

Card sharks



John Kochis (left) of E&J Gallo Winery and AMA member Szabolcs Sudy contemplate their losses at the blackjack table Wednesday night. The Main Event was part of the Career and Internship Fair and allowed students to network. *Amanda Cowan/Emerald*

Forest Work Camp losing funding

The camp for prisoners falls behind regular jails in budget priority

By Michael Hines
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Lane County Sheriff's Office moved forward Wednesday with its plan to scale back a politically popular corrections program.

Sheriff Jan Clements told the County Board of Commissioners that he wants the Lane County Jail's Forest Work Camp to run on a more limited basis because a state addition to the jail scheduled to be completed in the spring is sapping funds.

The addition will require extra staffing, and the Sheriff's Office will have to move personnel from the popular camp in Alma, Ore., about 18 miles southwest of Veneta, to the jail.

The work camp is a 120-bed program for minimum-security inmates to do unpaid forest work, mostly for public agencies.

Funding for the camp was part of a county levy that failed last fall.

"The Forest Work Camp enjoys an approval rating by the voting

public higher than any other program included in the ballot measure," over 70 percent, Clements said in a written report to the board.

This kind of public support is what led the board to support Clements' plan to keep the camp open on a limited basis.

"I think it's paramount for future relations with the community that we listen to them," said Commissioner Anna Morrison.

The board sparked a public outcry when it defunded the work camp several years ago because of a need to keep the jail fully funded, said Board Chairman Bobby Green.

"I don't want to go through that process of reeducating the public on why we closed the work camp," he said.

All of the commissioners voiced their support for the camp but agreed keeping the jail fully funded is the priority.

Clements said he hopes to have the work camp at full capacity by July 1, 2001, at the "absolute latest," through another levy attempt or other funding alternatives.

The work camp will soon downsize to 30 beds, with one or

two deputies on duty at a time.

"Our record there has been exceptional," said Sheriff's Lt. Bob Perdue. "Since 1988, when we started the program, we have not had one serious problem."

Perdue said that even after scaling back he expects no problems.

Commissioners and sheriff's deputies like the work camps because the expanded number of slots allows more inmates to move out of the jails.

But with 90 fewer beds at the work camp, the jail, which is already releasing about 80 inmates a week because of overcrowding, will have to find room for those people. There is no extra room at the jail, forcing the release of more inmates.

Releasing inmates early only adds to the "revolving door" reputation of the jail, Commissioner Cindy Weeldreyer said.

The work camp will reduce its numbers in February.

And although he didn't like it, Commissioner Bill Dwyer agreed with Clements' proposal to scale back the work camp.

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