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**SUNDAY**  
 May 2, 2010

# TIMES-NEWS

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## Amanda Coats seeks identity after near-fatal crash



Photos by ASHLEY SMITH/Times-News

Amanda Coats looks at the door of her physical therapist's office while riding an exercise bike in Twin Falls during a recent visit. Coats was in a car accident on Aug. 10, 2009, and doctors originally thought she might not be able to walk again.

## How can it be stopped?

Gulf oil spill swiftly balloons, could move east

By Allen G. Breed and Seth Borenstein  
 Associated Press writers



AP photo

Leonard Lawton of Pass Christian, Miss., fishes next to an oil retaining boom in Bay St. Louis, Miss., Saturday. Environmentalists are concerned about the potential disaster the approaching oil slick presents.

VENICE, La. — A sense of doom settled over the American coastline from Louisiana to Florida on Saturday as a massive oil slick spewing from a ruptured well kept growing, and experts warned that an uncontrolled gusher could create a nightmare scenario if the Gulf Stream carries it toward the Atlantic.

President Obama planned to visit the region today to assess the situation amid growing criticism that the government and oil company BP PLC should have done more to stave off the disaster. Meanwhile, efforts to stem the flow and remove oil from the surface by skimming it, burning it

or spiking it with chemicals to disperse it continued with little success.

"These people, we've been beaten down, disaster after disaster," said Matt O'Brien of Venice, whose

See **OIL SLICK**, Main 7

## Providing a choice

Cameron faces Mohlman in Dist. 26 primary



By Ben Botkin  
 Times-News writer



Cameron Mohlman

Sen. Dean Cameron is being challenged in the Republican primaries by Harold Mohlman, who is also seeking the party's nomination for the District 26 Senate seat.

Cameron, R-Rupert, has a nearly 20-year record in the Legislature, and Mohlman says he wants to put his name out there so the ballot has more than one choice on it. No candidates from other parties have filed to run in the May 25 primaries.

Cameron, who has been on the Senate since 1991, is co-chair of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, a position he held in the last session while setting a budget amid declining revenues that led to cuts throughout state government.

Cameron said maintaining a balanced budget and the state's financial condition are priorities.

"I feel like we have unfinished business to make sure that the budget remains balanced and that we see the state back onto a stable economic footing," Cameron said.

Besides the economy, other issues include providing appropriate funding for education and the Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan, a long-term effort to address the state's water situation.

"I think CAMP can work as fast as the water users who are in agreement are willing to move," Cameron said.

A third-generation insurance and investment businessman, Cameron

See **DISTRICT 26**, Main 6

# A COWGIRL'S CONFUSION

By Bradley Guire | Times-News writer

Amanda Coats began the physical therapy session with Jon Gardunia and Chuck Norris.

Well, not really Chuck Norris, but the same Total Gym machine that "Walker, Texas Ranger" hawks on late-night infomercials.

She lay flat on the incline bench to exercise her thighs, first squatting with her left leg and then with both. After 10 repetitions, she positioned her head at the low end of the bench as Gardunia, her physical therapist at Primary Therapy Source in Twin Falls, held Coats' feet so each bend of her knees pulled her up.

He held the silver-and-pink Nike Shox-clad feet, Coats' striped socks buffering her atrophied legs from the plastic, blue leopard print braces.

It was sunny on April 15, a perfect day for the high school rodeo star to ride.

Not long ago, Coats, 18, would have saddled her horses and practiced her roping and tying, preparing to take her next saddle or buckle. She'd qualified for the Idaho High School Rodeo



Amanda Coats gets a hand from her boyfriend, Eric Marvin, after riding on April 23 at her aunt and uncle's home near Kimberly. With months of physical therapy her body is healing and she is able to again enjoy a trot on her horse.

### MORE ONLINE

VIEW a slide show of Amanda Coats' rehabilitation and road to recovery. [MAGICVALLEY.COM](http://MAGICVALLEY.COM)

Finals, both as a Kimberly High School junior and sophomore, and was a rookie cowgirl of the year as a freshman in

Washington state.

"I love all of it," she said. "That's just how it is."

She competed in every event a cowgirl could — from barrel racing to team roping. Because of her car crash last summer, a pair of cowboy boots and a rope — the cowgirl's daily accessories

See **COATS**, Main 3

## Remodeled manor unveiled in Wendell

By Blair Koch  
 Times-News correspondent

WENDELL — Murlen Lancaster has visited the Magic Valley Manor for more than 40 years, often checking in on friends staying at the facility.

When he and his wife Verla Lancaster visited the manor Saturday, it was to see firsthand the improvements made to the building by Safe Haven Health Care, the company currently

operating assisted living at the facility.

The grand reopening featured a live band, barbecue, vendors and a small car show.

Lancaster was impressed with the building's fresh landscaping and interior improvements.

"It's just positively beautiful," he said, his eyes scanning the new floors, paint, light fixtures and crown molding in the dining room. "It's so attractive, inviting. This change will have a pos-

itive affect on those living here, absolutely."

Safe Haven spent \$1.1 million on the remodeling project. A new wing was added to the building, increasing resident capacity from 24 to 37. Rooms have been fully updated with private bathrooms, said president and CEO Scott Burpee. The main and north sections of the building have new windows,

See **MANOR**, Main 2



Residents of Magic Valley Manor enjoy dinner Saturday in the newly remodeled Wendell facility, which includes restoration of Italian tile imported in the early 1900s.

BLAIR KOCH/  
 For the Times-News



Bridge .....Classifieds 7  
 Crossword .....Classifieds 5  
 Dear Abby .....Classifieds 5  
 Kids Only .....Family Life 6  
 Jumble .....Classifieds 6  
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 Sudoku .....Classifieds 4  
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**HIGH SCHOOLS SPORTS BRACING FOR CUTS**  
 Athletic departments seeing budgets shrink > Sports 1

# Coats

Continued from Main 1

— are now replaced by leg braces and crutches.

"I want to try this," she said, looking at an elliptical machine later in her rehab regimen.

Gardunia encouraged her, and she enjoyed the short-lived range of motion before her legs tired so close to the session's end.

He liked what he saw. This machine may become part of Coats' routine.

Standing balanced with both legs straight is a major task for Coats, even after six months of therapy. Her record is four minutes with her knees bent. But that Thursday she managed only a few 30-second bursts of straight-legged standing before sitting back down.

"You look like you're done," Gardunia said.

"What do you mean? Like, can you see it on my face?"

"Your legs are wobbly."



Photos by ASHLEY SMITH/Times-News

Amanda Coats has regained a lot of mobility in the past 18 months and continues to work hard in physical therapy.

Aug. 10, 2009, came two days after Coats' last rodeo of the season, and she was transitioning to fall activities and her senior year at Kimberly High School. She was headed to a cheer camp at the high school to practice for her first year in the activity, and living five miles to the south with her uncle and aunt, Clay and Jolene Nannini. Her mom, Joanie Barry, was attempting without much luck to sell their home in Washington state.

Dusk approached when Coats tore her Honda Accord and her body apart.

"I was looking in the center console for my earrings," she said of the 80 mph crash. "I looked up and saw that I was on the left side of the road, so I overcorrected or something — this is where I really don't know what happened. I got back in the middle, kind of, and I remember thinking, 'I got this. It's OK.' The next thing I know, I went off to the left again and hit a cement ditch and a telephone pole."

She was barely two miles from the school when she landed in a field, still conscious but breathless. She instinctively reached for her phone, which she had placed in her lap while driving, but couldn't find it. The force of the crash, unhindered by the seat belt Coats wasn't wearing, had hurled her through the space between the sedan's front seats and into the back. She knew her back was badly hurt, and it didn't take long to realize something else was wrong.

"Then I was like, 'Oh, my God, I can't feel my legs,'" she said. "I was freaking out. My back really hurt, but I wasn't thinking about that. It was, 'Oh, my God, I can't not (participate in) rodeo. I can't feel my legs.'"

Neighbors from a house close by rushed to her aid, and less than an hour later Coats was sent to Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise in an air ambulance. Her uncle was on the flight with her, but her mother and aunt had to endure the drive to Boise, with all its uncertainty and worry.

Coats was rushed into surgery, where through the next 10 hours Dr. Tim Floyd rebuilt her.

"Initially, it looked really bleak," Barry said of the shattered vertebrae and nerve damage her daughter suffered. "I remember Amanda



Amanda Coats talks with her physical therapist, Jon Gardunia, while she walks backwards on a treadmill.

looking at me and saying, 'Mama, I don't want to be paralyzed.'"

Coats said she regained feeling in her legs after a week in intensive care, but still couldn't move them when she was moved to a floor with rehabilitation services. Gradually, more of her strength returned, and the prognosis became increasingly positive. As she learned how to move from her hospital bed to a wheelchair and eventually onto crutches, she took online high school courses to stay on track to

graduate, and her boyfriend, Eric Marvin, friends and family continued to visit, keeping her spirits up.

Then it was time to go home.

Since returning in November, Coats has met

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**Lori Chandler**  
Cleaning Center owner  
734-2404

with Gardunia four times weekly for physical therapy and water therapy. During those months, more feeling and more movement have returned in her legs, but a time line for her full recovery is a mystery.

"Some goals are standing with her knees locked — a balance goal — walking with one crutch, improving the quality of her walking and sitting and standing without the support of crutches or a walker," he said.

As many as another 18 months may pass before Coats can traverse the world like she once did. She remains independent, as a surge of donations and fundraisers helped secure a vehicle with hand controls so she can drive herself between home, school and therapy, but not to the arena.

Rodeo is a topic Coats still opens up about. Her face lights up when discussing her favorite events, her horses, or competing with her best friend, Tamzy

Hopwood. But she doesn't know if she'll again compete for buckles and saddles, and her dream of attending college on a rodeo scholarship may never be realized.

"That was her identity," Barry said.

Coats has attended the occasional rodeo, not for enjoyment, but to support Hopwood, who's riding Coats' barrel horse.

"She has come to a lot," Hopwood said, "but sometimes she's like, 'I don't feel like coming.' Usually, she gets on (a horse) and rides with me, and it helps her to

be involved instead of sitting in the stands and watching."

While sitting in her living room recently, Coats thought of a life without rodeo and admitted its uncertainty. Without rodeo, she is lost.

"I'm living without it right now," she said, "and it's really tough."

Faced with a void in her life now seemingly too expansive to fill, she looked to the coffee table at a puzzle not halfway finished and shrugged: "I like puzzles, I guess." But that's hardly a replacement for the rush of the gate opening, the calf fleeing, and less than four seconds to rope the go's best time.

Her body is healing, and she is capable of riding at a leisurely trot at the Nannini house, or at the rodeo grounds she once tore through like a spring windstorm. Hopwood has even talked her into a little roping when the pain can be endured, and she'll help Coats through the summer until it's time to leave for college in Moscow.

Coats will continue to strive toward a life that includes all the joys it once held.

But if she can never be a competition cowgirl again, to those who love her and have sacrificed for her recovery, Coats will remain these: daughter, niece, girlfriend, friend.

And it will have to be enough.

Bradley Guire may be reached at bguire@magic-valley.com or 735-3229.

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