

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2020 ■ SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

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Two newcomers face off in commissioner primary

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A pair of political newcomers have a difficult task ahead.

First-time candidates Ashley Carson Cottingham and Dan Norton face off in the May 19 Democratic primary for a seat on the Marion County Commission.

Both Norton and Carson Cottingham filed for the primary shortly before the deadline and their campaigns have been limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

And the three Marion County Commissioner positions have been exclusively held by Republicans since 1976.

"I was glad to see there were two people running for

the Democratic party," Norton said.

The primary winner will face Republican Danielle Bethell, a Salem-Keizer school board member, in the November election. Bethell is running opposed in the Republican primary.

They are all running to fill the position held by Republican Sam Brentano since 2003. Brentano announced in October 2019 he would not seek reelection.

"I think the fact that a Democrat hasn't been on the Marion County Commission in over 40 years means it's time to have some new ideas and new voices on the commission," Carson Cottingham said.

"I think people are ready for change. We have a much different county that we had in previous years. There are a lot of voices that aren't heard at the leadership level."

The two other current Marion County Commission-

ers are Republicans Kevin Cameron and Colm Willis. Their terms run through 2022.

Carson Cottingham's background is in public policy and her job experience is in directing departments assisting elderly and those with disabilities; Norton's background is in science and the military.

They both bring unique viewpoints through their decades of work in the public sector.

Carson Cottingham's current position as Deputy Director for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman for Oregon investigates complaints in assisted living and memory care facilities.

"I do have a background in policy, but I have run massive government entities far larger than the county entity," she said. "We had a \$3.4 billion biennial bud-

See **PRIMARY, Page 2A**



Grey Ferrando traveled 28 hours from Stayton to Jefferson, South Dakota, to participate in one of the first races since the COVID-19 outbreak. MADELEINE COOK/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Gates' turmoil threatens project that benefits Willamette Valley

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A small city's turmoil has threatened to derail an infrastructure project that has implications to cities throughout the Willamette Valley.

A series of contentious city council meetings in Gates concerning the proposed North Santiam wastewater project divided a community, led to the resignations of a city councilor and mayor, and might have derailed the largest infrastructure project in the Santiam Canyon in decades.

Now, as Gates seeks two new members for its six-person city council, Marion County and representatives of Detroit, Idanha and Mill City are left to figure out how to move forward with its landmark wastewater project. It's a project that could benefit cities that get their drinking water downstream on the North Santiam River such as Salem, Albany, Stayton and Turner.

"I want to go back and see what are the possibilities of continuing the progress that we've made and continue down the road with the research we need to do, the consulting we need to do to see how much the system would have to cost," Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron said.

"It would have to be done anyways. Let's just keep going."

A sewer project with wider implications

The idea of a joint sewer system for Santiam Canyon cities including Detroit, Mill City, Gates, Idanha and Lyons – which lie along the North Santiam River – has percolated for decades, but Marion County's involvement in the past few years has put it into the realm of possibility.

Detroit and Idanha have looked at building wastewater systems in the past, but it hasn't been economically feasible for one city to undertake.

"My understanding and this was before I was up there, they were actually getting ready to break ground on a system," Detroit Mayor Jim Trett said.

Of the involved cities, only Mill City has a sewer system, but it is nearing the end of its lifespan.

In the other Santiam Canyon cities, all properties have septic systems, and many need replacement or soon will. And if the current septic systems fail, sewage could spill into the water source for hundreds of thousands of people.

Multiple studies have shown the cities in the area are limited in growth due to the lack of a sewer system.

"In Gates the motel would like to expand, as well as the trailer park, but cannot because the cost of sewer and room to put it in is prohibitive," former Gates Mayor Jerry Marr said.

The most recent concept for the project would have linked Detroit and Idanha in one system and Mill City and Gates in another.

Estimates on cost are in the \$90 million range, but no official number has been determined.

"It's a lot more expensive than a normal one would be," Marion County Economic Development Danielle Gonzalez said. "Because of the complexity of the geology and the complexity of the four cities, we were going to move forward with the money we had in our budget to get the design and engineering."

Marion County and Business Oregon each already spent more than \$100,000 and countless hours on the project.

Though residents in the sewer district would have to pay for the system, they wouldn't have to shoulder all costs.

"We're going to have to Frankenstein funds together," Gonzalez said. "It's going to be clean water funds, it's going to be development funds. It's going to be a complex grant writing process."

The North Santiam Joint Wastewater Project task force was formed with members of the city councils of Detroit, Idanha, Mill City and Gates, but reached the stage where it needed the involved cities to sign an intergovernmental agreement that would create a government independent of the cities.

Marion County was slated to release another \$400,000 for an engineering study and design of the project when the agreement was signed, which Mill City, Detroit and Idanha did in the past few months.

All they needed was Gates.

See **GATES, Page 2A**

Going the distance

Stayton plumber takes cross-country trek for a chance to race

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A plumber from Stayton drove halfway across the United States during the coronavirus lockdown to compete in the only organized sporting event in the country.

Grey Ferrando traveled 28 hours to race Saturday and Sunday in Jefferson, South Dakota, the first races since most states shut down all organized sporting events due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

South Dakota is one of the few states that hasn't had a stay-home order in place, unlike Oregon, but the races went on despite local leaders advising them not to.

Ferrando has regularly traveled long distances to race, but never under such circumstances.

"It was nice to get to race," Ferrando said.

When it was announced a few weeks ago that races would take place at Park Jefferson International Speedway and neighboring The New Raceway Park in Jefferson, South Dakota with fields capped at 32 en-



Drivers prepare to race at Park Jefferson Speedway on Saturday in Jefferson, South Dakota. The event is going on without fans present because of the coronavirus pandemic. ERIN BORMETT/ARGUS LEADER

trants, Ferrando was one of the first to sign up.

It's a long way to go from his home outside Stayton, but towing long distances is common for him.

In the past few years, Ferrando has regularly traveled the West Coast, raced at the IMCA Super Nationals in Boone, Iowa, the Mark Martin Race For Hope 74 in Batesville, Arkansas and most recently in Arizona in February.

See **RACING, Page 4A**

Oregon House District 17 primary field crowded on Republican side

Pete Martini
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Oregon House of Representative District 17 will have a new occupant in 2021, as incumbent Sherrie Sprenger is running for Linn County Commissioner.

There is only one Democrat running in the May 19 primary, but six Republicans.

On the Democratic side, the lone candidate is Paige Hook, a Western Oregon University graduate who currently serves on the Stayton City Council.

She is passionate about rural Oregon, and she says residents in the area deserve climate legislation that is economically sustainable. She's also an advocate for affordable housing and properly funded emergen-



Hook Richards Sword Kirsch

cy services. She has raised \$4,177.20 in campaign contributions this year, and she has a cash balance of \$3,671.80.

The Republican side is a crowded field, with Dylan Richards, Scott Sword, Timothy L. Kirsch, Susan Coleman, Bruce Cuff and Jami Cate all running in the

See **STATE HOUSE, Page 3B**

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Vol. 139, No. 20

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880
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