



From the Sheriff's Desk

Archives 2016

Archived editions of "From the Sheriff's Desk" in 2016 are listed from top to bottom below with the most recent archived edition listed first. Previous year archives are listed under a separate link at: http://www.co.columbia.or.us/sheriff/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=169&Itemid=100

October 14, 2016

I am extremely proud of the way the Hightower homicide investigation was carried out in our County. This was the result of years of cooperation and relationship-building among the various agencies that contributed to the success of the Columbia County Major Crimes Team.

The major crimes team in this county is not a big team, but it consists of people who love their community and want to do their best to make our County a safe place to live, work and recreate. They have investigated and solved a number of high profile cases in recent years, including: the Depue homicide in Vernonia; the Attempted Homicide in St. Helens (Goin case); the Heller Homicide case in the Goble area, and now this murder up near Salmonberry Reservoir.

Because we have a small cadre of investigators available to handle these crimes, we have built relationships with each of our partner agencies in this County and with outside entities that help us bring the resources we need to gather the evidence necessary to produce justice for victims of serious crimes in our County.

One of the most important resources the major crimes team employed in this current investigation is the Columbia County Jail. Investigators relied heavily on our local jail to be able to corral those we believed were involved in the homicide and to conduct interviews that produced solid cases against three suspects.

I think back to what might have been--if we had not been able to pass an operating levy for the County Jail and that resource had not been available for this or a number of other investigations. In this case, we would not have had Jesse Lane in our jail--he would have been housed in Jackson County on his parole hold--and investigators would have needed to drive back and forth to interview him. And our other two suspects would not have been in custody at all.

The ability to interview these suspects and compare statements in real time, and then go back and confront them with inconsistencies was a big part of this investigation. Having all three in custody here, in Columbia County, made a huge difference to us solving this case so quickly--if at all.

So I'm grateful for the partnership we have with the taxpayers to provide this essential criminal justice facility. It is costly to run a facility like this, but oh, so necessary.

Thanks also to all those agencies (local, state and federal) who are helping us bring this case to court. There are so many who have come along side of us, but I'd like to point out one person in particular, and



that is Scappoose Police Chief Norm Miller, who is the Major Crimes Team coordinator. Chief Miller gave scores of hours to coordinating the investigative processes involved in this case. Every team needs someone versed in all the details that need to be accomplished and can work with the District Attorney's Office to ensure we are staying on track. Chief Miller carried out that task incredibly well, with the attitude of a servant. The Citizens of Scappoose have a gem in him.

Finally, I'd like to thank the individual members of the Major Crimes Team, police officers from St. Helens and Scappoose who helped with this investigation, and our deputies, who, as usual, went all-in and were available to help with search warrants, arrest teams and additional investigators when needed.

It is a tremendous privilege to serve as Sheriff in a County where we are able to lean on each other in order to promote the livable communities we all so desire.

Jail Provides Accountability, Hope

August 25, 2016

In my role as Sheriff of Columbia County over the past 8 years I have continued to be impressed with the dedication and commitment of our jail employees to create the kind of environment where those who have broken the peace within our communities are held accountable for their actions, and also, that they are given the opportunity to change.

The jail serves a number of different purposes, depending on the type of inmate we have: Some inmates are security risks who remain in our jail awaiting trial; some are spending just a few hours to a couple of days on arrest for charges for which they will appear later in court (but are needing time to cool off/come down from their high/get the mental health services they need, or to bail out, etc); some are serving sentences up to 1 year on misdemeanor convictions; some are on probation for prior offenses and have been sanctioned by a probation officer because they have violated the terms of their probation; and, others are criminals who were wanted in other jurisdictions but were passing through our County and are waiting for a transport to the outside jurisdiction.

In every case, the jail is never the final stop for those who have broken the law. Some inmates are eventually headed to other places (prison, or another county or state), but many eventually will be back in our own community after they have served their sentences, been released by the courts, or have fulfilled their sanctions.

And because we know that many who are in jail today will be back out in the community where we all live, our goal is to provide the kind of environment that encourages accountability and responsibility, as well as providing the impetus for change.



Jail is a place where people land after committing various acts of irresponsibility. But it also needs to be a place where those people can learn to refocus their energies on becoming more responsible members of society.

Since our resource levels have begun to return to more efficient and effective levels--and thanks to the help of some of our partner agencies--we are seeing new ways of providing the impetus for change within our inmate population. It starts with the commitment of our staff to provide an atmosphere where accountability and respect are paramount, but in more and more ways, it also includes opportunities for change.

Many inmates lack even a high school education, and we work with outside educational entities to offer G.E.D. programs for those inmates. We provide mental health services for inmates in crisis, and attempt to get them on a proactive mental health management program with Columbia Community Mental Health both now and when they are released from jail. We have benefitted from long-term spiritual counseling of inmates through our jail chaplaincy that has given many inmates hope for future change; and in recent months, we have begun to see new, promising, evidence-based programs designed to reduce recidivism by teaching life skills to inmates.

Through our contracted Food Service provider we have begun a Master Baker program. In this program, the inmates complete written assignments and receive a specific number of hours of hands on training. After successfully completing the program, the inmate will receive a certificate that is actually recognized by employers in the food service industry. We also have a Community Works Furlough program. That has been used in a recent beach clean up on Sauvie Island and to augment Community Justice work programs.

Most recently, grants through the Columbia Community Mental Health program have increased our mental health services to inmates whose primary reason for being in jail are mental health conflicts that lead to criminal behavior. We are working more closely with the courts and mental health services in our County to identify those inmates who could benefit from a diversion program designed to get treatment for offenders who qualify.

There are some who believe the best thing to do with offenders is to stack them like cord wood without distinction. That is not the way we operate here in Columbia County, however. Because the local jail is never the final landing place for those who commit crimes--and most inmates end up back in our communities--it behooves us to use the time and resources we have wisely: To create an atmosphere where, if you're doing the time associated with the crime, you do it with dignity and with the hope for a better tomorrow.

Sheriff Reacts to Dallas Texas Police Shootings

July 8, 2016



Anyone who has travelled around the world can tell you that we have the best criminal justice system that universally flawed human beings can produce. It obviously isn't perfect, and sometimes injustices occur. But our justice system even recognizes that fact, requiring proof beyond reasonable doubt in order to convict any person of a crime.

And even after someone is convicted, our system generally works to correct problems, not just punish those who create them. Prisons and jails--including ours here in Columbia County--are always looking for ways to make a positive impact on those we hold. Our intent is to create an environment where people take responsibility for their lives and hold themselves accountable to internal standards that make for peaceful re-entry into society.

Still, no one is under the delusion that law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, corrections officers and probation officers perform their jobs flawlessly. We train constantly to be aware of our own human weaknesses in carrying out our duties and have processes in place to ensure that when mistakes are made, we find a way to correct them.

When it comes to carrying out the functions of law enforcement and corrections, we expect our deputies to stand in the gap between law and order and those who seek to break the peace in our County. This entails risk. This requires vigilance in the midst of having to sometimes make split-second, life-and-death decisions--often in regard to the use of force.

And while there will occasionally be the times when police use of force is determined to be unjustified, the fact is that these times are extraordinarily rare. In fact police use of force itself is rare. In 2008, for example, an estimated 16.9 percent of all US citizens 16 years of age or older had some form of police contact. Of those, only 1.4 percent of them had police use or threaten force against them. In other words, just over two-tenths of 1 percent of all Americans age 16 or older reported either use of force or threatened use of force in 2008, and those numbers compare equally low to those in 2002 and 2005.ⁱ

These numbers fly in the face of those who suppose there is an uptick in police use of force. And they make clear that the attempt of some to paint the law enforcement profession with a broad brush is unfounded. Moreover, the reviews of police use of force often tell the sad story of an officer or officers who had no other choice but to use deadly physical force in order to stop a clear threat to their lives or the lives of others.

I don't know how these most recent police use of force cases will turn out. But I do know that several cases that have been used to stoke public furor over the lawful use of force in recent years have usually cleared the officers involved of any nefarious intent.

Use of force is never clean. Being in the midst of the turmoil that leads an officer to conclude that the use of force is necessary, is always difficult to reconstruct. But many more times than not, these uses of police force are reviewed and found to be justified--even if the details involved are disturbing or troubling.



Are they always justified? No. But neither is there an increase in rogue police officers. And even if mistakes are made in the use of force from time to time, there is a big difference between someone who 's intent was to save lives and someone whose intent was to take lives.

It is not the intent of law enforcement to go out and kill someone today. Law enforcement personnel are employed for the purpose of saving lives and standing against lawless behavior that threatens others.

But the intent of the shooter in Dallas yesterday was to kill. There is no justification for murdering police officers who are merely doing their jobs to protect and serve--no matter what someone thinks some other police officer has done.

The Sheriff's Office honors the devotion to duty exemplified by so many Dallas police officers during and following yesterday's shooting. We honor the dead. May the inquiry into what led to these officers' deaths not stop at the place of the tragic police shootings in Baton Rouge and Falcon Heights, Minn., but may it continue on to the false narrative that law enforcement is using force at greater rates and regularly depriving people of their constitutional rights.

That is not the way we do business here in Columbia County, and , I'm confident that it is not generally the way it is done *anywhere* within the criminal justice system in this Country. If actions to the contrary come to the surface, we all have a vested interest in seeing that improper conduct is dealt with decisively.

¹ See "Contacts between Police and the Public," October 2011, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics; <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpp08.pdf>

February 18, 2016

There are those out there who continue to mischaracterize the nature of support we receive for our budget from the rental of beds to the United States Marshal for the detention of federal prisoners. One such mischaracterization appeared in last week's "Letters" section of the Spotlight:

If it costs Columbia County taxpayers \$125 per bed to operate the jail at full capacity and rent beds to the U.S. Marshals Office for \$90, then the Columbia County taxpayers are responsible for paying the \$35 difference.



We have always maintained that the cost to add federal prisoners to the overall cost of running the jail is negligible in the grand scheme of things, and that adding federal prisoners to our jail at \$80 per inmate per night actually drives down the cost of jail operations to County taxpayers.

To understand how this is so, one must first comprehend that our primary mission in operating the jail is to keep Columbia County a safe place to live, work and recreate by maintaining a lawful, humane and effective incarceration facility that is also a safe and secure environment for *local offenders*.

If we did not need to keep local offenders accountable, we would not need to operate a jail, no matter how many federal beds we could rent out. The challenge that confining federal offenders presents in our facility is not one we want to take on unless the funding they provide to our services is a net financial *benefit* to the County.

So the question is: How much does it cost to provide such a facility for local offenders only? Once we determine what *that* cost is, we can then ask how much more it costs to add beds for the use of the U.S. Marshal's Service to house its prisoners.

Instead of making that analysis ourselves, we asked the Jail Operations Citizens Advisory Committee to review our numbers and come up with its own findings. Those findings will be contained in a report from the committee later this year. However, given the continued misunderstanding of our budget that is out there, I want to provide a brief description of the conclusions the committee will provide, along with a brief description of how the committee arrived at those conclusions.

The primary costs to provide safety and security for the jail are employee costs, and those costs are roughly the same (except for some minor clerical changes). In order to provide safety and security to the jail with 70 local prisoners, or to do the same for 135 local and federal prisoners combined changes very little—when it comes to the cost of labor inside the facility. This is because we have posts inside the jail that must be filled on three shifts per day. These posts are necessary and do not change whether we have 70 prisoners or 135 prisoners. In addition to employee costs, changes in medical costs between 70 or 135 prisoners are negligible, as well.

There are some savings to be found in clerical costs, utility costs and food costs. But, in what would be a \$5.3 million budget in 2015-16 for housing local prisoners only, becomes an approximately \$5.5 million budget when you add the federal prisoners. This computes roughly to an additional cost of \$11 per night per federal inmate—when the USM is paying \$80 per night per inmate.

This drives the cost per inmate down in the scenario developed by the writer of the letter to editor quoted above. Without federal inmates, the committee found that the cost per inmate per night is roughly \$181 per night, but by adding the service to the USM—who pays to keep their prisoners—the cost per inmate per night goes down.

Another way to see this in broad terms is that, in this year's budget, USM was projected to provide \$1.6 million to the cost of operating the jail. If we take that money away, we do not have enough revenue to operate the jail at minimum capacity without an additional \$1.4 million from the taxpayer.



Federal bed rentals save the local taxpayer money. We have NO other motive in providing this service than to drive down the cost of providing a jail to LOCAL prisoners.

ⁱ See "Contacts between Police and the Public," October 2011, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics; <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpp08.pdf>