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ALERT FEATURED TOP STORY BREAKING

Corvallis community leader dies in Highway 20 crash

Maddie Pfeifer

Dec 19, 2022

A longtime Corvallis community leader has died in a car crash on Highway 20. Andrea Thornberry, 47, died in a two-vehicle crash near downtown Corvallis on Sunday night, Dec. 18, a family member confirmed to Mid-Valley Media.

At around 4:30 p.m. deputies responded to the crash, west of Circle Boulevard, according to a Benton County Sheriff's Office news release.

Deputies discovered Thornberry was driving a Honda CRV eastbound when a 24-year-old man driving a Volkswagen Touareg that was traveling in the opposite direction left the lane of travel at the curve of the road and hit the Honda head-on.

Thornberry was pronounced deceased at the scene, and medics transported the other driver to Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center for minor injuries, the news release said. The highway was closed for around four hours.

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At this time, it's unknown whether or not alcohol or drugs were factors in the crash, according to the Benton County Sheriff's Office.

The Oregon Department of Transportation, Corvallis Police Department and Corvallis Fire Department assisted at the scene.

The investigation is ongoing and anyone with additional information is asked to contact the agency at

BentonCoSheriff@co.benton.or.us

or 541-753-8477.

Benton County deputies have responded to 13 fatal crashes this year — which is more than the county has

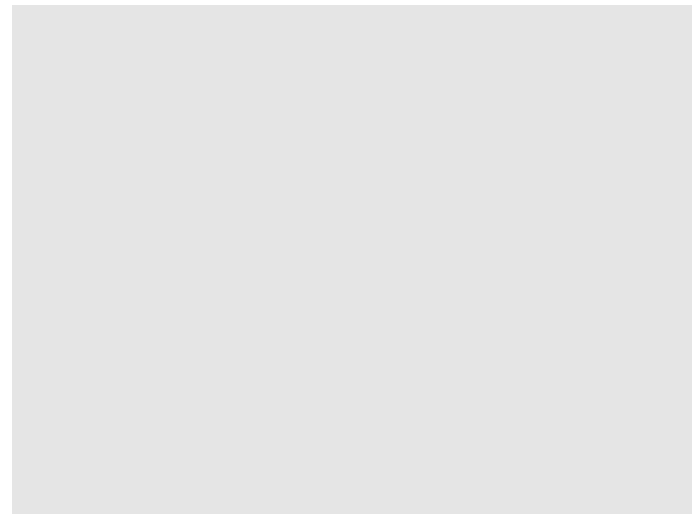
seen in any one year in more than 20 years, the sheriff's office said in the news release. Distracted driving, impaired driving and more vehicles on the roads are believed to be main factors in the increase, according to BCSO.

A nonprofit proponent

Thornberry's death is leaving a giant hole in the Corvallis community, those close to her said.

Thornberry served in a variety of community positions in Corvallis since moving to the city in 2002. She was **executive director** of Heartland Humane Society for 12 years, leaving the nonprofit in 2019.

"Heartland benefited greatly from Andrea's skill and nonprofit knowledge and community involvement," the organization said in a statement to Mid-Valley Media. "Andrea believed in her staff and invested in and supported us to develop our skills and be better leaders ourselves. She knew the value of people and relationships and imparted that to those of us who tended to focus only on the animals."



Andrea Thornberry, shown here in a file photo from 2016, died in a two-vehicle car crash on Highway 20 Sunday, Dec. 18. Thornberry was known for her contributions to multiple nonprofits in Corvallis.

Mid-Valley Media (File 2016)

Thornberry was also the secretary for the Rotary Club of Greater Corvallis and was involved with other local nonprofits over the years. She was named the 2015 Celebrate Corvallis Junior First Citizen for her contributions to the community.

Oregon state Sen. Sara Gelser Blouin, who represents a large portion of Linn and Benton counties, was a longtime friend of Thornberry.

“She’s been a real backbone of the nonprofit community in Corvallis,” Gelser Blouin said. “There’s such a genuine nature in the way she engaged with and lifted others up.”

Gelser Blouin said Thornberry not only put in the work but also created and maintained relationships with community members.

She always brought fun and a “sparkle,” Gelser Blouin said. She added that she also admired Thornberry as a mother. Thornberry leaves behind her husband Matt and teenage son Connor, but also her own lasting impact.

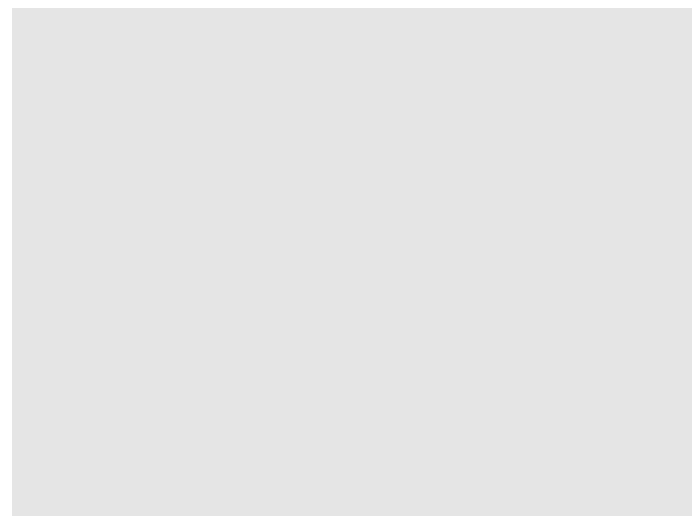
“Everyone in the community knew her as this devoted volunteer,” Amy Yardley, Thornberry’s sister said in a statement. “But she was all these other things: a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter.”

Gelser Blouin said Thornberry’s death is a reminder that life and time are fragile, and it’s crucial to make time for the people you love — something she said Thornberry always did.

Donating her time

Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis CEO

Helen Higgins said Thornberry was very connected in the community. Higgins



Andrea Thornberry, 47, is remembered for her work with multiple nonprofits and organizations in Corvallis. Thornberry died in a car crash Dec. 18.

Photo courtesy of Lorena Reynolds

first met her through the Boys & Girls Club and later worked with her through Rotary. “She was a person who knew how to get things done and how to bring people together,” Higgins said.

Thornberry was always at events or working behind the scenes, according to Higgins, and always managed to bring a fun energy to every room.

“She led from the heart and was always looking for ways to help people,” Higgins said.

According to Thornberry’s LinkedIn page, throughout the years, she volunteered her time with Leadership Corvallis, Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence, Soroptimist International of Corvallis, Benton County Health Department, CORE Corvallis and Downtown Corvallis Association.

Lorena Reynolds, a close friend and colleague of Thornberry, said her friend’s contributions made every event and fundraiser run smoothly. Thornberry was smart and practical when it came to running these events, Reynolds said, and always had so much energy and knowledge to bring to the table.

“I can hardly think of any organization in Corvallis she didn’t do something for at some point,” she said.

Reynolds added that Thornberry’s financial knowledge, efficiency and powerhouse personality will make her very hard to replace in terms of event planning.

But Thornberry didn’t do it for the accolades. According to Reynolds, Thornberry always thought someone else deserved the credit. Reynolds joked that Thornberry was upset after being nominated for the Celebrate Corvallis Junior First Citizen award.

“She was a really good friend,” she said. “She really showed up for the people in her life. She never let you forget she had your back.”

She didn't do it for recognition, but Thornberry's service will live on thanks to the imprint she's leaving on the community and her loved ones. Reynolds said honoring her legacy means going out and doing things to make the world a better place — that's what Thornberry would want.

Thornberry's husband Matt echoed this sentiment.

“Her service was her legacy,” he said in a statement. “She would encourage support for these organizations as the best way to honor her.”

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By Maddie Pfeifer

Reporter
