

Bend officer is seeking sheriff's office

By **Jim Cornelius**
Editor in Chief

Bend Police Department Patrol Officer Scott Schaier is challenging incumbent Sheriff Shane Nelson for the county's top law enforcement job in the November 3 election.

He told *The Nugget* that he was motivated to run by conversations he's had with law enforcement officers, including deputies from DCSO that he believes indicate a leadership change is needed.

"Part of me just believes that no election should go uncontested, no matter the size of the election or the position," he said.

Schaier began his law enforcement career with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and, since moving with his wife to Central Oregon in 2013, he has served with the Bend Police Department as a patrol officer, training officer, and as a member of the Central Oregon Emergency Response Team. He was serving as a school resource officer until the COVID-19 school closures and is currently working patrol.

Schaier acknowledged that he has no administrative or command experience in law enforcement and has not sought promotion within his agency.

"I've never applied to promote in my career at this point," he said.

The candidate told *The Nugget* that, while he sees the value in promoting through the ranks traditionally, he believes that the office of sheriff requires a fresh outlook and temperament in order to change the culture.

"When we promote or elect the same résumé, we get the same result," he said.

He also noted that he managed personnel and budgets in the private sector in his family's car business

in Long Beach, California, before transitioning into a law-enforcement career.

"Your role is to take care of the staff and they will take care of the customer," he said.

Taking care of the staff, for Schaier means attentiveness to the well-being of sheriff's office personnel. He acknowledged recent moves by the sheriff's office to institute wellness programs for deputies, but he argues that Sheriff Nelson was slow to move in that direction when other agencies were already acting in the area.

"It's about revolutionizing the profession," he said. "That would be top priority."

Schaier believes that the sheriff's office has been slow to adapt, in part due to its command structure. He told *The Nugget* that he would establish an Undersheriff position to help manage day-to-day operations so that the sheriff can focus on strategic planning and building community relationships.

"We're not seeing a lot of motivation and foresight... what are we going to do years down the road?" he said.

"I think we need to learn a little bit more from the private sector about deadlines," he said. "We don't need to wait years to implement these new ideas."

Schaier is supportive of the DCSO's enhanced presence in Sisters, established through a new contract agreed between DCSO and the city of Sisters this year.

"Having that dedicated team out there in Sisters is very important," Schaier said.

Schaier said that he would expect deputies to attend homeowners association meetings, Chamber meetings and integrate themselves into the life of the community.

He said that he would work closely with City leaders and other agency chiefs, particularly to ensure that the

area is prepared for wildfire impacts.

"My style of leadership is, without question, collaborative," he said.

The candidate also expressed a willingness to meet with virtually any organization — outside of outright hate groups — at a time when law enforcement is under intense scrutiny and public pressure.

"I think this is a time when we need a sheriff who can build those bridges," he said. "Our profession needs to do a little better job at times humbling themselves and just listening."

Schaier has intense personal experience of the intersection of mental health and law enforcement. In December 2016, Schaier and another Bend PD officer shot and killed 31-year-old Michael Jacques during a traffic stop. Jacques reportedly struggled with addiction and mental health issues.

An Oregon Department of Justice investigation concluded there wasn't sufficient evidence to find Schaier criminally liable. In 2018, the City of Bend's insurance company paid an \$800,000 settlement to Jacques' family.

The officer told *The Nugget* previously that he was not privy to the reasoning behind the settlement.

Schaier told *The Nugget* that he continues to be certain that he made the right decision to fire his weapon in that incident, but he wishes "that he and I's stars would never have aligned that night."

He said that he sees value in finding ways to engage mental health professionals in situations that, under current conditions, usually start with law enforcement involvement. That might be a way to avert situations becoming confrontations and turning violent.

"We need to get ahead of this kind of thing before they ever occur," he said.

"Officers are always going to have to be safe and they are going to have to make split-second decisions... and will have to live

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— Scott Schaier



PHOTO PROVIDED

with those decisions for the rest of their lives," he said.

The candidate strongly supports the use of body cameras.

"They are not the be-all-end-all to police reform," he said. However, he believes they allow transparency through the release of "real time, factual information" and "they also protect officers when it comes to fraudulent complaints against them."

Schaier said that the current national climate of suspicion and hostility to law enforcement can be challenging, but locally there is a strong well of support and trust between law enforcement and the community.

"We're super fortunate to have that relationship already built," he said.

It's a relationship he hopes to continue and enhance if elected Sheriff of Deschutes County.

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