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Carol Olson has the golden touch

Olson looks back at 16 years
of leading Oronoco's Gold Rush

BY BRIAN TODD
Post Bulletin

ORONOCO — After 17 years at the helm of Downtown Oronoco Gold Rush Days, Carol Olson is ready to retire. Well, technically she retired in 2006, leaving her job in publications at Mayo Clinic, but by then she'd already served as event coordinator for Gold Rush one year, and she had plenty left to accomplish. She spend years — decades, really — volunteering for one of the signature events in the region. For Olson, it all started when she and her husband moved to Oronoco in 1986. One day, the entire downtown area was a mass of booths, food vendors and people meandering from one place to another. At first, Olson was

bewildered. Then she was intrigued. "After that first year not knowing what was happening, I got involved," Olson said. "I basically helped in the information booth, but once I started going to the meetings, I started taking over all the advertising." Her job working in print media at Mayo Clinic made her a fit for the advertising job, or so everyone thought. Olson said while the world of trade publications wasn't her area of expertise, she could manage a budget and that was a good start. It was a few years later when Olson took over as volunteer coordinator that she made her first big change.

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Photos by Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Katie Campbell and her daughter, Emma, 11, have breakfast before Emma goes to school on Oct. 6, at their home in Rochester. Campbell was sentenced to five years of supervised release earlier this year and lives with her father.

Finding a place to call home

Housing elusive for many with criminal histories

BY RANDY PETERSEN
Post Bulletin

Katie Campbell knows finding a place to live with her daughter will be a challenge. Rochester's housing market offers enough obstacles for single mothers, but a recent federal conviction tied to the approximately 25 pounds of methamphetamine she was helping move from Arizona to the Twin Cities raises the bar. "Previously, there were no places that would rent to me, because I did have (fifth-degree felonies) on my record," the Rochester native said. "Now, I have conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more on my record, so it's going to be even harder for me to even think about



Katie Campbell holds Tigger, a kitten, while her daughter, Emma, 11, gets ready for school on Oct. 6, at their home in Rochester.

getting a place for me and my child." Campbell's participation in a Twin Cities-based drug trafficking ring landed her five years of supervised release, with the first six months on house arrest,

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Contributed / Downtown Oronoco Gold Rush Days

Carol Olson hoists a statue of a prospector during Downtown Oronoco Gold Rush Days in this photo from Aug. 21, in Oronoco. Olson is stepping down this year as event coordinator for the antique sale and city celebration.

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Glidden is a knight in shining armor Hobby educates community about Renaissance era

BY EMILY CUTTS
Post Bulletin

As a 62-year-old knight, Terry Glidden has far outlived his 14th-century contemporaries, and he has no plans to give up his knighthood anytime soon. Glidden is part of the Society of Creative Anachronism, an organization dedicated to researching and re-creating pre-17th-century crafts and skills. It's something he's spent more than 30 years doing after first seeing it on a morning national news program. Get him talking about it, and you may leave with a new hobby yourself — just ask the man who recently came to

ASKED & ANSWERED

repair his fence. Glidden showed the man his 12 1/2-pound helmet, and in doing so, recruited a new fighter. Glidden's persona, "Theodward l'Archie," is the son of a rich merchant who bought a barony and was able to afford armor and started fighting during the 100 Years War. Glidden said he chose the 14th century because so much happened so fast, including the Black Plague — twice.

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Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Terry Glidden, also known as Theodward l'Archie, on Monday at his home in Rochester. Glidden is part of the local chapter of the Society for Creative Anachronism, an organization dedicated to researching and recreating pre-17 century crafts and skills.

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BRIEFS

11 BULLETS, 2 SHOOTERS, NO ONE HURT IN SE ROCHESTER SHOOTING

A pair of gunmen pulled up to an apartment building in the 800 block of 16th Avenue Southeast on Friday night, shooting up the building and driving away. Rochester police responded to a call at 8:44 p.m. Friday concerning a shooting at the address, said Capt. Casey Moilanen. According to reports from the incident, two men drove up to the west side of the apartment building in a dark vehicle similar to a Crown Victoria, got out of the car and fired, between the two of them, 11 shots at the building before getting back in the car and driving away.

Several bullets hit the outside of the building, and bullets entered at least three apartments, Moilanen said. There were people in several of the apartment units. Moilanen said police had been called out to the apartment building earlier in the evening to handle a report of a physical fight between residents of two different apartments. The fight had de-escalated to being verbal in nature by the time officers arrived, and no one was arrested from that incident. Moilanen said bullet casings were collected from the scene. The gunmen were described as black males wearing hoodies. Several individuals were detained for questioning,

but no arrests have been made. Police continue to investigate. **WOMAN ACCUSED OF STEALING FROM DOVER-EYOTA SOFTBALL FUND** DOVER — After an investigation that began in late September, the Olmsted County Sheriff’s Office is recommending charges be filed concerning the theft of nearly \$18,000 from a bank account that funds a girls softball organization. On Sept. 25, deputies were called to a home in the 400 block of Eyota Street in Dover to talk to members of the board of the Dover Eyota Storm Softball Association, a volunteer coached fast pitch girls softball organization for girls 16 and younger. Members of the board reported

the suspicion that one of the board members who had access to the account had been taking money for personal use by transferring the funds to their own bank account, said Capt. James Schueller of the sheriff’s office. Schueller said the board members had been alerted to the suspicious account activity by personnel at Bremer Bank who noticed some irregularities with the account. Initially, they believed \$15,065 had been taken from the account and placed in one of the board member’s personal accounts. Detectives followed up by interviewing the suspect, who initially claimed the have simply transferred the funds in error, Schueller said. When pressed further,

the suspect asked if they could repay the missing funds. Eventually, Schueller said, detectives discovered bank transfers totaling \$17,986 dating back to 2015. Jennifer Stephans, 47, of Eyota, faces pending charges of felony theft, Schueller said. **ROBBERY ATTEMPT ENDS WITH VICTIM DRIVING AWAY** A Rochester man sitting in his car escaped from an armed robber early Friday morning. The victim, a 36-year-old man, was sitting in his car in a parking lot about 1:45 a.m. in the 1400 block of Fourth Avenue Southeast with the door slightly ajar when a man approached on the driver’s side and

began asking questions, according to a statement from Rochester Police Capt. Casey Moilanen. At one point, the victim admitted to the stranger that he had his wallet on him, and the suspect then brandished a handgun and demanded that the man turn over his wallet. The suspect threatened to shoot the man if he did not comply. Instead, Moilanen said, the victim shut the door and drove away, calling 911 from a safe distance. The victim was not harmed and did not lose any property during the incident. He described the suspect as a Black man between 20 and 30 years old, and taller than 5 feet, 5 inches.

Post Bulletin staff reports

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which she’s serving at her father’s Rochester home. Campbell chose the location to be closer to her daughter, since her father has custody of his 11-year-old granddaughter. With her court-ordered restrictions expected to end in December, Campbell knows her current living situation isn’t a permanent solution, but the outcome of the 2020 arrest has served as a wake-up call. “I didn’t realize how much my dad was doing for me until recently,” she said. She’s landed a full-time job at the meat counter of a local grocery store, racked up more than 18 months without drug use and is working to officially regain custody of her daughter. She said a place of her own – for the first time in her 34 years – would be a next step.

“I finally found my place and where I belong and what I should be doing,” she said of the job. “Actually being an adult for the first time sucks, but it’s fun, I guess.” She’s already started looking at apartment options and hopes the ability to accrue extra funds to pay months in advance will help her chances, but she still knows options will be slim with her record. “There are no big-time apartment complexes that do massive background checks that are going to take a risk on me,” she said, noting she’s hoping to find a landlord willing to let her plead her case.

SHIFTING CONCERNS Alex Bunger, Dodge-Fillmore-Olmsted County Community Corrections supervisor, said the housing challenges Campbell faces are common. He said when he started in the department two decades ago, finding employment was the greatest challenge following a felony conviction, but today’s job market makes work easier to find than housing. “In the mid-2000s, everyone had a place to stay with no jobs,” he said. “Now it is reversed. People can find employment with no place to land.” As a result, he can’t put a number on how many people on probation in Olmsted County are homeless. “I feel that the numbers have climbed slightly,” he said, noting that clients who are couch hopping or staying with family members don’t always report being homeless. He said the county’s work with programs



Traci Westcott / Post Bulletin

Dondi McIntosh on Sept. 23, outside of Next Chapter Ministries in Rochester.

like Damascus Way has helped. Damascus Way, which provides housing for up to 50 men in Olmsted County, has beds in a transitional housing facility on the county’s east Rochester campus, as well as apartments in southeast Rochester. Terre Webster, executive director of the program, said the goal is to provide housing stability while helping clients overcome their criminal histories. Working with the county since 2017 to help some of the most difficult-to-house people coming out of the prison system, he said men ideally work with the program for at least a year before seeking other housing options, but flexibility exists. “There’s no real restriction or stipulation,” he said. “It could be emergency housing, it could be short term and we have a couple guys ... probably will end up dying here, because where else will they go?” Benjamin Alverson, a Rochester native, moved into the Damascus Way transitional facility earlier this year after more than two decades in prison and under civil commitment in the Minnesota Sex Offender Program. The 46-year-old said he sees the move into provisional discharge as a step toward building a new future. With a full-time job, the \$500 he pays Damascus Way each month leaves an upside until he has the ability to consider other housing options. “I’m developing a network and developing a plan as I go forward,” he said, adding that it’s too early in his release to start searching for new housing, but he’s hoping for permission by next summer. Next Chapter Ministries, another Rochester program offering housing and services to people released from prison, also provides the opportunity to find a new path and potentially save funds for the transition. The first month of rent is free, followed by \$250 for the second month and \$450 for each additional month. Dondi McIntosh,

who served 15 years in prison for a drug-related felony, said the program provides him an opportunity to change direction. “There should be more places like this,” he said. Next Chapter Executive Director Courtney Dugstad said the organization can help sway some landlords, but the success rate for clients finding secure housing following Next Chapter’s Discipleship Program remains very low. McIntosh, who is working as a cook in a downtown hotel, said he remains hopeful the program will help him overcome the two convictions in his past. “All I want is the opportunity to be like any other citizen,” the 48-year-old said, adding his prison experience motivated him to change. “I’m done. I’m not going to allow myself to put myself into a circumstance that’s going to put me back,” he added. “I wouldn’t wish incarceration on my worst enemy.” With less than a year out of prison, he’s not ready to move out of the Next Chapter house, but he has been testing the waters. “I’ve called around, just to see what Rochester has to offer, and it’s a lot of no’s,” he said.

OVERCOMING RISKS Michelle Hill, owner of Matik Management and president of Rochester Multi-Housing Association, said landlords have been increasingly reluctant to rent to people with recent felony convictions, sometimes requiring several years before being willing to overlook past charges. “When the market is like this, it’s difficult to get past that, because we can rent to somebody who is presumably a lower risk,” she said, adding that violent charges and drug manufacturing can keep people off rent eligibility lists for a lifetime. “Violent crimes are difficult to get past, especially if it’s going to be in multi-family housing, because you need to be concerned about the other tenants in the building,” she said. Hill and others

said risks exist with most new tenants, but criminal histories tend to highlight concerns for many property owners. Matik has been working with the county and other agencies in efforts to overcome the reluctance in renting to people with other crimes in their past. The company participates in “master leasing” programs, which involve the county or another agency guaranteeing the rent is covered and the tenant paying a percentage of his or her income for the apartment. The agency signs the lease, and the client signs an agreement to follow the rules. If a violation is found, the property owner can reach out to the county or outside agency, which is expected to work directly with the tenant. “As long as the program is willing to be supportive, it works,” Hill said. Dave Dunn, Olmsted County’s housing director, said the goal is to reduce risks for landlords with the hope that they will discover that renting to someone with a felony conviction can work. In 2018, Dodge-Fillmore-Olmsted Community Corrections also started a Justice Reinvestment Fund, providing up to \$800 to help qualified clients secure a place to live. The fund has approximately \$15,000 available each year; so far \$9,000 has been used this year. The one-time funding can help pay a security deposit or cover an expense that could prevent a move. Community Corrections program manager Angie Roche said the limited funds are tapped when it could help a client maintain sobriety, change patterns and remain headed in the right direction. “We ask these people to do so much to change behaviors, but if they don’t have the housing ... that’s insanity,” she said.

GENDER DIFFERENCES While more programs are emerging, Alexandria Anderson said it’s not enough for her and her 6-month-old daughter. Anderson, a 30-year-old La Crescent native who served nearly two years in prison in Wisconsin for possession of meth, said she struggled with her addiction when she was released. Unable to legally return to her home state due to probation restrictions, she couldn’t find stable housing or a treatment program, eventually becoming pregnant while still using narcotics. “As I was trying to be successful, there was just no opportunity for me,” she said. When she was able to

return to Minnesota, she landed in an outpatient program that she credits with helping turn her life around, but housing remains a challenge. Today, she lives in an apartment rented by a family friend, but she knows she’d never qualify for her own lease in the complex, so she risks being expelled if discovered. With the current lease set to expire in March, she’s considering her options, which are limited by her \$13-an-hour salary as a cashier. She said part of the problem is the lack of programs like Damascus Way and Next Chapter Ministries for women. “There are so many things offered to men, but there isn’t anything offered to women, but they expect us to get out and know how to live normally when we haven’t lived normally, especially in my case, for 10 to 15 years,” she said. Dugstad said Next Chapter has offered housing for women in the past, but discovered it can delay opportunities for single mothers to reconnect with their children, since state requirements often set custody deadlines for establishing permanent housing. As a result, Next Chapter operates a non-residential program for women, which includes efforts to help participants find stable housing. Additionally, one of the program’s five houses near downtown Rochester provides a home for a family after the mother leaves prison. Another Rochester program, Join Our Journey, also provides recovery housing for women, as well as men, with one location dedicated to single mothers. Founder Tiffany Hunsley said she sees the work as crucial with nearly 90 percent of her clients having a criminal conviction in their background. “It’s much more complex with the women, because there’s a lot of domestic violence, drama and emotional healing that has to happen,” she said. Probation officer Karla Severson said her co-workers, as well as local housing advocates, frequently have lists of landlords and programs willing to work with people who have criminal histories, but the numbers remain limited. “We need more landlords that will be able to give these people a chance,” she said.

HOMEOWNERSHIP CONSIDERED At the same time, some people struggling to find a willing landlord are looking beyond landlords “I want to buy my own house in about a year if full discharge goes through,” Alverson said, noting his conviction on a sex-based crime will add barriers to finding a rental. Campbell and Anderson also said they’ve toyed with the idea of buying a house, rather than renting, but both said they’d need help with securing a mortgage. “When you are struggling with addiction, it’s not like you are working on your credit,” Campbell said. Severson, who was once Campbell’s probation officer and currently works with Anderson, said she likes hearing when clients are starting to think about their credit. “I see a correlation between them worrying about their former finances,” she said. “I know they are serious about their sobriety then.” Next Chapter and Damascus Way are working on programs to get more of their clients looking at their credit and potential homeownership. Dugstad said Next Chapter’s first group of residents will move into the organization’s new Transformation Home next month, starting a program designed to create pathways to homeownership. Webster said Damascus Way is working with creating a partnership with Think Mutual on a financial literacy program, and a grant from Minnesota Housing will help guide some clients to homeownership. “We would love to create a first-time homebuyers program similar to the one that Rochester Area Foundation has created with First Homes,” he said. Dugstad and Webster noted such programs could change the trajectory for their clients. Dugstad said clients that leave programs without stable housing too often fall into bad habits or are influenced by people around them. She said if they can find secure housing, away from the few larger apartment complexes that might turn a blind eye to past convictions and current criminal activity, they have a brighter future. “How could we ever expect behavior change, if we have a heart change, but we don’t offer an environment conducive to that?” she said. “It’s like growing a plant in a pot, and when you are ready to replant in the ground you just throw it on concrete and hope something happens. It’s impossible.”

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