

Sheriff's candidates face criticism for mistakes

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan apologized Friday for ignoring a Helix man's calls for help more than a year ago.

Yet moments before, Rowan told that man and 30 other audience members: "I'm your sheriff 24/7, 365."

Rowan and challenger Ryan Lehnert spoke at the Milton-Freewater Republican Women's Club candidates forum at the Milton-Freewater Community Center. Club president Suni Danforth was the host and read questions from the audience, which included undersheriff Jim Littlefield, sheriff's Capt. Kathy Lieuallen, two sheriff's detectives and Athena Mayor Jon Shafer, who also works for the sheriff's office.

The first shot landed on Lehnert, a corporal with the Pendleton Police Department and a former Oregon

National Guard platoon sergeant who served in 2004 in Iraq. He was asked why Pendleton police demoted him seven years ago from sergeant to officer.

Lehnert explained he worked night shift and spent too much time hanging out at the county's dispatch center. He said he was not doing anything different from other Pendleton cops. However, he admitted, he also sent another officer to answer a call for service that he should have taken. That led Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts to strip Lehnert of his rank for not fulfilling his duties as a supervisor.

His boss was right for taking the action, Lehnert told the crowd, and the demotion allowed him to acquire new police skills. Roberts now endorses him for sheriff, he said, and so too does Umatilla Tribal Police Chief Tim Addleman and Pilot Rock Chief Bill



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County Sheriff's candidate Ryan Lehnert answers a question during a forum sponsored by the Milton-Freewater Republican Women's Club on Friday as current sheriff Terry Rowan looks on.

Caldera, who until early this summer was the Pendleton police lieutenant.

Lehnert also said no local chiefs have signed on to support Rowan in his re-election effort.

Rowan also took a shot when Jim Williams of Helix said that what happened

to his daughter about a year ago eroded any trust he had in Rowan and his office.

Williams recalled his daughter called him one night after someone chased her down a county road. She is smart and tough, he said, and volunteered in some of the nation's poorest commu-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan addresses an audience.

nities and taught in foreign counties, yet what she experienced here frightened her more than anything.

"I waited for three days for a response from an officer," he told Rowan. "I went to your office and asked to speak with you."

But even that proved fruitless, Williams said, and after waiting 45 minutes a

deputy came out and said he could not help.

"I tried to call you on your cellphone, I left messages ... and no response back," Williams said. "I've lost full confidence in your office."

Rowan offered an apology for his failure and his department's.

"There is no excuse for my not calling you back," he said, then pivoted to talking points on the improvements he made in the sheriff's office, including keeping more offenders in the county jail and increasing the patrol division from seven deputies to 14.

Rowan touted his experience and the work he has done as sheriff as reasons why voters should send him back for a second term. Lehnert expressed his passion for helping others and desire to hold the sheriff's office more accountable to the citizens of the county.

Walden to visit Eastern Oregon veterans this week

Rep. Greg Walden will meet with veterans and their advocates in Eastern Oregon this week to discuss challenges facing veterans in the region and his work with Congress to address veterans' issues.

His agenda includes stops in Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater.

On Thursday, Walden will attend a Hermiston Rotary meeting at noon before meeting with Hermiston Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion chapters at the VFW, 45 W. Cherry Ave. in Hermiston at 2:30 p.m.

There he plans to hear from local veterans about their experiences accessing care at the VA and discuss current efforts in the House of Representatives to improve VA programs.

On Saturday Walden will visit Pendleton to meet with the Backcountry Horsemen of Oregon at 11 a.m. at Shari's, 319 SE Nye Ave. in Pendleton, and attend the demobilization of Pendleton's National Guard unit (1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment) at the Army Aviation Support Facility Hanger, 2110 NW 56th Drive in Pendleton at 2 p.m.

HSD students offered dental health screenings

Students in the Hermiston School District will be given dental health screenings over the course of the next month.

Advantage Dental has been contracted to provide the service, according to a news release from the school district, through the Oregon Community Foundation. Students with parent permission can receive an oral health screening, fluoride coatings, sealants and silver fluoride.

Oregon Community Foundation's Comprehensive School-Based Dental Health Program targets students in kindergarten

through eighth grade. It is an effort to help meet the requirements set forth by Oregon House Bill 2972 to collect dental screening information for students under the age of 8 who are starting an educational program for the first time. New students are required to have certification of a dental health screening from a qualified provider in the past 12 months.

For questions about the screenings, contact Jon Mishra, the school district's director of special programs, at 541-667-6020 or via email at jon.mishra@hermiston.k12.or.us.

County cuts fair local employees as EOTEC construction moves forward

By PHIL WRIGHT AND JADE MCDOWELL

Staff Writers

Don Slone's job as Umatilla County Fair manager came to an end Saturday, along with maintenance manager Ed Peterson, as work on the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center continues.

Construction of the rodeo arena began last week, and a contract for purchase of the barns to host the Umatilla County Fair in 2017 should be ready for approval during the EOTEC board's Oct. 21 meeting.

County Commissioner Larry Givens said moving the fair to EOTEC means the county no longer needs to fund the positions.

"We don't have a fairgrounds any more," Givens said. "And a lot of the fair manager position was overseeing the grounds."

The county hired Slone and Peterson in February. County counsel Doug Olsen said the fair manager made \$5,181 a month and the maintenance lead made \$2,934. Givens said there have been no decisions on who will manage the 2017 fair and who will pay for that work. The city of Hermiston and Umatilla County are co-owners of EOTEC.

The fair's office assistant, Angie McNalley, will keep her job. Olsen said she is the lone county employee working at EOTEC.

The county planned to extend its lease for the old fair site, which the Herm-



CONTRIBUTED BY THE CITY OF HERMISTON

Ground was broken on the rodeo grounds at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center last week.

iston School District now owns, from its current end date of Dec. 31 to June, in order to accommodate a horse sale and collegiate rodeo. But Givens said the school district, which bought the property, decided not to extend the lease.

Not being able to extend the lease has some cost advantages.

"Economically, it makes more sense for us to put our efforts into getting the fair moved," he said.

Mike Kay, executive director of operations for the school district, said the district did offer to extend the county's lease through June 1, 2017, using the same terms as the current lease, but that was "not acceptable" to the county.

However, he said that the district has reached out to the groups that were plan-

ning to hold events there and is working to make sure those events continue to stay in Hermiston. The Hermiston Senior Center has extended its lease to June.

Kay said the school board would be discussing the district's post-lease plans for the property during its next meeting.

Randy Hull of the Hermiston Horse Sale Extravaganza said he still planned to hold the February and May sales at the old fairgrounds, in cooperation with the school district, before moving to EOTEC as soon as it is ready.

"I have every intention to stay in Hermiston," he said.

The county, meanwhile, has until Dec. 31 to move all of the fair's equipment over to the EOTEC

grounds. The county commission recently approved \$30,000 to build a secure storage site there.

Despite some delays, members of the EOTEC board and of Hendon Construction have said they feel confident the arena will be done in time to host the Farm-City Pro Rodeo in August 2017.

As construction of the rodeo arena begins, Kay (who volunteers as a member of the rodeo board in addition to his job at the school district) said the rodeo board is grateful to Hendon Construction for stepping up and making it possible to finish the arena in time for the 2017 Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

"We're very excited to be able to put these plans in motion," he said.

Smith said the EOTEC project in its entirety will result in a facility that can meet the region's needs while not asking the community's taxpayers to shoulder "crippling debt" to pay for it.

"Too often with the development of large public facilities like this, the stakeholders get too anxious and end up making poor business decisions which end up saddling the public with major long-term property tax debt," he said. "The community should be very proud that their patience and generosity has allowed the EOTEC Board to develop this project in a logical and fiscally responsible manner."

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