

County looking for funds to ease filled jail

■ Opponents to new jail building suggest alternative law enforcement options

By Andrew Adams
Oregon Daily Emerald

Faced with an overcrowded jail and an underused juvenile detention center, Lane County is looking to raise funds to expand its criminal justice system.

Nearly 4,500 prisoners left the county jail before completing their sentences last year, and Sheriff Jan Clements hopes voters will approve measures 20-38 and 20-39 this November to cut that number back. Stephen Carmichael, director for the John Serbu Youth Campus at the Lane County Juvenile Justice Center, is also campaigning for the measures because he says they will force more young offenders to face the consequences of their crimes.

But the opposition, led by grassroots political activist Steve Kutcher, says that if voters approve the

measures, they will provide funding for unnecessary prisons.

Ballot Measure 20-38 would generate \$10 million a year for four years by increasing property taxes 55 cents for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. These funds would support a larger population at the county inmate work camp and Juvenile Justice Center, add staff to supervise the increased populations and open a female wing of the juvenile center's alcohol and drug treatment center.

Ballot Measure 20-39 would provide more than \$8 million to build a new jail intake center that would allow the incoming population to increase by 65 people. Like 20-38, Measure 20-39 would raise property taxes by 3 cents for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Carmichael said the two initiatives are vital to preserve the effectiveness of the county's justice system because without adequate funding, juveniles won't learn they can be held responsible for their actions.

"Last year we had about 5,000

crimes, but we had only 36 beds," he said. "There's no way to hold kids responsible."

In addition to not learning a lesson, offenders also know their stay in the detention center could be short, he said.

"They all know that we're full, and if someone comes in they know someone has to be going out," he said.

If the two measures pass, Carmichael said the Department of Youth Services can staff another holding area at the justice center to increase its population by 32. He said the increase will allow the county to handle about 2,000 juveniles a year.

"We'll be able to hold them for four to five days," Carmichael said, "That's enough for most kids to get the message there are consequences."

Clements also said that it's hard to make inmates feel punished when they know they have a chance to get out of prison early. Under federal regulations passed in 1986, all jails have to keep their populations at certain levels by releasing in-

mates through a matrix system that figures which criminals pose the least threat to society. Clements said this entails a constant "juggling act" with inmates to ensure the wrong ones are not released.

The number of prisoners released has steadily decreased since it reached its peak in 1997, when Clements said that for "every 100 people booked in, we threw 45 out the door." Now the release rate is about 29 percent, and Clements said if the two measures pass the release rate could possibly drop to below 20 percent.

There are currently 485 total beds at the county jail and 120 at the county work camp, an isolated minimal security facility that is currently only housing 30 inmates because of a lack of funds. Clements said that if the funding is secured, the work camp could be brought to capacity and that would free extra space at the jail so the new intake center could be built.

"We have 120 beds at the work camp and the measures will bring

another 90 on-line," he said. "The domino effect is even when we're building this intake center we've got 90 beds."

Clements said the new intake center needs to be built because the current center's foundation is sinking.

The measures will also provide funding for the increased staff necessary to supervise all the extra prisoners and improve the aging heating and cooling systems in the jail, which Clements said are vital to keep inmates from growing belligerent.

"You don't want to get into a situation where you give inmates a reason to riot," he said.

Kutcher, however, said the reasons to vote for the measures are completely unsound. The local activist, who has worked on previous political campaigns, said he is organizing a committee to oppose the measures on the grounds that they are unnecessary.

"The crime rate is going down and instead of decreasing the number of

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Cadavers

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hope is that the students will learn to think in anatomic terms."

He said the bodies have been donated to medical science and come from Oregon Health Sciences University. They were bought for approximately \$1,100.

Two of the teaching assistants for the course, Reed Ferber and Susan Verschuer, have had the opportunity to dissect many cadavers previously.

Ferber is teaching the laboratory section for the sixth year. He said he enjoys teaching students about their own bodies and giving them an appreciation for the complexity of the human body, and hopes the students will eventually go on to enter health-related fields.

"Students walk away with an understanding of EMS," Verschuer said. "They can say: 'I know where the deltoid muscle inserts.'"

But before the dissection begins, students have to be mentally ready to see a corpse on the examining table.

"I basically tell them they have to deal with it," Ferber said. Strum said, in the beginning, the person still looks human, but after the dissection has been in progress for some time, the body loses its human appearance. "It's a lot harder to understand the body with everything over top of it," Verschuer said.

She said it is easier to see the muscles and organs with the skin off.

"The brain doesn't look like much as an organ," Strum said. "But the way it functions neurologically is enormously complex."

Verschuer said some students have shown no apprehension about dissection and are already asking to look at the cadavers.

"They are really excited," she said.

However, not all students are prepared: Strum said one student passed out the first year Strum taught the class.

Ferber said by the second or third time the bodies are uncovered, students understand the etiquette and respect involved in the process.

Verschuer admitted she often

wonders what the person being dissected was like during life and how he or she died.

"That is the fun part. It's a mystery," Verschuer said. "I prefer to know about the person."

Verschuer said she once looked at the body of a male who had an artificial knee, but the story surrounding the injury was an unsolved puzzle.

"It would have been interesting to know something about the person because we now are seeing the end result," she said.

Strum said that the most frequent causes of death in the cadavers they receive are cancer and heart or lung disease. While the person's medical report is available to the students, often the cause of death is unknown.

"If a body is donated to science, there is no autopsy," Strum said. "If the physician caring for the person was not certain of the cause of death, it may not be known exactly [how the person died]."

Ferber said students really get to know the person to whom their at-



Dan Brunell Emerald

Waweru Gatimu discusses his homework in Human Anatomy with his instructor, Susan Verschuer, on Wednesday.

attention is devoted.

"They almost end up being part of the family," Ferber said. "You really get to know the little intricacies about them."

Sophomore biology major Karina Brown, a volunteer in the emergency room at Sacred Heart Medical Center and a student in the class, said she is looking forward

to dissecting the cadavers.

"Being able to explore our own bodies and deal with something that is so applicable, I think will be awesome," Brown said. "I just think of them as generous people who were willing to donate their bodies to science. They should be treated with respect and not harmed."

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