

TUMULT: Recruiting is critical element of accountability

Continued from page 1

as of July 1 — is already acting as an interim, supervising the deputies who are currently working in Sisters and the west county.

City administration and council will participate in the final selection of the deputies and their lieutenant. They're not expected to be in place till later in the year.

"Some of it depends on the training of the new recruits we have on the road — and some of that has been delayed due to COVID-19," Sheriff Nelson said.

Recruitment for the sheriff's office has been a challenge for some time, and Nelson sees that situation only getting more acute in the current climate.

"I do anticipate more challenges in that area," he said.

The Sheriff said that the agency has done three back-to-back recruiting drives — and needs to do more.

"We will not be able to fill all of our positions in patrol out of the third (cycle) so we're going to do a fourth," he said.

There may be more of a reluctance in the populace to pursue a law enforcement career these days, but Nelson said that a large part of the recruitment issue comes down to more stringent standards.

"We are seeing a higher washout in the background and probation period," he said.

That's actually desirable, the sheriff says.

"As you can imagine, this job is not for everyone," he said. "We are looking to get people out who don't belong before they become a problem for the profession."

Nelson considers recruitment the foundation for reform and accountability.

"The accountability piece, look, that starts with recruitment and hiring the right people," he said. "That's where it starts."

The "right people," according to Nelson, recognize and buy into a culture based on "customer service." Nelson wants recruits with a positive attitude, who function well in a team environment; people who have an ethic of public service and who "have compassion and empathy for the people we deal with."

Nelson acknowledged that there has been significant turnover at the sheriff's office during his tenure since 2016 — some of that normal retirement or job-change losses, some terminations. Several actions flowed from the arrest and conviction of DCSO Captain Scott Beard who received a five-year prison sentence in September 2017 and was ordered to repay \$205,747 after pleading guilty

to two counts of money laundering and two counts of theft from programs that receive federal funds.

While some see the turnover as evidence of turmoil in the sheriff's office, Nelson considers such personnel actions as representative of accountability and transparency. In an interview last spring, he told *The Nugget* that he believes that the public has a right to know about personnel issues to the degree authorized under the law.

"We employ human beings, just like anybody else," he said then. "I don't expect them to be perfect, but we will deal with personnel issues as they come up."

The imperative for law enforcement officers to

hold their peers and colleagues accountable has been emphasized in calls for police reform. Activists have recently promoted the principle of a "duty to intervene" among police officers. Nelson aligns with that principle.

Nelson noted that sheriff's office policy has long held that deputies are obligated to report misconduct or be held accountable for misconduct themselves. The Sheriff told *The Nugget* that that policy is being amended to add a duty to intervene in incidents of misconduct — a practice that he says is already at work in the culture.

He acknowledged that, "we've received reports of behavior that is unacceptable." At the same time, "we

know (deputies) are intervening because we've heard of the examples."

Nelson said that he is arranging for implicit bias training and an officer intervention training is already scheduled (*see sidebar below*).

Some changes have come the hard way — in the wake of serious incidents.

In 2016, Deschutes County paid a \$1 million settlement to the family of a man who died in custody in the jail in 2014. Edwin Mays was arrested for intoxication. Jail staff thought he was high on methamphetamine, though Mays denied taking drugs. Mays died of an overdose, and investigators reviewed his case for possible misconduct by the Deschutes County Jail staff. Reports indicated that staff mocked Mays and were slow to seek medical treatment for him.

Nelson told *The Nugget* that personnel action was taken against three jail staff in regards to the incident, and that procedures and medical staffing and preparedness were improved in response to the incident. The jail now has 24/7 medical staffing and the sheriff's office works with a medical director, Eden Aldrich, FNP.

Dealing with people who have mental health-related behavioral problems or who are in crisis can be a fraught

and complicated problem for law enforcement, and there are calls nationwide to shift away from law enforcement intervention to the use of "crisis workers."

In Deschutes County, dispatchers will send out a personnel from the county public health department's Mobile Crisis Unit at deputy request to help deal with such incidents. Nelson also holds out high hopes for the newly-opened stability center designed to provide an alternative to incarceration for those whose brush with the law stems from a mental health and/or substance abuse problem. (*See related story, page 3.*)

The long-term wellbeing of law enforcement personnel is also a key concern. DCSO is in the final stages of development of a comprehensive "Health of the Force" initiative to bolster mental and emotional well-being among personnel — and their families — who operate in an exceptionally stressful and demanding environment.

"We're asking normal people to deal with abnormal situations," Nelson said.

DCSO is enhancing its counseling offerings on a "no questions asked voucher basis." Nelson recognizes that

See TUMULT on page 22

Verbal Judo Institute to train county sheriff's personnel

The Verbal Judo Institute will be providing Officer to Officer Intervention Training to the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office on July 13 and July 17.

One hundred sworn deputies are scheduled to receive this training offered by Greg Walker, long-time Verbal Judo instructor and co-author of "The Verbal Judo Way of Leadership — Empowering the Thin Blue Line from the Inside Up".

"For 37 years the Verbal Judo Institute has provided timely, ground-breaking training in tactical verbal communications and skill sets," said Walker. "If you truly want to change the traditional police culture you have to implement a new philosophy of action and provide training to all levels of an organization on why and how to intervene when a co-worker or peer is committing an administrative or

criminal act."

Walker, a retired Oregon law enforcement officer, served as a reserve officer and civilian CERT team instructor for the Bend Police Department in the mid-1980s. In 2004, he was a criminal intelligence officer for the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office under Sheriff Les Stiles. Walker's credentials include serving as a police officer in both Sunriver and Astoria.

He was a DPSST CONTENT level instructor in multiple hard and soft law enforcement topics including Verbal Judo. Medically retiring from law enforcement in 2006 due to military service-connected injuries and wounds, Walker spent the past 10 years working as a Department of Defense certified Warrior Care case manager and advocate in the area of behavioral health. He retired in 2018.

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