



Dick Mason/The Observer

Guy Francy of La Grande picks up apples at Harvest Share on Wednesday. Francy is one of 150 and 200 people who regularly pick up items at Harvest Share daily. "It is a gift every day," Francy said.

POPULAR

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Blanchard. Steve Konopacky and Blanchard are members of the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon's regional food bank staff.

Limits are in place for how much food people can take. For example, only one bread package is allowed per person. The limits were implemented about two years ago. Before that, Steve Konopacky said, almost all food would disappear before the senior center closes at 9:30 a.m.

People who regularly pick up food include Guy Francy, of La Grande, a retired scientist who often chooses fresh fruit after eating lunch at the senior center.

"It is a gift every day," Francy said on Wednesday.

Francy is one of between



Dick Mason/The Observer

Andrea Konopacky sets out food for Harvest Share at the Union County Senior Center Thursday morning.

150 and 200 people who regularly pick up items at Harvest Share daily.

Each weekday morning, Konopacky spends nearly two hours setting out the Harvest Share food. She rests for a few minutes before opening the senior center's doors at 8 a.m.

"I take a little break before I let my kids in," she said.

The banter she has with the people coming in is one of the favorite parts of her work.

"They are a lot of fun," Konopacky said. "I love my job. The only thing I've enjoyed more in my life was raising my children."

CHANGES

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ordinance changes.

Possible revisions to Union's city charter were also discussed at Wednesday's meeting. One proposed change regards how councilors are elected. Presently elections for council seats are conducted in November between candidates who have filed and write-in candidates.

The new proposal would mirror in many ways how Union County's elected officials are selected. The proposal being considered would call for elections first to be conducted in May. If a candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, that individual would be declared the winner of the election. However, if no candidate receives more than half the vote, a runoff election would be conducted in November between the top two finishers.

The intent of this change would be to make it possible for only candidates who receive a majority of the votes to be elected. Councilor Matt Later voiced support for this change. Later said that under the present system it would be possible, if 10 candidates filed, for one to win with just 10% of the vote.

"Someone could get elected who 90% of the voters didn't vote for," Later said.

Several people attending Wednesday's meeting said they disagreed. Dick Middleton told the council he believes the city should keep its present system.

"The candidate who gets the highest percentage of votes is the one the people want," Middleton said.

The city council will continue discussing possible charter revisions at future meetings. Once the council approves a revised charter, it will have to be approved by Union's voters before it can be adopted.

RACE

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must" complete certification at the academy.

Marsha Morin manages the Criminal Justice Certification Program for the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, which is in charge of the academy. Each of the Union County Sheriff candidates meets the eligibility requirements to run for the office, she said, but that assessment does not check the box for certification.

"We've had a couple of sheriffs come through the academy," she said. "It's not common by any means, but it does happen. They usually have out-of-state experience."

She also said those sheriffs obtained the certification.

Miller left the Union County Sheriff's Office in August 2018 for a job in parole and probation and has the certificate for that job, according to the Oregon Criminal Justice Information Records Inquiry System, the state's online searchable

database of law enforcement and emergency services personnel certification and training. But that certification cannot substitute for the police officer requirement, and Miller's police officer credentials are out of date.

Miller said the way he understands it, as sheriff he would have to return to the Public Safety Academy for two weeks of training on criminal law to reactivate his certification.

"All I have to do is go back and refresh it," he said.

Just how he would manage the sheriff's office from Salem remains a question. He said that answer would depend in part on his evaluation of the administrative roles in the sheriff's office. He said he was confident he could remain in communication and work with staff to ensure smooth running if he were out of the office.

Rollins said while he could seek a waiver to the academy's 16-week basic police course, he is ready to dive into education as sheriff.

"I feel it's better for me to go through the academy to learn the laws of Oregon," he said. "Plus that would build a bit of trust with the deputies, knowing I went through the same academy they did."

Morin with DPSST said there is no guarantee when it comes to waivers.

"It's a case by case basis if we're going to approve it or not," she said.

If either challenger wins, Union County would pay for his time at the academy. The sheriff is the county's top paid official with an annual salary of \$90,723.

Rasmussen said while a lot of people think they can do the work of the sheriff, it takes a "boots-on-the-ground" approach to build trust with the community and staff. He said the recent unanimous endorsement from Union County Law Enforcement Association supporting his re-election shows he is doing just that.

County Clerk Robin Church said Union County has not had a sheriff's race with three candidates since the 1980s. The deadline to file for candidacy in the primary election is March 10, 2020. Plenty of time for more challengers to step in.

SERVICES

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services they are entitled to."

Some of the services that veterans and their families are entitled to include health care, home loans, life insurance, education funding and career support. However, according to Blais, access to these services across the nation can be limited due to location and individuals' knowledge about what benefits they are entitled to. He said he is working to help those in Union County access what they need.

One of the services that seems to be of high importance to veterans is access to mental health services. The nature of the military often has a lasting effect on veterans' mental health, according to Scott. According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 20 veterans die by suicide every day, and about 18.5% of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. To help combat this need, Blais organized an event Oct. 29 at the Center for Human Development in La Grande for veterans and their families to teach about mental health first aid.

The course, led by Guy McKay, a mental health first aid instructor goes over the signs of emotional distress and how to properly handle it. The class was first developed in Australia in



Sabrina Thompson/The Observer

Veterans Mental Health First Aid class teaches veterans and their families how to handle emotional crises.

2001 and came to the U.S. in 2008.

"Everyone who knows CPR knows how to deal with the physical issues that arise," McKay said. "We are teaching people how to deal with emotional issues."

According to McKay, the course focuses on the acronym ALGEE, which stands for assess the threat to suicide, listen without judgment, give reassurance and information, encourage appropriate professional help and encourage self-help and other support strategies.

One attendee of the class said she came because she wanted more knowledge to help her husband, an Iraq veteran who has PTSD.

"There are times that he spends days in bed disconnected from life," she said. "I want to have a better ability to deal with people with mental illness."

Another service now being offered to veterans in the community is a same

day clinic at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla, Washington. This clinic gives vets the opportunity to have minor illnesses and injuries addressed without waiting for an appointment with their provider.

"As this new opportunity to meet veterans' health care needs grows, the Walla Walla VA will monitor its effectiveness and be watching how veterans respond with the goal to expand the program," a news release from the Walla Walla VA said. "Taking care of the veteran's medical needs is the highest priority."

An extension of the Walla Walla VA is located in La Grande. The community-based outpatient clinic is located at 202 12th St.

"The clinic is our area's access point to the VA medical system and services," Blais said. "The staff there are a valuable resource for our community."



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