

Public Works crew hard at work

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Keeping Sisters streets and public restrooms clean and landscaping maintained is the responsibility of a group of dedicated City employees who do their jobs seven days a week in the freezing cold of winter and the broiling heat of summer.

This crew, part of the Public Works Department, consists of five field staff and one seasonal worker. Public Works Director Paul Bertagna hopes to add another full-time person next fiscal year.

“The seasonal position is difficult to fill because the City wages are not competitive with private landscape maintenance companies,” said Bertagna.

Public Works is responsible for maintenance of the city streets, starting with the sweeping up of cinders and debris left from the winter to chip-sealing and striping in the good weather. They also handle the signage on all city streets.

Spring cleanup of the city in preparation for tourist season takes eight weeks in April and May. There are 220 street bulb-outs throughout town

that require raking, weeding, and applying bark for that all-summer-long tidy look.

Prior to Memorial Day, 60 hanging flower baskets from C & C Nursery will be installed along city streets. Most of the pots have automatic drip irrigation but there are some that require hand watering. The pots are planted with wave petunias which don’t require deadheading (the removal by hand of spent blooms).

Bertagna credits the season-long beauty of the baskets to Robin Bentz, who he refers to as “a guru” when it comes to the petunias.

An unpleasant part of the crew’s job is cleaning up after dogs. This spring the bulb-outs were full of dog waste that had to be removed; that despite the 10 (plus two more coming online soon) dog waste stations located throughout town and in every City park. During the summer, the stations are refilled with bags every week, calling for over 20,000 bags a year. Each dog waste station costs \$110 to install.

“I was amazed at the amount of dog waste we have found in the bulb-outs,” said Wanda Braughton,

public works maintenance supervisor.

Mowing of all lawns in City parks and other City-owned properties is done on a four-day cycle during the summer.

“We are very fortunate to have Gus Johnson on staff,” Bertagna said.

He used to work on the golf courses at Black Butte Ranch and is highly skilled in all facets of turf maintenance, which Bertagna describes as “a science and a fine art.”

Johnson is the lead in charge of the parks and oversees the irrigation, fertilizing, and mowing. In addition, Johnson is a jack-of-all-trades, skilled in a number of areas like carpentry and concrete work.

“It’s nice to have specialty people in a small organization,” said Bertagna.

In the fall, it takes the crew four weeks to “put the town to bed” for the winter. Bertagna told *The Nugget* there are plans for next fall to cut back all the native grasses and conduct one last weed patrol to hopefully make cleanup easier in the spring.

A majority of the bulb-outs have been converted to subsurface drip irrigation to



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Josh Stotts, who grew up and attended school in Sisters, is one of the hardworking members of the Sisters Public Works maintenance crew .

more economically water and reduce evaporation. Through capital improvement projects, all lighting and irrigation on town streets is now on the City’s grid, allowing for better control of resources.

“I can’t say enough about our crew,” Bertagna emphasized. “They take such pride in the way the town looks. They have the right mentality and they work hard.”

That sentiment was confirmed by Bentz, who said, “We’d do it (beautifying the town) without the tourists coming. We live here and we take pride in the city.”

The safety of the workers out among traffic is what keeps Bertagna awake at night. Drivers are reminded to watch for their equipment and bright reflective vests and give them a wide berth.

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