that really made a difference," Stott said. "Anyone can drop a couch off and say enjoy, but they gave me love where I felt none, support where there was adversity, and recognition of my abilities."

Full House stores all the

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Hero

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community," Hansen said.

Hansen said Vogel worked well with Auburn High School's basketball team.

"Bobby could find positivity in any situation, whether it was in his life and the cards he was dealt or with the team," Hansen said. "You know, we'd lose a tough game and he'd be right there after the game to tell the kids 'it's okay' and give them a hug."

The loss of Vogel hit the Auburn High basketball team hard, especially the seniors who have known Vogel since their high school career started, Hansen said.

Vogel had a deep faith and talked about wanting to be with his mom and sister who passed away, so Hansen said he finds solace in thinking Vogel is happy and with his family now.

The community at Auburn High is still



Bobby Vogel (center) with the Auburn High School basketball team.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AUBURN HIGH SCHOOL

processing the loss of Vogel, but they will find a way to honor his legacy at the school, Hansen said.

One of his favorite

memories of Vogel is from summer league when Vogel was in charge of stamping hands as they entered the gym, Hansen said.

Oftentimes the line would get backed up because Vogel had to say hello and chat with everyone in line, Hansen said.

Shop

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furniture in a warehouse and when the city notifies them about a family moving into a house, they work to furnish it based on the family or individual's preferences, Flannery said.

"We hear about things they like and what they want in their home, there was one woman who really wanted a botanical theme so we went through our warehouse and picked out botanical themed things," Flannery said.

In addition to their clothing thrift shop, Revitalized is opening a "Home Edition" store in Outlet Collections mall on Oct. 8. Revitalized Home Edition will sell used home goods like furniture and decor, Flannery said. All of the proceeds from this store will also go to furnishing homes for people exiting

homelessness.

In addition to helping people who are exiting homelessness, donating and shopping at Revitalized is a great way to shop sustainably, Flannery said.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that in 2018, over 9 billion tons of clothing and footwear ended up in landfills in America alone.

"This is a great way for people to get rid of things in their closet that they're not using but also find quality things too," Flannery said. "What I love about our store is it isn't just junky clothing, it's the quality brands you're already searching for."

If you have clothes to get rid of, or need to find a new jacket for fall and you want to help Auburn's homeless community, you can visit Revitalized in the Outlet Collection mall in between Hot Topic and the Gap.

Compost

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during the darkest times in their lives, Truman said.

The environmental aspect of terramation is what made Houston leave her job as a traditional funeral director.

"I had been a traditional funeral director for 15 years and then the laws changed here and I began to question everything I had previously believed about funeral services," Houston said. "I felt like at home I was doing everything I could as an individual to be a better steward of the earth, and then going to work and putting formaldehyde into bodies."

The disconnect between Houston's passion for environmentalism and

what she did at her job grew over the years, Houston said. In addition to the environmental aspect, she didn't like rushing families through their grief in order to fit the traditional funeral schedule.

The carbon footprint of cremating a loved one isn't something people typically think about, but they should. Cremating one body releases around 500 pounds of carbon dioxide into the air. Annually, cremations in the U.S. alone release 360,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

After a body is cremated, the organic material that once made up a body can't be used for anything productive, Truman said.

On the other hand, terramation releases around 50 pounds of

carbon dioxide into the air — only a fifth of cremation, Truman said. In addition to this, after the terramation is done, the soil is high quality and can be used to grow plants and trees.

The only thing added to the process of terramation other than organic matter and a body is air and water, Truman said. One terramation draws enough air to power one-third of a hair dryer, Truman said.

"Environmentally, I think the end product is ultimately what drew me to Return Home," Houston said. "I was tired of telling families 'please don't put these cremated remains on your plants because it will kill them,' to give something back that is essentially life giving is something I've never experienced."

The idea of giving back is what draws people to Return Home as well, Houston said. The idea of being turned into something that can continue to sustain life after a person dies is comforting to a lot of people, Houston said.

Return Home has the capacity to terramate 74 people a month, Truman said.

There are two other terramation facilities in Washington, but Return Home is the largest and it is the only one that allows people to visit their loved one during the process, Houston said.

In a way, terramation isn't a new concept. People have buried the dead for thousands of years, and under the right conditions, after a few months the body will turn to soil.



PHOTO BY HENRY STEWART-WOOD/SOUND PUBLISHING

A sample of the soil Return Home creates. This sample was created using a pig carcass in their Auburn facility.

However, Return Home and other terramation companies are the first to do this in a precise way, Truman said.

"This is the first time that, in a really controlled, careful environment, we're able to transform bodies into soil with

precision," Truman said. "Washington state is the first place on the planet to legalize this."

Since Washington legalized terramation, Oregon and Colorado have followed suit, Truman said.

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