

DISPATCH

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newbie, Weissert is already putting those abilities to the test.

"I've had a couple high stress calls (and) a lot of high stress periods of time, where everything is coming at you (simultaneously) and you have to prioritize and give and look up information," Weissert said of the job. "It's been fascinating. Sometimes I thrive on the stress (and) enjoy that period of time."

Weissert is nearly halfway through the first six months of her initial training under the tutelage of trainer Dyan Snook. She'll have an additional six months of training following this stint — a year of training total — before she can dispatch on her own.

"They offer the support and training you need to be successful," Weissert said of LGPD. "They're not going to throw you in there and expect you to manage it. They take the time to teach you. It's a team, (and) everybody is helping each other."

In August, Weissert graduated from the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem, a mandatory training all 911 dispatchers must complete. The academy is operated by the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, which offers training that adheres to professional standards and certification for first responders. The two-week course includes emergency and non-emergency training such as call handling techniques, stress management and an overview of fire-rescue and law enforcement operations.

Back in the LGPD offices, however, Weissert has a whole other set of information to familiarize herself with and set to memory — 10 codes, radio traffic communication and phone system operations, all while navigating a sea of buttons and functions on the monitors and looking up information in the Law Enforcement Data System. Weissert said she's even made flashcards to review some of the information.

"We answer 911 calls, but

we do a lot of non-emergency calls too," she said. "I'm starting to learn how to answer questions when people call in for information (and) all the other pieces that come together to form the job I've taken on. It's very involved and I (still) have a lot to learn."

Weissert currently works swing shift but will soon transition into a night owl, working 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. on graveyard shift. The Union County 911 dispatch center operates 24/7, providing police, fire, EMS, search and rescue and quick response team dispatch and communications services for a total of 22 agencies across the county. In 2017, Union County Dispatch logged and dispatched 32,480 calls: 5,385 of those calls were "imminent threat to life or property" or "needs immediate response" incidents, while 11,168 calls were routine calls for service (theft, burglary, suspicious persons, etc.).

"When you answer the phone, you never know what's going to be on the other end of the line. It's

different every time you answer," Weissert said. "That's a part (of the job) I enjoy, not knowing who it's going to be, what they're going to need and how I can help them."

A good dispatcher has the right combination of personality type and acquired skills — requiring quick thinking and problem solving, the ability to manage emotions and maintain an even temperament under immense pressure and stress, plus a detail-oriented mindset, penchant for asking the right questions and affinity for the unusual.

"If my voice is excited, it's going to affect the person on the other end. I (need to) be their calm in the middle of the storm, keep them focused and give them as much information as I can," Weissert said.

If it's a law officer, she added, she must calmly impart the necessary information, "so they can be ready when they get to the scene (and) have a more successful interaction. It saves them time so they can be (better) prepared."

When dispatch receives a

call, the two dispatchers on duty are alerted by one of two different tones that indicate whether the call is 911 or non-emergency. The call will also appear on both dispatchers' computer screens, and while one is gathering information from the caller and entering data into the computer, the other can see that same information and proceed with notifying the appropriate agency.


"The single-most important piece of information is location. If I get disconnected or something happens, if I have that location, I can send someone to help," Weissert said. "A lot of times (callers) want us to stay on the line, so (we) reassure them help is coming (or) how long it might be (until someone arrives)."

Weissert also appreciates the comradery and communal atmosphere among everyone at LGPD, and says officers have provided her constructive criticism and advice along the way — some even hang out in dispatch during down time. "It's a great group of people to work with here,

a fantastic team," she said. "They all have each other's backs. We put out the call to one person, and other people say they'll come and help. It's been really great to hear officers support each other, and we're here to support all of them as well. Everybody does a little piece of the puzzle to make it all come together."

With just a few months of training under her proverbial duty belt, Weissert is eager to settle in to her position and anticipates a long career with LGPD.

"I'm looking forward to a day when I feel just a little more comfortable," she said. "I'm still second-guessing myself and a little hesitant sometimes. It'll be great to have more of a comfort level and confidence in myself, (to know) I can handle whatever is on the other line. It's going to be fun to master all the skills I need in order to perform at the level I need to."



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COUNCIL

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"I support pro-active veteran employment programs at the local level, within the business community and state levels. To that end, I would support the creation of a City Veterans Employment and Business Development Committee to support and work with other federal, state and county programs to meet their needs," he said.

Hugh Johnson

Hugh Johnson is concerned about Union's business district, which he said "is gradually dying."

The candidate said downtown Union is in need of new businesses to pump life into the city's economy.

"(Union) needs industry that will help other businesses, not compete with businesses we already have," Johnson said.

He said the community needs businesses like a lumber store to replace the one it lost several years ago and a store to serve outdoor enthusiasts.

"They would help bring traffic by drawing customers," Johnson said. "We need business that appeals to local interests."

He said the addition of such companies would draw more people downtown, who would in turn provide valuable support for businesses such as Union's pharmacy.

Johnson would also like to see downtown renovated to reflect a common theme like the Oregon Trail, which ran through Union County.

"We need to get back to our roots," Johnson said.

He said this would give downtown Union a badly needed distinctive feel.

"Union needs its own culture, one that would make it a tourist destination," Johnson said. "Right now we don't have the drawing power we need."

Johnson is also concerned about the number of people in Union who have substance abuse problems. Many of these are young people, who he said could be

helped by a juvenile detour program he would like to see the city get involved in setting up. The program would provide juveniles with adult mentors who could help them redirect their lives.

"It would provide an alternative to kids who need help," Johnson said. "A lot of times when you get young people in a mentoring environment, they will get out of the drug culture altogether."

The city council candidate said that such a program would be welcome by law enforcement agencies like the Union County Sheriff's Office, which does not always have the space or resources needed to help juveniles with drug problems.

Johnson has worked for the Oregon Youth Authority's Riverbend facility, 12 miles west of La Grande, as a security guard and counselor for 18 years. He said his experience working for OYA has helped him learn how state politics work, which would help him as city councilor since cities often deal with the state.

The candidate said he enjoys living in Union because it has pockets of Norman Rockwell-type innocence.

"There is a lot of this type of culture that needs to be preserved," Johnson said.

Leslie McMillan

The desire to give downtown Union a boost inspired Leslie McMillan to run for a position on the Union City Council.

"I want to promote new business and support existing business," McMillan said.

As a city councilor, she said she would strive to promote local business by providing incentives for new

businesses and encouraging residents to shop locally. She emphasized if residents do not patronize local businesses, the town will lose them. McMillan believes this is one of the reasons Union lost Community Bank in 2011 and Umpqua Bank two years ago.

McMillan also said she would like to spruce up the appearance of Union's downtown.

"I would like to see some cosmetic improvements," she said.

The Union resident knows the downtown of her community well, for she is the former owner of LG Brewskis, a Union pub she operated for almost nine years until April of this year. McMillan opened the business in September 2009 after moving to Union from Yakima, Washington, in April 2008.

She said she enjoys living in Union because of its relaxed lifestyle and its residents.

"There are really good people here," McMillan said.

Even while operating her business, she was active in the community. She served as president and secretary of the City of Union Chamber of Commerce for two years and was a member from 2009 through 2017.

From 2010 to 2015, McMillan helped organize and coordinate Union's annual Christmas parade and tree lighting ceremony, and from 2010 to 2016 was the live music coordinator of the annual Grassroots Festival. Community organizations McMillan has been a member of include the Union High School Booster Club, which she belonged to for two years, and the Union County Museum Board, which McMillan has been on the past three years.

She said as a councilor she would strive to keep

events like the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show, Grassroots Festival and Fourth of July celebration popular.

"I want Union to be a destination (in terms of events, tourism and shopping opportunities)," McMillan said.

Community safety is another area McMillan would like to focus on. Along this line, she would like to see discussions started about possibly reviving a community volunteer group that used to check all down-

town businesses to make sure they were locked and secure.

McMillan said as a councilor she would be open to new ideas.

"I am very open-minded," she said. "I do not have an agenda."

She noted that while she operated LG Brewskis she met people with a diversity of backgrounds.

"I interacted with people who represented all walks of life," McMillan said. "This experience would help me as a city councilor."



Johnson



McMillan



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