



Observer file photo

La Grande Rural Fire Chief Larry Wooldridge recently announced he will be the new Tangent Rural Fire Chief in Linn County. Wooldridge has been the chief at La Grande Rural for 9-1/2 years.

WOOLDRIDGE

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He said leaving the Grande Ronde Valley will be difficult.

"I have loved the area, (and) the surrounding districts have been very welcoming," he said.

Mike Barry, chief of the Imbler Rural Fire Department, said Wooldridge has had an enormously positive impact on firefighting operations in Union County.

"He has brought us a long way, improving our cooperation and skills," Barry said. "The bottom line is we are going to miss him a lot."

Barry credits Wooldridge with being able to get local fire departments excited about making changes.

"He creates a vision and then gets people to buy into that vision," he said of Wooldridge.

Wooldridge has found local fire departments receptive to changes he proposed. "They were at the point where they wanted to move forward," the La Grande rural fire chief noted.

One of his biggest steps was creating a box alarm system that all of Union County's fire departments are tied into. Barry said the system allows crews and specific vehicles and equipment to reach blazes faster.

"(The alarm system) gets the right people, vehicles and equipment needed for a call there earlier in the process," he said.

The Union County Dispatch Center is a key part of the box alarm system. When there is a fire, the incident commander — the individual in charge of directing firefighting operation — calls the Union County Dispatch Center with a code. The code indicates which fire departments are to respond and what type of equipment they are to bring.

A dispatch center worker

then instantly relays the code to the pagers of the firefighters of the appropriate department. Should the fire level escalate, a code requiring additional fire departments to respond is sent out.

Because the code issued tells fire departments which type of equipment is needed, they never come with unnecessary items, Wooldridge said.

"It really helps our efficiency," he noted.

Wooldridge is also credited with helping to boost the quality of his department's vehicles and firefighting equipment. For example, about two years ago, the La Grande Rural Fire Department added a new command vehicle that has made the department more nimble, efficient and better able to communicate in emergency situations.

The command vehicle, a marked Ford F-250, is equipped with many items the department did not have, such as a cellphone booster, which allows responders in areas with poor cellular service to successfully make calls. The truck also has a repeater, which is a combination of a radio receiver and a radio transmitter that receives a weak or low-level signal and retransmits it at a higher level or higher power, so the signal can cover longer distances.

Following improvements such as these in Union County, it may come as no surprise that Wooldridge was named Tangent's next fire chief by the Tangent Fire District Board of Directors. The board chose Wooldridge over eight other qualified candidates, according to the *Covallis Gazette-Times*.

"He was the unanimous No. 1 choice. The reason most of them gave was his experience and how he dealt with the board. They just felt he would be a really good

fit for the department and the community," said Scott Casebolt, former Tangent fire chief.

"We had quite a few good candidates, and he clearly rose to the top," Casebolt added.

Wooldridge said he hopes to be with the Tangent Rural Fire Department for years to come.

"I love what I do. There's no short-term for me. I'm looking at long-term and years of service," said Wooldridge, who came to Union County from Amity, where he had been a member of its fire department for 21 years.

Wooldridge is the only paid member of the La Grande Rural Fire Department, which has about 30 volunteers. The Tangent Rural Fire Department, however, has five paid positions — its chief, an assistant chief, two captains and an administrative assistant. The fire department also has three college student "sleepers" who sleep at the Tangent station and work regular, volunteer shifts.

Wooldridge said Tangent's staffing situation will make his hours a little more manageable. Presently, as the La Grande rural fire chief, he is responsible for responding to a wide variety of calls around the clock.

"(In Tangent) I will not feel as if I am being tugged from all sides quite as much," he said.

Wooldridge, who grew up in the Amity area, will be closer to family in Tangent. His brother Ray Wooldridge is a lieutenant with the Albany Fire Department.

The La Grande Rural Fire Department is now accepting applications for Wooldridge's successor. Applications are due by Dec. 7. For information call 541-963-6895.

GRH

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hospital staff and emergency responders have badges that give them access to the parts of the hospital where patients can't go.

"Most nurses here have seen or experienced an assault," Brock said. "Our goal is that the patient and staff are safe. We've been fortunate to put steps forward (toward this goal). We also work very closely with law enforcement, and we're grateful to them for responding."

Although the "police are up here on a regular basis," for general business, Brock said, the hospital has also added security staff. The pilot program concluded the presence of a uniformed security guard alleviates violent outbursts.

"The security officers' uniform is a sign of authority. The security officers have been trained to de-escalate a situation — not to harm someone," she said. "They're

good at talking people down."

Generally, Brock said, people want to feel heard. They're at the hospital because something bad has happened to them or a family member and they're stressed and need an outlet.

"We understand no one wants to be here," she said. "ER visits are unplanned. People feel like they don't have control. They're trying to grasp for that control and don't react in the manner that they would usually."

Brock said some of those who have displayed poor behavior to the hospital staff have come back later and apologized for their actions. She gets it, she said — nevertheless, physical violence is not acceptable, and the hospital is working to combat the number of incidents.

"This isn't a GRH-specific issue," she said. "We want to be a part of the solution, though."

Among the security measures put in place by

the hospital, Brock said, is teaching nurses how not to get blocked into a room.

She said nurses need to make sure they have a straight line to the door and not allow the patient to block their exit. It's a strategy that works, she said, and it's keeping nurses safer.

Brock said the idea that abuse from patients is just part of a nurse's job needs to be changed.

"We need to come back to a culture of kindness," she said. "We have a passion and desire to be healers. Don't assume the worst about us. We are doing the best we can with the (medical) information we've been given. There's no malicious nurse or doctor here."

Brock said she's had staff give patients clothes and money to help them in their time of need. Mistreating nurses is like biting the hand that feeds you. As Brock said: "We go out of our way to make someone's bad day better."

Police catch Umapine shooting suspect

Homicide suspect is found in Kennewick on Tuesday

By Phil Wright
East Oregonian

The man police suspect of murdering his co-worker at the Umapine Creamery is in custody.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said police found Decidero Vargas-Ortiz staying at the Clover Island Inn, Kennewick, Washington, and arrested him Tuesday at about 1:30 a.m.

Early reports identified the suspect as Decidero Cruz Vargas. Rowan said Decidero Vargas-Ortiz is the official name the sheriff's office is using in this case. He explained that stemmed from fingerprinting, which generates state and FBI identification numbers.

"We were able to connect the dots between that name

and a legitimate FBI number," he said, and pegged him as the suspect in the shooting death of Renee Luiz-Antonio.

The homicide took place around 6:30 a.m. Monday northwest of Milton-Freewater at the Umapine Creamery, where Vargas-Ortiz, 52, and Luiz-Antonio, 35, of Milton-Freewater, worked. The investigation at the scene of the crime led law enforcement to look for the vehicle belonging to Vargas-Ortiz's girlfriend, Rowan said, and Kennewick police spotted the vehicle at the Clover Island Inn, Kennewick.

Umatilla County sheriff's detectives working with Kennewick police eventually saw Vargas and his girlfriend at the hotel's

parking lot, he said. The Kennewick Police Department called on the resources of the Tri-City Regional SWAT Team in Washington to take Vargas-Ortiz into custody without incident.

The sheriff's office in a written statement Tuesday called the case a "murder investigation" and thanked multiple agencies for working long hours "making it possible to bring the case to a swift closure." The sheriff's office also thanked the Clover Island staff and guests "for their patience in this matter."

Rowan said Vargas-Ortiz now is awaiting transfer from Washington to Oregon, where he will face the charge of murder. Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus confirmed his office is working on its end of the case to bring charges.

THIEVES

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by making sure someone's at home to receive the delivery, while 18 percent reported using some form of security technology to guard against thieves and 15 percent allocate an inconspicuous space or container to hide items.

But the poll also found one in four recipients (28 percent) don't do anything at all to protect their deliveries from theft.

"We were surprised to find that so many people take the risk of leaving their packages unprotected, even though a significant number

of residents have had something stolen from them," said PEMCO spokesperson Derek Wing. "And while some folks have taken steps to thwart would-be 'porch pirates,' these results suggest many of us could do more to protect our deliveries."

Bell also added it's not just package thefts that are on the rise during this time, but also vehicle thefts.

"At the shopping centers, parking lots are full," the LGPD lieutenant said. "People are out there doing their holiday shopping and leave items (in their cars) that they've purchased. That becomes an attractive thing

for a thief."

Bell said to make sure not to leave valuables in full view in your vehicle. Put the items in the trunk of the car, and don't leave anything valuable in the car once you get home.

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