

COUNCIL

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Bell becomes new police chief

Strope announced Wednesday evening at the conclusion of the city council meeting that Lt. Gary Bell of the police department will be La Grande's new chief of police.



Bell

"I was excited with the offer and feel extremely honored to have the opportunity to continue to

serve our community in this capacity," Bell said. "The support I have received from inside the department and from the community is very humbling."

Bell began working as an officer with the La Grande police 26 years ago, rising to become the second in command. His work has included serving as the media contact for the department and now brings him the opportunity to lead the group of 31 employees.

"I'm looking forward to strengthening already great relationships with our professional partners and with stakeholders in our community," Bell said.

Strope did not announce when Bell would start the job. Bell said he does not plan to make any drastic changes to the department but does hope to fill some vacancies as soon as possible. He said he is excited to bring lessons he has learned as a police officer and his core values to his new position.

"I will continue to do all I can to support our police officers, 911 dispatchers, and professional staff at the department, which in turn leads to our collectively achieving mission success and a safe community where we can live, work, recreate and raise our families," Bell said.

Bell will succeed Chief Brian Harvey, who announced his retirement at the beginning of March. Harvey served the last 11 years as police chief and said it was time to take a step away. Harvey's retirement is effective May 4.

"Chief Harvey is leaving us in excellent shape, and we have many really good things happening at the department," Bell said. "I will ensure we stay the course and adhere to our values, which will help us achieve continued successes."

ODOT to replace Whiskey Creek Culvert on Highway 244

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Department of Transportation announced it plans to replace the Whiskey Creek Culvert under Highway 244 (Ukiah-Hilgard Highway). The project is one of several dozen transportation projects the state road agency has planned along Eastern Oregon highways this year.

Near mile post 45 (approximately 16 miles west of La Grande), travelers can expect lane closures, flaggers and delays up to 20 minutes once work is underway later this summer, according to ODOT. Crews will complete work before winter sets in.

The decades-old, 5-foot diameter metal pipe will be replaced with a 22-foot-wide, pre-cast concrete box culvert. The culvert is undersized and does not meet requirements for fish passage or water flow during high water events. Conditions in recent years have resulted in flooding of the adjacent land and roadway where Whiskey Creek connects under the highway to the Grande Ronde River.

The new concrete box culvert will accommodate high water events and meet fish passage criteria.

HEALTH

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you are living alone, is not always possible. This lack of connection can cause anxiety and heighten feelings of loneliness.

"When we isolate from others we tend to focus more on our own thoughts, stresses and challenges," said Aaron Grigg, mental health coordinator at the Center for Human Development Inc., La Grande. "Isolation can naturally create negative thinking, which leads to negative beliefs about ourselves and the situation we are in."

Financial difficulties from possible job loss or having to adapt to working from home can compound the stress.

If you're not at home alone, being isolated as a household may create added pressure to all members of the family. Cabin fever, lack of fresh air and being confined to the house can increase tensions. With children now doing

"People who may not have noticed symptoms of depression and anxiety before the quarantine may now be feeling the strain from lack of connection and lack of physical touch."

— Meegan Harp, therapist

their school work at home, another pressure has been added for parents, Harp pointed out. The change is no easier on the students who are adjusting to learning in a new way.

While stress due to COVID-19 can create or exacerbate mental health struggles, there are ways to fight against these problems, with and without professional help.

Promote positive mental health

Grigg said one of the most important actions during social distancing is to stay socially connected.

"When we do this, our thoughts tend to become more positive, we become

more hopeful for our future, and we feel more gratitude for what we have," Grigg said. "Now that we are encouraging people to social distance in order to stop COVID-19 from spreading social connection is a much greater challenge, but is possible."

Grigg suggested letter writing, frequent phone calls or video calls and texting as ways to maintain social connection. He shared a story about his mother-in-law's 80th birthday being celebrated through letters of appreciation instead of a party as a way of maintaining that needed connection without breaking social isolation rules.

Wallowa County officials talk up COVID-19 prep

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa Memorial Hospital collaborated with the Wallowa County commissioners and the Wallowa County sheriff this week to produce and post an 8-minute video summarizing the state of COVID-19 preparations in the county.

The video features hospital nursing and emergency preparation coordinator Stacey Karvoski, Commission chairman John Hillock and Sheriff Steve Rogers.

In the video, Karvoski notes Wallowa Memorial Hospital began preparation and planning for COVID-19 in February, and the local incident command team meets twice daily for updates on coronavirus developments statewide as well as nation-

ally and globally. They have a plan for meeting demands on care that may be imposed if there is a surge in COVID-19 cases and have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment.

To date, the hospital has administered 18 COVID-19 tests, with 15 negative results. The remaining three have not been returned. The hospital is screening all visitors for temperature and self-reported illness.

Hillock said helpful information about financial support for businesses during the COVID-19 financial storm is available on the websites of Oregon U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, and Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Hillock urged small businesses to contact the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce for more

opportunities for aid.

Hillock recognized Senior Meals on Wheels and Community Connection for delivering food and company to homebound adults, as well as the schools for delivering breakfast and lunches to students. He noted this week, supplies that Karvoski requested will arrive at the hospital, like other rural counties in Eastern Oregon. Hillock also said he expects the National Guard will deliver additional medical supplies from federal stockpiles next week.

Rogers said the department is doing criminal fingerprints only and is not processing applications of renewals for concealed handgun permits. The sheriff's office also will not take action until June on criminal cases involving concealed carry.

For those who are not isolating alone, such as families, limiting screen time and connecting with one another is important. Family walks and board games are a great way to stay connected, Grigg said.

Setting and sticking to a routine is another way. Grigg, Matteucci and Harp suggested to maintain good mental health.

"Flexibility and creativity will be people's biggest strength right now, along with the self-discipline to structure their days," Matteucci said.

"Determine what you want your day to look like: get a project done, watch Zoom tutorials, play a board game with the kids, have a virtual chat with a friend or relative, write a thank-you note ... Create your own list of positive activities and structure your day accordingly. You will feel accomplished, loved, and perhaps find new, more effective ways of coping with normal anxiety and depression."

Practicing self-care is another effective

way to manage mental health during quarantine. Allowing time to reflect and assess your emotional state can be a good way to restore balance, Harp said.

Matteucci agreed. "Consider reaching for things that have been steady in the past, like some relationships, your favorite book, your faith, exercise and hobbies," he said. "Try to find time for these things and other self-care activities, even if it doesn't feel good in the short term."

Help is available

If attempts such as these to alleviate feelings of depression and anxiety are not effective, professional help remains available. In-person counseling is limited to emergencies, but the Center for Human Development, Blue Mountain Associates and Grande Ronde Recovery and Still Waters Counseling continue to provide services through calls and video chat. Do not hesitate to reach out.



Screen shot from Wallowa Memorial Hospital Facebook page. Wallowa County officials produced a public service announcement to report on the local preparations for the COVID-19 outbreak.

Oregonians assemble 10,000 masks for health care workers

By Andrew Selsky
The Associated Press

SALEM — Hospital workers in Oregon are astounded at the community response to an effort to provide those on the front lines of the coronavirus fight with protective masks.

Oregon officials have been disappointed in the response by the federal government to its requests for protective gear. They requested 1 million N95 masks and received about 70,000. Of 1 million surgical masks requested, 287,000 have been received, according to a state report. Much of it is past expiration dates.

Some masks have faulty elastic and consequently are not being distributed to Oregon health care workers, said Charles Boyle, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's spokesman.

Other expired equipment, some dating back to the H1N1 outbreak of 2009, is unsuitable for surgical settings, Boyle said. However, the Trump administration did deliver all 140 ventilators that Oregon asked for.

Faced with shortages, Salem Health, which runs two hospitals and several clinics in and around Oregon's capital city, announced on March 26 it would hand out kits for people to make masks.

So many cars lined up to receive the kits that a traffic jam ensued. People had to be turned away because the response was so great. All the kits — with enough material to make around 10,000 masks — were handed out the first day.

The people returned



Andrew Selsky/AP photos

In this March 26, 2020, file photo, people from Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics, hand out kits to make surgical masks causing a traffic jam in Salem. Hospital workers in Oregon are astounded at the community response to an effort to provide those on the front lines of the coronavirus fight with protective masks. By Friday, April, 3, 2020, the last day for drop-off, 10,942 assembled masks had been returned. "It's incredible to see the community come together and put in their time and effort to protect our health care workers during this time," said Elijah Tanner, a Salem Health spokesman.

home and began assembling the blue masks using cutting boards and sewing machines.

Then they began dropping them off this week. By Friday, the last day for drop off, 10,942 assembled masks had been delivered.

At right, a man waiting on his bike wears a bandana to protect himself from the coronavirus waits to receive a kit for making surgical masks from Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics in Salem.

