

# Observer-Reporter

\$2

OUR 215TH YEAR, WASHINGTON, PA

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## 'LIFE CHANGER'



Brandon Rumbaugh and his service dog, Hatfield, a 4-year-old yellow English Labrador retriever, are inseparable. COURTESY OF BRANDON RUMBAUGH

## Rescue 22 provides service dogs for vets

By **KAREN MANSFIELD**  
Staff writer  
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Like many people, Brandon Rumbaugh has a close bond with his dog, Hatfield. But for Rumbaugh, the yellow English Labrador retriever is more than a companion.

Hatfield is a service dog, and he provides independence and emotional support for Rumbaugh.

The U.S. Marine Corps veteran lost his legs in Afghanistan in November 2010, when he stepped on an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan while running to rescue another Marine who had stepped on an IED.

Rumbaugh, 34, a Purple Heart recipient, was paired with Hatfield in 2021 through Rescue 22 Foundation, a veteran-operated nonprofit that provides free service dogs to veterans.

The 95-pound retriever aids Rumbaugh, a Uniontown native who lives in Pittsburgh, both physically and emotionally.

"He's the most amazing dog I've ever known," said Rumbaugh. "People might think service dogs are just

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Debra Swift, founder of Swift Audiology in Washington, presents U.S. Marine Corps veteran Brandon Rumbaugh and his service dog, Hatfield, with a check for \$5,000 for Rescue 22 Foundation. The nonprofit matches veterans with service dogs. Since 2021, Swift has donated a portion of each hearing aid sold to raise funds and awareness for Rescue 22.



A newly installed stop sign at Berry Road's intersection with the Strabane Square shopping center entrance near Kohl's. KAREN MANSFIELD/OBSERVER-REPORTER

## Taking a step toward safety

### Stop signs installed at Berry Road intersections

By **JON ANDREASSI**  
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Motorists, take heed: Two new stop signs have been erected along Berry Road in South Strabane at the rear entrance to two popular shopping centers.

The township's public works department installed the signs Monday morning, and turned Berry Road's intersections with Old Mill Boulevard and the Strabane Square entrance into three-way stops.

"Generally, we're just hoping that it slows people down a little bit," said Jordan Cramer, chief of South Strabane Fire and Emergency Services and interim township manager.

The township's board of supervisors decided to add the stop signs after rejecting a recommendation from the planning commission in May that would have closed Berry Road near the Old Mill Boulevard intersection. In that scenario, only drivers traveling Berry from Locust Avenue would have

**"BERRY ROAD IS ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS TOWNSHIP ROADS. THIS IS KIND OF STEP ONE IN ATTEMPTING TO MAKE IT SAFER. IT WAS ALSO THE MOST FEASIBLE."**  
— **JORDAN CRAMER, INTERIM MANAGER OF SOUTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP**

had access to Old Mill and Strabane Square shopping centers.

Township officials hope the stop signs will make Berry a safer roadway. According to Cramer, many accidents in the past year have led to multiple people being hospitalized.

"Berry Road is one of the most dangerous township roads," Cramer said. "This is kind of step one in attempting to make it safer. It was also the most feasible."

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## Treasurer accused of stealing \$170K from South Fayette youth sports groups

By **MIKE JONES**  
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The treasurer for two youth sports associations in South Fayette is accused of stealing more than \$170,000 from the organizations over a two-year period.

Lisa Michell Howrylchak was charged last week with more than a dozen felony forgery counts and numerous other charges in connection with her alleged theft of money from the two associations and manipulation of financial records.

According to court documents, Howrylchak is

accused of stealing \$81,828 from South Fayette Youth Lacrosse Association and another \$88,361 from the South Fayette Baseball and Softball Association.

Detectives with the Allegheny County district attorney's office were alerted to the situation in April when

the South Fayette Youth Lacrosse Association's leadership contacted township police after noticing issues with the treasurer's work in recent months. Some of the problems with Howrylchak, who began serving as treasurer in May 2021, was that she no longer was writ-

ing checks on a timely basis or providing reports to the board at meetings.

When the board's vice president began reviewing financial reports, she noticed a donation from her husband's social club was not included, prompting her to contact Howrylchak about

the contribution not appearing in the ledger, although the treasurer gave conflicting statements about the situation, according to court documents.

The vice president then began looking through the

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An avid weightlifter, Brandon Rumbaugh, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who was injured in Afghanistan in 2010, works out at a gym while his service dog and faithful companion, Hatfield, stays close by.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRANDON RUMBAUGH

## Service

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for physical things, but they're for emotional support, too. He's 50/50 for me, for emotional support and service. Before I had him, I was always by myself, but he's like having a person around. He's the best."

Each veteran is paired with a dog who learns that person's needs and accommodates their limitations –

For example, when Rumbaugh falls, he commands Hatfield to "brace," and the 95-pound retriever stiffens his back so Rumbaugh can pull himself upright.

But it's Hatfield's ability to help Rumbaugh cope with the struggles of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – and the severe depression and anxiety that accompany it – that has made an impact.

"He's saved my life," said Rumbaugh. "I have to take care of him, I have to keep in a routine. In the Marine Corps, that's ingrained in you, take care of your people," said Rumbaugh. "He gives me purpose, and at the same time he realizes I need some help, too."

According to Rescue 22, an estimated 22 veterans die by suicide each day as a result of PTSD and the significant challenges associated with it.

It costs Rescue 22 between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to train a service dog and integrate it into the home. Recipients are responsible for veterinary care and food costs, but Rescue 22 will help if need arises.

The Veterans Affairs department does not cover the cost of service dogs.

Rescue 22 relies on donations. Among the business-



Brandon Rumbaugh's service dog, Hatfield, enjoys snuggle time with Rumbaugh's son, Gunner, top, and daughter, Remi.

es who have supported the nonprofit is Swift Audiology, which recently made a \$5,000 donation that was accepted by Rumbaugh and Hatfield at the company's Washington location.

Since 2021, Swift Audiology has donated more than \$25,000 to Rescue 22, enabling the organization to place three dogs with veterans.

Angela Connor, co-founder and CFO for Rescue 22, is grateful for the support of Swift and other donors.

"That's a huge impact for one small business," said Connor. "Their generosity and dedication have made a significant difference in the lives of our local heroes, allowing them to live fulfilling lives post-service. Together,

we are transforming lives and making a lasting impact on our community."

Since its start in 2018, Rescue 22 has placed 42 assistance dogs nationwide, including four in Southwestern Pennsylvania. One of the most recent pairings was Josh Schreckengost of McDonald and his companion, Riot, a 6-year-old golden retriever.

There are nine veterans on the waiting list.

Connor said 36% of veterans who have received a service dog have reduced their use of medications by more than half, and 78% of veterans no longer take sleep aid medication.

"It's a life changer. They are able to use less phar-

maceuticals and re-engage with things they previously enjoyed. The dollar figure in the beginning sounds like a lot, but compared to the money for pharmaceuticals and other treatment, the dog is really a pretty efficient mechanism of care for the veteran and a companion that doesn't judge them," said Connor.

After Rumbaugh, a mortar gunner and squad leader, was injured – he lost his left leg below the knee and his right leg at the hip – he spent two years at Walter Reed Medical Center, where he underwent multiple surgeries and therapy, and learned to walk with prosthetics. He struggled to handle the loss of his limbs.

But Rumbaugh has seized the opportunity to make the most of his life, with help from Hatfield.

The father of two – daughter Remi, 4, and son Gunner, 2 – is a motivational speaker who travels around the country and internationally talking about overcoming obstacles and challenges, and advocating for veterans issues.

He recently returned from Dallas, Texas, where he completed a photo shoot for a major retailer's adaptive clothing line. He also is an avid weightlifter.

And he volunteers with Rescue 22.

"Having Hatfield really did save my life. I think about that how we're keeping people alive, and there's nothing more important than that," said Rumbaugh. "If I can go out there and talk about how Hatfield and Rescue 22 has affected my life in a positive way, maybe it will open up people's eyes, and they'll donate. My life is good. I've got Hatfield, I've got my kids. I'm good."

## Stealing

Continued from Page A1

financial records, which she noticed had been drained from nearly \$40,000 in recent years to just \$8,000. Further review indicated that the association's account with PNC Bank had been closed in August 2022 without the board's knowledge, but Howrylchak had secretly opened a personal account with another bank in July 2021, where she made deposits with money intended for the association, investigators said.

A review of two years' worth of financial records showed that Howrylchak had been "using the account for her own personal benefit," which included ATM withdrawals and the use of a debit card that had not been issued by the board, according to court documents. A \$13,000 wire transfer had gone to a mortgage company, while internet banking payments went to a local car dealership and a paintball game complex. Meanwhile, payments that the association should have made to a local sports complex were delinquent and other checks were issued but never cashed, investigators said.

An audit of the financial records showed a laundry list of secret spending, along with significant deviations from what Howrylchak was presenting to the board in her treasurer's report and what was actually in the association's bank account, according to court documents.

In May, investigators spoke to the South Fayette Athletic Association, which is the umbrella organization for the township's youth sports groups, and officials there suggested the detectives meet with South Fayette Baseball and Softball Association leadership.

Howrylchak began working as treasurer for the baseball and softball association in November 2021 and was tasked with issuing checks, providing financial statements to the board, completing tax records and overseeing concession stand sales. She had an approved signature card for the organization's bank account as treasurer, but the acting president at the time did not, as would be required for the two-person check signing protocol, according to court documents.

Officials with that youth sports association expected to have more than \$100,000 in their account, but financial records showed Howrylchak had drained it by making 77 transactions totaling \$83,250, police said.

Howrylchak allegedly told detectives during a July 18 interview that she began using the baseball and softball association's account for her personal use in spring 2022, and then things began to "snowball" from there. Police said she admitted to doctoring the bank

HOWRYLCHAK, 50, OF SOUTH FAYETTE, IS CHARGED WITH MULTIPLE COUNTS OF FORGERY, THEFT BY UNLAWFUL TAKING, THEFT BY DECEPTION, RECEIVING STOLEN PROPERTY, ACCESS DEVICE FRAUD, UNLAWFUL USE OF A COMPUTER, TAMPERING WITH RECORDS AND MISAPPLICATION OF ENTRUSTED PROPERTY.

statements to conceal the theft, and estimated she took about \$87,000 from that association. Investigators wrote in court documents that Howrylchak told them that she took money "out of desperation, and she is sick about it."

Shortly after Howrylchak was charged on July 25, the South Fayette Baseball and Softball Association issued a statement on its Facebook page that the organization was aiding authorities in the investigation and trying to recoup money lost from its account.

"During the investigation, the DA's Office determined that Lisa provided falsified bank statements and other financial records to the Board to conceal steps she took to enrich herself with association monies," the association's statement read. "Realizing the severity of the situation, the Board immediately removed Lisa from her position and took the necessary steps to secure all remaining SFBSA funds."

Howrylchak was removed as treasurer from the lacrosse organization in April, while it is believed she was dismissed from her role with the baseball and softball association in May.

"Subsequently, the Board instituted numerous security measures to prevent future occurrences," the baseball and softball association wrote in its Facebook post. "Additionally, the Board is currently evaluating all options available to recoup the funds that were misappropriated."

In all, investigators allege Howrylchak took \$170,189 from the two associations.

Her defense attorney, Justin Ketchel, did not respond to a phone message seeking comment.

Howrylchak, 50, of South Fayette, is charged with multiple counts of forgery, theft by unlawful taking, theft by deception, receiving stolen property, access device fraud, unlawful use of a computer, tampering with records and misapplication of entrusted property. She is free on \$75,000 unsecured bond while awaiting her preliminary hearing before District Judge Maureen McGraw-Desmet at 2:30 p.m. Sept. 11.

## Lotteries

### MONDAY'S RESULTS PENNSYLVANIA

Pick 2 (day).....	8-7
Pick 2 (night).....	3-5
Pick 3 (day).....	8-6-7
Pick 3 (night).....	0-7-6
Pick 4 (day).....	9-8-9-6
Pick 4 (night).....	9-8-0-8
Pick 5 (day).....	9-7-8-2-1
Pick 5 (night).....	5-8-4-6-4
Treasure Hunt.....	9-10-11-21-27
Cash Five.....	2-5-22-33-36
Match Six.....	19-20-28-30-35-47
Cash4Life.....	9-14-22-24-29 CB:3
Powerball.....	LATE

<b>OHIO</b>	
Pick 3 (day).....	7-7-7
Pick 3 (night).....	5-3-8
Pick 4 (day).....	7-5-3-9
Pick 4 (night).....	6-1-6-0
Pick 5 (day).....	7-8-7-0-1
Pick 5 (night).....	8-9-5-7-7
Kicker.....	6-4-9-2-9-2
Rolling Cash Five.....	5-14-21-29-47
Classic Lotto.....	6-18-21-38-44-47
<b>WEST VIRGINIA</b>	
Daily 3.....	9-8-0
Daily 4.....	9-2-1-0
Cash 25.....	1-2-6-8-10-22

Numbers are unofficial; check with lottery agencies.



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## Stop

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Safety on Berry Road has been a focus for supervisors this year as a pair of large developments are planned for the area: Menards home improvement store in the Old Mill shopping center and a new Freedom Transit facility at

the former site of Tower Golf.

Going forward, Cramer said they are going to see how the stop signs affect traffic on Berry Road, and that supervisors hope to have an engineer complete a study for other potential changes.

"I think we're going to try to evaluate what happens in the coming months," Cramer said.

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