

SHERIFF: Concern that easing sanctions increases use

Continued from page 1

scheduled before the organization People's Rights Oregon 5 (PR OR5), which meets regularly at Aspen Lakes. The organization, which proclaims that it is "Uniting Neighbors to Defend Their Families, Faith, Freedom and Future," has been negatively depicted as right-wing and "extremist" in some local media (*see related story, page 7*).

The January 18 presentation had been characterized as a "closed-door meeting," because PR OR5 said that it was not allowing media to attend the function.

After a query by *The Nugget*, Sheriff Nelson invited *The Nugget* to attend and cover the presentation, to which PR OR5 organizers agreed.

Nelson told the assemblage that he is supportive of some of the thinking behind the ballot measure, regarding ensuring that resources are made available to get users and addicts "back on track."

"If you do not give people resources," he said, "our jail becomes a revolving door."

However, Nelson asserted, removing enforcement and the threat of incarceration from the equation handicaps the effectiveness of intervention.

"In order for something to work, enforcement has to be part of it," he said.

Nelson said that the way Measure 110 leaves the law, a user could rack up essentially

unlimited numbers of citations with no consequences. And sometimes consequences get users into the "system" where they can get court-ordered help.

Nelson emphasized that manufacture or sale of drugs is still treated as a crime.

"If you manufacture or sell, that's a different story," he said. "You're still in the criminal justice system."

But "personal use" has wide parameters.

The audience was clearly taken aback by the amounts of drugs considered to be for personal use under Measure 110:

- Less than 1 gram of heroin
- Less than 1 gram, or less than 5 pills, of MDMA
- Less than 2 grams of methamphetamine
- Less than 40 units of LSD
- Less than 12 grams of psilocybin
- Less than 40 units of methadone
- Less than 40 pills of oxycodone
- Less than 2 grams of cocaine.

The sheriff said that an early "snapshot" indicates that a large proportion of cited violators fail to appear and very few have received a health assessment under the law.

Nelson emphasized that he is not opposed to a behavioral health approach to drug and/or mental health issues, which are becoming increasingly prevalent in Central Oregon.

He said that "a (law enforcement) uniform is not always the answer" in responding to mental health crises.

He noted that the community and the Sheriff's Office "made a significant investment in the Stabilization Center" next to the Sheriff's Station in Bend. The Center serves those in need of short-term mental health crisis assessment and stabilization. It also helps people in mental health crisis who have been referred to law enforcement or diverted from a hospital emergency room.

"I'm prepared to increase that investment, because not everybody (with problems) belongs in the criminal justice system," he said.

The Sheriff also noted that DCSO is partnering with Ideal Option, an outpatient medication-assisted treatment for addiction in Operation Guardian Angel, where users and addicts can bring in their drugs and paraphernalia without sanction and be put in touch with treatment options. The program comes at no cost to DCSO.

"I look forward to seeing what kind of success Operation Guardian Angel will bring," he said.

Sheriff Nelson entertained an extensive question-and-answer period, asking that questions be confined to the subject of the presentation. With a handful of exceptions, they were.

One questioner asked what good solutions there might be to drug use/abuse and associated social problems. He specifically asked about a return to family values.

Nelson noted that many people who run into trouble with drugs have grown up in "negative environments," with very little support in their family and social

environment.

"They need wraparound services," he said. "You have to have mentoring, life-skills programs. Frankly, I will tell you, you get the best intervention with the youth."

That said, however, Nelson recalled a man he knows who didn't turn his life around until he was in his 40s, when he started taking advantage of the services on offer to break the cycle of addiction and incarceration.

"You never know when it's going to click," he said. "You have to keep offering it."

Other questions regarded whether people are moving to Oregon to take advantage of a more permissive environment around drug use, and whether Measure 110 contributes to human trafficking and homelessness.

Sheriff Nelson said it's too early to have reliable data on those questions, although he said there is anecdotal evidence that people have moved to Oregon for legal marijuana use and/or jobs. Regarding human trafficking, he said "there is definitely exposure here," and "I don't think it's that big of a leap" to associate it with drugs. He noted that there are several nonprofits working in Central Oregon to combat human trafficking.

"It's very real," he said.

Regarding homelessness, he said that a combination of resources and enforcement is necessary to cope with an increasingly prevalent issue.

"There's rules that everybody has to follow; that has to be an element as you offer resources," he said.

To considerable agreement in the audience, he said that issues of homelessness

and often-associated mental health issues should be approached with compassion.

"I'm not trying to speak coldly about this issue," he said. "Right now we're just trying to mitigate a problem, because it won't be solved."

Nelson said that, "(Methamphetamine) continues to be our biggest problem," and that "we have more work than we can get to as far as illegal marijuana grows."

Sheriff Nelson told *The Nugget* that he is willing to offer a presentation on Measure 110 to other organizations in the county, and a video of the January 18 presentation will be posted on the DCSO Facebook page this week.

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