



From the Sheriff's Desk

Archives 2014

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November 26, 2014

Reflections on Ferguson

A fall 2013 *Johns Hopkins Magazine* article reports how 93 percent of police officer homicides involve gunshots—10 percent coming from the barrel of the officer's assigned duty weapon.

Of course, we here in Columbia County know all too well how a police officer's gun can be wrested from his or her control and used against the officer. Fallen Rainier Police Chief Ralph Painter saw a routine encounter quickly turn deadly in 2011 when an "unarmed" suspect overpowered the officer and used the chief's own firearm to kill him.

From my perspective, the stories coming from the grand jury investigation in Ferguson, Mo. show how the officer in question was threatened with serious physical injury and responded within his training to stop the threat.

The facts of the case showed how Missouri law and U.S. Supreme Court precedent justified Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson's shooting of Michael Brown. Under Missouri law (similar to Oregon Law), a police officer is authorized in self-defense to use a sufficient amount of force to stop a threat (when in fear of death or great bodily harm to himself or another person) and to effect an arrest or prevent escape under certain prescribed conditions.

We train police officers and sheriff's deputies to have the tactical advantage over suspects who would do them harm, providing them with the tools necessary to stop threats to the safety of themselves and/or the public whom they serve. Society is the winner when our law enforcement officers boldly stand up for the law abiding in our communities and take appropriate action to interdict lawless behavior.

And, like in Ferguson, we have protocols in place to review all police use of deadly force. Usually, police officers are cleared from any wrongdoing in these incidences, because we train incessantly on the proper use of force and we hire good people who are usually in this business for the right reasons. And, after every use of deadly force, we review the use of force, review our policies and our tactics—always looking for ways to minimize the risks we have to take to do our jobs effectively.

One of the lessons that can be learned from Ferguson is the need to get as much information out to the public as possible—as soon as possible. The needs of lawyers to keep the evidence pool untainted by public inspection must be tempered by the reality that what we are silent about creates a vacuum that will be filled by someone with an agenda. Truth is truth, and the more of it we can share right away can help mitigate the faulty information in the public that seemed to plague the Ferguson case from the beginning.



The tendency in some circles to always blame the police and to assume the worst stands in stark contrast to the risks many officers and deputies take on a daily basis to stand in the breach between lawlessness and civilized society.

Are there bad apples out there with a badge and a gun? Certainly—and we do our level best to keep them from gaining a foothold in this profession. We welcome the microscope-view of our actions and rely on the criminal justice system (and our own internal procedures) to identify the bad cops and deal with their actions with gravity.

In the end, for our society to function with any sense of certainty, we must yield to the protocols we have in place—both to convict the guilty and to protect the innocent. And just because someone with an agenda attempts to rabble-rouse with a caricature of what actually occurred, we should not tolerate anyone – police officer or criminal suspect – being tried in the mass and/or social media of our day.

November 17, 2014

When Columbia County voters voted to keep their jail open in May, it reversed the jail's demise that had been years in the making. The County's loss of federal timber payments, coupled with a sagging economy had left the jail without the necessary funding to continue—and this was the result of years of decline in our budget.

In 2011, the total jail budget picture for the Sheriff's office meant that cuts in jail beds were necessary in order to keep the jail sustained through the budget year. We dropped to 65 local beds (down from 150) in 2011, then fell again to just 25 local beds in 2013. Had the levy failed in May, we would have been forced to close the jail and take the 10 worst local offenders and send them outside the county to another jail.

However, the passage of the levy in May has meant that, first and foremost, our jail remains open and remains a viable option for police officers to solve immediate problems. Second, it has meant that we can slowly rebuild our capacity to house up to 100 local inmates – a far cry better than the 25 we had last year at this time!

In fact, we are averaging between 40 and 45 local inmates now, despite the fact that our workforce has shrunk further due to attrition.

We are working very hard to replace the cutback positions we have lost over the years, but as I have said from the beginning: *We didn't get to this place overnight, and we aren't going to be able to fix it overnight, either.*

It takes time to recruit, develop a pool of qualified applicants, conduct background investigations, and hire and train a sheriff's deputy. Once you get a group of deputies trained, you don't want to lose them, because it takes so long to get them ready.

For this reason, I have pushed and pushed to protect our budgets in the past from the degradation we have experienced over the last few years. We have seen years of experience and training go out the door because there wasn't the funding to pay them. Now that the funding is there (to hire jail deputies only), it is going to take time to get up to the number we need to get our jail capacity to the levels that we need. Whether we are talking about corrections or enforcement, the time it takes to train a deputy should be remembered the next time budget cuts are threatened against this critical aspect of government service.



In the interim, we are working long hours, pulling deputies in off the road, and using temporary employees to at least keep the jail going. I am so proud of the effort of our small staff to keep this operation functioning at any level at all--let alone the fact they are holding more than they were last year with even fewer staff!

The good news is that we are housing some of the most pernicious criminals: Homicidal subjects, sex offenders, burglars and other assaultive people remain in custody. For example, we have in custody the individual we believe was mostly responsible for the serial burglaries in South County last spring. If the jail levy had failed, it is likely this individual would still be on the streets. In addition to him, a number of sex offenders and other violent folks remain in custody!

I understand the frustration of some who have voiced their concerns about the jail not holding every single person brought to us, but with the number of people lodged in jail on a variety of charges, it is not possible to keep them all for as long as some might wish. But we are holding more than we were a year ago. And as we staff up, we will continue to hold as many as we can hold of those who need to be here. But we're going to do it safely, and with the proper concern for our staff and the inmates that are committed to our jail. And that is going to take time to do things right.

July 25, 2014

I sympathize with the family of one-year-old Paxton Pitts, after the woman who was convicted of assaulting him was released from jail early. Stephanie Kral, who received a 10-day sentence from the court following her conviction for Assault Third Degree, represents just one of the 1,897 inmates we've been forced to release early since the fall of 2011 (nearly 500 of those releases have occurred since the beginning of this year).

The bad news is that these forced releases have caused hundreds of inmates to serve a small percentage of their time in custody—in order to keep in custody those who pose the greatest threat to public safety. The *good news* is that this situation will be changing for the better in the coming year, as we are able to build our staffing level back to the levels needed to hold more sentenced inmates for longer periods of time.

I join with those who find the current catch-and-release situation plaguing our jail to be unacceptable. We are working furiously on getting our jail back into the condition where we can hold more sentenced inmates, but I must continue to ask for the public's patience while we rebuild our staff.

It hasn't been that long ago that we were preparing to shutter the facility and send only the worst 10 criminals to another jail. And while the vote in May to keep the jail open has turned this direction around, there will still be many more early releases of inmates until we are able to re-staff.

We are hiring jail staff as fast as we can, but it will still be a number of months before they are trained to be on their own. First, we have to screen all those who have applied to work as deputies and technicians. We received scores of applications for the openings, which closed Monday, July 21. After going through these applications, all candidates passing the initial screening will be tested with physical and written tests. Those who pass those tests will be interviewed. Those who pass the interview process will be given a thorough background investigation, which itself can take more than a month.



Suitable candidates will be given tentative job offers subject to passing a physical and psychological examination. Those who pass all of those examinations will be trained in both an in-house training academy and a mandatory, six-week academy at the state level.

Once they return from the academy, we must complete a field training program before the deputies will be qualified to be on their own and can begin to ease the staffing issues that have caused us to keep available jail beds low.

I am eager to see that day approach, as it has been a humbling three years of catch and release that have been painful to oversee as your sheriff. While adding back 100 local beds will not solve all our custody issues, I look forward to the day when more of the sentenced inmates in our community will more fully serve the sentences they have been given by the courts.

June 25, 2014

When someone shoots a police officer, it is an affront to that which we should all hold in common: the desire for peace in our communities through the rule of law.

The shooting of City of Rainier Police Officer Russ George evoked a tremendous amount of support for the injured officer and his department—not to mention reopening the wound from three and a half years earlier when the city's police chief, Ralph Painter was gunned down responding to a disturbance. Officer George was struck with gunfire after responding to a citizen's complaints of reckless driving. The suspect, Christopher Elliot, of Waitsburg, Wash., shot Officer George while he was on his initial approach to the driver's window.

This is the risk that your friends and neighbors who are law enforcement officers and deputies, corrections deputies and parole and probation officers take every day. It isn't every day that an officer faces deadly assault from a suspect, but each one of them knows that today could be that day for him or for her.

What signifies the unique character of our law enforcement members is that when the citizen calls and wants the suspicious activity (whatever it might be) checked out, the law enforcement officer is the one who *wants* to be the one to check it out—wants to answer the call and solve the immediate problem.

The citizen making the call can rest assured that the officer who responds will take care of the problem and ensure that, at least in this instance, the rule of law and the safety of the community is in good, trained, professional hands. The original call came in to the Sheriff's Office, but we had no one in position to intercept the vehicle as it was driven erratically from Deer Island in South County all the way to Rainier. The complainant following behind the vehicle said the driver was going back and forth between the lines on the highway, tailgating and "flipping people off."



The complainant said he would sign a driving complaint, and the cell phone connection was lost. But that was enough for Officer George to intercept the suspect vehicle and make the fateful traffic stop.

The Sheriff's Office salutes Officer George and all of the officers, deputies and troopers who not only take those same risks every day, but also responded to the scene and worked in unison to stop the suspect from advancing any further.

The suspect only gave up and ended his life once he was hemmed in by the massive response of Officer George's fellow officers, deputies and troopers. I also want to publicly thank all the dispatchers, firefighters, medics and local citizens who helped us bring this incident to its conclusion.

The officer will survive. The threat was stopped. And until the next crisis, where we will again work together to stop the threat to the community peace, we can get back to business as usual, enforcing the rule of law—without fear or favor—for the good of all.

June 17, 2014

Advancements in technology are the wave of the future for public safety agencies, and the Columbia County Sheriff's Office is no exception. In fact, with our few resources available to respond to emergencies throughout our county, we increasingly rely on technical advances in the areas of radio communications, report writing, criminal intelligence gathering, and analysis of crime patterns.

A few years ago, we were able to purchase advance radio components that enable us to have interoperable communications with virtually any agency that comes into our county to assist us, or if we are traveling outside the county for any reason and need to contact a regional dispatch center or a public safety provider in any particular jurisdiction.

Since 2011, we have participated in the Portland Police Data System (PPDS) as our report management system and as our link to the Portland area regional criminal intelligence network. We, along with the St. Helens and Scappoose Police Departments regularly enter all our law enforcement contacts into this system, providing information that can be helpful in solving crimes. Next Spring, all the agencies that participate in PPDS will migrate to the new Regional Justice Information Network, which will enhance PPDS services and provide exponentially greater detail and information to law enforcement across the region on criminals and the crimes they commit.

This coming week, we are teaming up with a student volunteer from the Western Oregon University Criminal Justice program to conduct computerized crime analysis of the burglaries that have plagued the St. Helens area in particular. Our hope is to utilize crime patterns to develop specific analysis that can aid in the apprehension of our suspect or suspects.



As budget pressures continue to mount on law enforcement around the nation, we will continue to do all we can to access advancements in technology to work smarter. One of those coming advancements is FirstNet, which is the federal government's attempt to build and operate the nation's first nationwide broadband network devoted solely to public safety. This will allow first responders to have lone broadband access that will not have to compete with private sector demand during an emergency. This is designed to provide the opportunity to use digital wireless technology that will improve interoperability and provide safe, secure and high levels of operational capability around the clock.

We have to be ready to adapt to technology to make sure we have every advantage in carrying out our mission, which never changes: to keep the peace and make our county an ideal place to live, work and recreate.

June 9, 2014

With the increase in property crimes in our communities, citizens have asked what they can do to make their property more secure. While nothing is fail-safe, there are some things you can do to discourage property crime.

First, keep good relations with your neighbors—look out for one another. A trusting relationship among neighbors can provide extra eyes on one another's property. You can also start a Neighborhood Watch organization in your neighborhood. The Sheriff's Office provides training in Neighborhood Watch development.

Secondly, keep doors and windows locked. Invest in window locks and deadbolt door locks. Don't leave keys under the doormat or other "logical" places for a burglar to look.

Third, keep valuables out of view from prying eyes. Keep firearms and other valuables in a safe. Keep car keys out of view. In your vehicles, don't leave anything of value in view when you are parked and away from your car.

Fourth, give your home that lived-in look, even when you aren't there. Install a timer on your lights so that when you are gone they come on and go off as they might when you are home. Have good exterior lighting and make sure it is illuminated at night.

Finally, security cameras and home alarms can add an extra level of security. There are a wide variety of models and styles of security systems available on the market for you to choose from.

Some have suggested that all they need to protect their property is their gun. While firearms can be good home defense tools for protecting yourself and your loved ones from violence or threatened violence, guns are not really helpful in defeating property crimes. In fact, you cannot use deadly force to protect your property.

Most property crimes occur when people are not around, any way, so the best place for any gun that you leave at home is in a locked gun safe.



Our job is to try to piece together enough clues to be able to solve these property crimes, but we rely on the law-abiding citizens in our community to be our eyes and ears to what is happening out there. If you see something suspicious, don't hesitate to call it in. In an emergency, dial 9-1-1, otherwise you can call the Dispatch Center's non-emergency line at (503) 397-1521 24 hours a day. You can also call our tip line at [\(503\) 366-4698](tel:5033664698). We get to these calls as soon as we can.

June 1, 2014

The burglaries in the Greater St. Helens area have drawn a concerted effort from our Enforcement Division in conjunction with the St. Helens Police Department. Local citizens should be proud of the efforts our staff has made in attempting to solve this string of criminal events.

When someone kicks a door in, hoping that no one is home, and then proceeds to enter the home and take people's valuables, it violates so much of what we believe in as citizens.

We put ourselves in the place of every burglary and theft victim. We are troubled by the proliferation of crime and motivated to catch these individuals and see that they are brought to justice.

I cannot discuss all the details of the investigations we have conducted thus far, but we are working very hard to identify the suspect or suspects responsible. We have also committed extra patrols using volunteer reserve deputies and our regular sworn force in creative ways.

Even though our regular call load of sex abuse allegations, assaults, suicide attempts, calls on the Columbia River, and traffic crashes on dry land continue unabated, our deputies have also arrested two people for driving stolen cars last week and put many hours, including overtime hours into investigating these burglaries.

I wish I had more staff to address all these problems! I am so thankful for the efforts of our enforcement team members, however, who are working to solve this particular problem, along with other members of law enforcement in South County.

If and when we have a suspect or suspects in custody, it will be thanks to the efforts of deputies, police officers, dispatchers and citizens working together for the good of the community we serve.

May 26, 2014

All the plans we were making to close the jail came to an immediate halt last week after the voters passed the \$7 million levy to keep our jail going for the next three years. Our effort and energy leading up to the vote had been devoted to getting everything in place for what would have been a very quick closure if the levy had been defeated.



Once the levy revenue is figured into the equation, we will begin in earnest to reverse direction. This will take some doing, initially, as the jail remains on life support due to low staffing. There is a long process that must be initiated before we can begin hiring staff, but we have contingency plans in place to fill gaps until we can begin the hiring process.

We also have several vendor contracts that need to be renegotiated, as we had let them lapse pending the vote, continuing on a month-to-month basis. Now that we know we will be in business, we need to start afresh with new contracts for food, inmate telephones, and inmate medical.

We need to upgrade our software for jail inspections and jail management, and it will be better to do that now, than while we are in the hiring process. The Board of Commissioners also will empanel the citizen review committee that the commissioners were talking about during the election campaign. I am hoping for a good cross-section of individuals to sit on the panel, and I also hope those who voted against the levy will be well-represented.

The fact is that this county is pretty much divided on using additional tax money to support the jail. We need to develop a long-term strategy to fund the jail, and we need to build consensus around a lasting solution that will work for longer than three years. Let us work together to build consensus for a safer, more secure community for our future.

May 18, 2014

Today marks the transition point for these weekly comments. After this week, we will either be talking about restoring the capacity levels of our jail to where they were a few years ago, or about what we will be doing in the aftermath of the jail's closure.

As many have learned by now, last week we handed out notices of layoff to our corrections staff, pending the vote on the jail. We delayed making this public for as long as we could in an effort to avoid the sense that we were trying to make a political statement.

Nevertheless, out of respect for our people, we wanted to give them adequate notice of their final day if the levy does indeed fail.

While a number of citizens have been working diligently to get this issue before the voters in hope of staving off these cuts, we have been working hard to make as solid of a transition as possible. We have finalized protocols with Polk County, and they are ready to receive our top 10 prisoners. Working with legal counsel, we are cobbling together interim custody policies setting forth the protocols for how we address the 1200 local custody arrests we processed in 2013, when there will be no place to take most of those people in 2014--if our jail closes.

And the biggest issue we will face, and for which we are trying to plan, is the shock wave that may hit our communities, when victims of crime learn that the suspect who assaulted, burglarized, stole from, or otherwise violated their person or possessions is likely not going to jail. Law enforcement, prosecutors, the courts and community corrections staff all know what this will mean and will be impacted immediately with this new reality. But gauging how the public will react is, at this time, just a guess.

We have in place several contingency plans designed to do our best to respond to what will be a very difficult situation. We will continue to take calls for service and find ways to solve problems for our community with the continued goal of conserving the peace in the county.



May 13, 2014

No matter what the outcome of the vote is on Tuesday, May 20, it is clear that things cannot remain as they are within the criminal justice system in our county. Whether or not the citizens pass a temporary measure to fund our jail for the next three years, I think it is imperative for us to begin immediately to plan for the future.

Even if we are able to keep the jail open this year (if there were to be the passage of Measure 5-238) we cannot continue with business as usual, but must plan now for a future where scarce resources continue to threaten our ability to provide adequate public safety in our county.

Collectively as a community, we need to think about what the priorities are for the future and start heading in that direction. Given the fact that we have limited resources, how do we make sure that the most important services are adequately funded?

These things have been talked about before, but have always fallen flat—not because the citizens thought it was a bad idea, necessarily, but because there are so many competing voices as to how to execute such a plan. Necessity, however, is said to be the mother of invention.

It is time to think outside of the proverbial “box” and find a way to think smarter; to develop a new way to get things done that makes the most of the tax dollars contributed from the hard-working people in this county. We talk about economic development in our county that is long overdue, and we insist that this development must be sustainable over time. I heartily agree with that sentiment. I think we should have the same goal for local government with a plan that is economically feasible and sustainable.

Government is not like the private sector. It is not supposed to be a profit-oriented enterprise. Still, that should not deter us from doing everything in our power to make it a value-oriented enterprise for the people we serve.

May 4, 2014

As sheriff, I truly hope that all the preparations we have been making to close our jail will not be needed. This exercise has truly been a painful, humbling experience for me and the dedicated staff in our jail.

Though it is only one aspect of the job, it remains a very important tool for solving local criminal justice problems that occur daily in our county. If and when we send the last inmate out of our facility, it will be a sad day for me, and one that I never pictured for our county when I first decided to run for office in 2007.

Being in law enforcement for over 25 years and seeing the terrible things people can sometimes do to others, I have always believed that I was a member of the “thin blue line” that stood between civilized society and those who lived in defiance of society’s norms.

I still believe, as did Sir Robert Peel in 1829, that “the police are the public and the public are the police; the police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the intent of the community welfare.”

In other words, I have always believed the vast majority of people are on our side and are pulling for us to succeed on their behalf.



I still believe that is true, but it leaves me wondering just where we have gone wrong in communication or actions that have caused too many good citizens to not value the concept of having a lockup to hold those who defiantly break our laws and threaten the public peace.

I do understand there is a tremendous distrust of government, and that law enforcement has not always lived up to the lofty ideal rightfully expected of us. I know also, though, that people still dial 9-1-1 and are glad when we respond to the call—and that there is a certain amount of frustration out there (particularly with a severely diminished sheriff's office) when we don't show up soon enough for the liking of some.

We've all heard the saying, "There's never a cop around when you need one." I hope we're not all saying soon that "There's never a *jail* around when you need one, either."

April 27, 2014

It costs a lot of money to run a jail. Jails costs millions of dollars to run, because we have to pay enough staff and provide enough financial support to comply with the law.

In Columbia County, there is no longer enough money to run our jail. In fact, our jail should have closed years ago, except for one thing: We have rented beds to the federal government, which has brought millions of dollars into our County to keep the jail open.

If we could have run the jail without federal prisoners, we would have done so. These prisoners are very difficult to manage, and their numbers have stressed our limited staffing to the limit.

Instead, we used the revenue from these bed rentals to keep the jail open and make its cost much less to the county taxpayer. Some think that the millions of dollars the U. S. Marshal's Service pays to house its prisoners here isn't enough and that we should make them pay more.

The Marshal's Service, however, tells us how much they will pay, and we decide if it is worth it or not. In my view, it has been worth it, because it has made it possible to keep the jail open all these years when the county was spending much less on the jail than the federal government was.

Without those federal bed rental payments, the cost of the levy to the taxpayer would be closer to \$1.00 per thousand, instead of the 58 cents per thousand that the levy is asking for.

Some people have been confused about figures thrown around about the "cost per day" to house one inmate. Just know that the "cost per day *per inmate*" is mostly dependent on the number of inmates we have in our jail. The more inmates we have, the cost *per inmate* per day goes down.

The only way to lower the cost *per inmate* is to have more inmates. If the levy passes, we will be able keep our jail open and do so at a lower cost per inmate.

Jeff Dickerson
Sheriff

April 20, 2014

As sheriff's office resources have dwindled over the years, we have sought ways to work smarter and provide some additional methods for the communities we serve to receive sheriff's services.



With only one deputy assigned per shift and office support that depends heavily on volunteers to stay on top of things, we have resorted more and more to automated responses to many of the non-emergency related events that occur in our county every day. Last year, more than 9,000 calls for sheriff's office service came in to dispatch. We sort these calls according to priority and go to the most pressing calls first. Averaging over 25 calls per day scattered across the 688 square miles of our county it is impossible to respond in person to every call.

Those calls to which we cannot immediately respond are followed up on as soon as possible. We have a triage system for handling non-emergency calls and a checks and balances approach to make sure people needing a call back get one—that includes the hundreds of calls coming in on our citizen report line ([503-366-4698](tel:503-366-4698)). It might take a while, but we've done pretty well connecting with complainants.

But there are other ways to let us know what is going on and for us to stay in touch with you. Our website at www.co.columbia.or.us/sheriff provides a number of contact points for you to file a crime report, make an appointment for a concealed handgun license, obtain dog licensing information, make a request by e-mail, or locate our calls for service report and our annual sheriff's office reports.

As long as we still have our jail, you can go on our website to see who is in custody and their charges, put money on an inmate's account and even order gift packages for friends and/or family who are in custody.

Our front office staff also goes the extra mile, taking fingerprinting and concealed handgun licensing services to remote areas in the county twice a month. The last Saturday of the month they also come in to handle the ongoing demand for concealed handgun licenses. This is on top of their regular duties working on civil papers and managing the thousands of warrants, investigative reports and concealed handgun license applications they receive every year.

As we've seen our resources fall, our staff has responded with creativity and devotion to duty to still present the most efficient law enforcement and public safety services money can buy.

I hope you are as proud of your sheriff's office and its dedicated employees as I continue to be. It has been a tremendous honor and privilege to serve with them during these very difficult times.

April 13, 2014

The criminal justice system in Columbia County consists of the elected judges, district attorney, and sheriff as well as the appointed judges and police chiefs in the cities, and the appointed county officials in the courts and community justice department.

It is a high honor to be elected by fellow citizens to serve in any capacity. To do so within the auspices of the criminal justice system is truly a humbling experience.

To lead is to invite criticism, and that is true in Columbia County as it is in Salem, or Washington, D.C. People exercise their freedom to express their disagreement with judges, with the district attorney and with the sheriff. They can affect how each does his or her job either by voting them out of office or by giving or withholding additional funding to get the job done.

As we continue to focus our energies on the pending closure of the jail, I have made it clear that I intend to carry out the will of the people with a servant's heart. I am also meeting with these elected officials and the municipal leaders, working with them to find the best possible way to carry out the functions of this system.

We are fortunate in this county to have officials in the criminal justice system, who are committed to working together on this issue. There is tremendous stress—to be sure—as we figure out how to make this happen in the best interests of all concerned, but there is also a tremendous desire to work hand-in-hand as fellow servants of the people.



That is how the founders of our state and nation thought it should be. Each of us has a vision of how things ought to be. But each of us also knows the value of working together to solve problems and make the most of what we have to get the job done on behalf of the citizens we serve.

It continues to be a great honor to serve this community and to work with the truly committed members of the sheriff's office, police departments, 9-1-1 staff, prosecutor's office, judges and court staff, and adult and juvenile community justice staff, who make our criminal justice system work.

Jeff Dickerson
Sheriff

April 6, 2014

Jails serve both as the community's last resort for solving public safety dilemmas and as a critical piece to the overall criminal justice program in every county.

Whether or not we are forced to close our jail by this summer, I think it is important for the community to understand the purposes for incarceration and the reason why it costs as much as it does to run a local corrections facility.

First, the reasons for incarceration are several. Many people see the jail as a place where we send local citizens convicted of crimes that do not merit a prison sentence, and, while that is true, there are a number of other reasons that have just as great of an impact on the overall livability of a community. Jails perform the vital criminal justice function of booking those accused of crimes—from murder to drug dealing, from rape to burglary, and from child abuse to domestic violence and other assaults on vulnerable victims—and then holding those so charged either until they can get before a judge to be arraigned (and held until trial if the charge is severe enough) or released with a date to appear in court.

Jails, then, also become the resting spots for those who fail to appear in court when they are supposed to and where they can be held until the judge sees them.

Police officers and sheriff's deputies use the jail to solve immediate public safety problems caused by individuals who are impaired by alcohol, drugs, rage or a combination thereof. Hundreds of people in our county every year commit crimes for which a long-term stay in jail is not necessary, but, due to their current criminal behavior, need a place to be held until they bail out or see a judge, come down from their inebriation, and realize there is a consequence for disturbing the peacefulness of our community.

Local Community Corrections officials depend on the jail as a consequence for their clients who have been committed to them from the state prisons. They use the jail as a sanction against those on probation and parole who fail to comply with the terms of their early release from prison.

The courts depend on the jail as a last resort for those who fail to comply with the probation the courts often give in lieu of custody, and attorneys rely on the jail as a place where they can find and interview those they are representing on a wide variety of criminal charges.

Because of our short-staffed situation, we have been forced to release many inmates earlier than we wished these last few years, but we've still been able to provide a facility for local law enforcement to take criminal offenders off the streets for at least some period of time—and that can make all the difference for a home shattered by domestic violence, or a police officer needing to find a place to take someone who is acting out violently.

It costs a considerable amount of money to provide these services to the community. Our jail has between 4 and 5 mandatory staffing posts (plus adequate supervision for staff) that is needed for three shifts a day to make sure this custody facility is run efficiently and effectively, and according to the rulings of the courts that protect the rights of prisoners. That staffing level is basically true, no matter how many local or federal prisoners we have in custody.



Lack of adequate staff can lead to many problems affecting the safety, security and Constitutionality of the jail's operations. Cutting corners because we lack the proper staffing can lead to the kind of problems we've seen lately in our jail with employee burnout and lawsuits for failure to uphold inmates' rights. Many of the lawsuits are frivolous, but one was found by a federal judge last year to have some merit.

This is why we are in the predicament we face today with the closure of our jail. We have tried to hold on long enough to give voters the final say on whether we stay open or not. After the vote last November, I and my staff have been preparing to close the jail and move as many prisoners as our budget will allow to Polk County, thanks to an agreement we now have with Sheriff Wolfe and the Polk County Board of Commissioners. The current levy campaign is a citizen effort to forestall the direction in which we are rapidly moving.

No matter the outcome of the vote, the Office of Sheriff will still be here, and we will still work our hardest to keep the most serious offenders off the streets. But please be aware that most of the functions listed in this article will have come to an end in our County until such time that the operations of a local facility can be re-authorized.

Jeff Dickerson
Sheriff

March 29, 2014

Rumors and assumptions about the Sheriff's Office are rampant these days. To listen to our critics, one would have to believe that the public officials who have committed themselves to the safety of the community **we all live in** would willingly manipulate the voters and hold them hostage to their up or down vote on the jail.

Let me assure each of my fellow residents in this county, that no matter what happens with the jail levy vote, we will remain dedicated to providing the best public safety service possible with the resources committed to us.

The proof is in what our staff has continually accomplished in the last five years despite ever-decreasing resources to get the job done!

Yes, it's true, jail beds have been cut, but jail deputies continue to work long hours and long weeks under stressful conditions. Understaffed and working with some dangerous individuals, they have been able to keep this jail open. And despite the erroneous assumptions of some, they are at least able to provide a place for arresting officers to take those who break the peace in our county—even if it usually is only for a few days.

Yes, it's true, we don't always solve every crime. But our patrol deputies have worked very hard—even sacrificing time with their own families—responding to as many calls as possible. And even though we generally only have one regularly assigned deputy on duty at a time, they have definitely been solving crimes and making arrests. In this past year, our deputies made more arrests than most of the city police departments in this county—combined!

Yes, it's true, our front office is closed on Fridays, but our front office staff uses that time either to catch up on thousands of civil papers, police reports and concealed handgun license applications, or to go to outpost locations in Clatskanie and Vernonia to take Sheriff's Office civil services to citizens in those areas.



We continue to be buttressed by thousands of hours of volunteer service with reserve deputies and office helpers giving us a fighting chance to stay on top of a mountain of work.

I continue to be impressed and honored by the hard work of our staff. Even if we have to close the jail (and NONE of us wants to do that), those of us who remain will redouble our efforts to conserve the peace in our county. You can count on that!

Jeff Dickerson
Sheriff