



## The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

### Community Policing

Sisters doesn't need its own police department.

To begin with, we can't afford one. Police departments, like an effective military, are extremely expensive to operate and maintain. That's particularly true if the plan is to staff it with highly qualified and motivated law-enforcement officers who aren't just station-warmers trolling for a double-dip on their pension, or badge-heavy control freaks tucking in to small-town life after bouncing from agency to agency.

Those folks, the AA pool of lateral candidates, are out there, and they tend to make their new agency worse rather than better because they aren't really suited for 21st-century law enforcement in the first place. Deschutes County recently

had one run for Sheriff, and he is now suing for millions of dollars because — well, let's just say he is suing and leave it at that.

It costs a lot of money to defend those suits, which never stop coming, and which explains why municipalities and counties are constantly settling the suits against them, even when they have done absolutely nothing wrong.

It's always cheaper, in the end, to settle.

To attract highly qualified, highly motivated people — which one presumes would be the governing idea — requires offering a competitive starting salary because law enforcement, like any other job, is a competitive market. The alternative, hiring bad cops on the cheap, is far more expensive in the long run than hiring the right people in the first place.

There are dozens of other costs built into police departments. A new fleet of vehicles, for instance, complete with radios, rifle-racks, cages, and enough electronics in the trunk to outfit a space shuttle, doesn't come cheap. There is, naturally, on-going maintenance on all of those things, and considering that most police cars are on the street all day, every day, and all night, every night, they need frequent maintenance and replacement.

On-going maintenance on a fleet of cop cars requires infrastructure which, since Sisters doesn't have any, means contracting with a menagerie of mechanics and IT people to keep both the cars and on-board computers running 24 hours a day.

A decent computer-aided dispatch system, which allows cops to retrieve and input information and to write reports while in the field, can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, with on-going costs for continuous storage of gazillions of bytes of data.

If the new Sisters PD is to be outfitted with body and dash cams, which one presumes the City would want to protect itself from use of force and other issues organic to law enforcement, there will need to be a system in place to store all of that data forever. Which costs A LOT of money.

There is administrative staff. A handful of new, non-cop City employees with benefits starts to look expensive without even diving into the details.

We would probably need a magistrate to handle violations of City ordinances, and staff to support that new entity.

There are booking fees, fuel, ammunition, weapons, and administrative supplies, none of which come free.

There is also the on-going training required every year of every officer. Most of those training events would presumably take place somewhere else, meaning Sisters would take on the cost of sending officers to schools, often for weeks at a time. This is expensive stuff, so expensive that during difficult financial times the first item cut from most department budgets is money for training.

And here's the rub: Contracting with the Sheriff's Office works. DCSO has the infrastructure in place, and they have leadership. Sheriff Nelson has done an excellent job of cleaning out some rotten apples and the mold they left behind. He's been relentless about dropping the hammer on folks in his own department who couldn't, or just wouldn't, rise up to the enormous challenge of policing with integrity.

Which is precisely what the community elected him to do.

DCSO deputies are professional, courteous, and pack enough punch to mix it up with any serious criminal individual or element trying to leverage a foothold in our town.

They aren't here enough, which is a fair complaint. Sisters should pony up the money to keep deputies here full time, particularly

at night, which is when knuckleheads do most of their capering. Burglaries are generally a daytime event, because people aren't home, but tweakers, junkies, and vandalism types are vampires.

Having a couple of pipe-hitters in uniform patrolling our town at night would go a very long way to dissuade the growing problem of nuisance crime in Sisters.

And we can all be thankful that Sheriff Nelson's attitude toward traffic enforcement leans toward education over citation. Robotically scratching cites to every stupid motorist does two bad things: first, it destroys the community-policing model, and second, it deprives the officer of discretion, which feeds back into the first problem on an endless loop. Warnings can go a very long way and are more in keeping with the kind of law enforcement Sisters residents want and expect.

Let's not reinvent the wheel. Let's spend a little more money to get more deputies in Sisters for longer periods of time. It really is that simple. In the meantime, let's focus on getting a new roundabout on the other end of town, which might help alleviate the far more serious problem of making a left turn anywhere in Sisters between April and November.

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These results, published 3-12-18, combine answers from 308 Oregon adults, ages 18+ who participated in a Pulse Marketing Survey. Information provided Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

