

Opinion / Local

— EDITORIAL —

Money down a rat hole

We were very disappointed with our local Economic Development Committee's recommendation to renew Economic Development Director Greg Smith's contract, via his company, Gregory Smith and Company, LLC. We were also disappointed with the Baker County Commissioners' vote to accept that recommendation. Though we do appreciate the respect they showed to that Board in listening to their recommendation, our Commissioners hold the County's purse strings—and they should have voted with a resounding no.

We understand the contract includes an out-clause by which Smith can be released from his contract on any given month. Good.

Smith's company now absorbs \$108K per year from this one local contract alone. This year's contract gives him a \$12K raise.

Baker City and Baker County have dumped hundreds of thousands of dollars into Representative Smith's efforts with little to no return over the years.

It only takes a look around our county to see no new mid- to large-sized companies in our midst thanks to Smith since he began in 2011. As documented in a City Council meeting last year, Smith explained that is where his forte is supposed to be, and dedicating himself to small "Main Street" businesses really wasn't within the scope of his work. Funny. Initially the widespread belief was that it was.

This is now why, in part, we have Robin Nudd with the City beginning Community Development efforts within our City Limits this year. Nudd lives here, works here, and is making an effort. Giving her a chance makes sense.

Keeping Smith in place does not.

Smith's company offers other services, which are also duplicated, such as budgeting and loan application assistance. The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District and the loan officers at any of our local banks offer the same support and advice. Training and classes provided are also available elsewhere in eastern Oregon.

Then there's what we see as a conflict of interest issue in that Smith is under a similar six-figure contract with neighboring Malheur County to provide them with the same services. That's right—he's trying to place companies with the competition at the same time as us. He used to be under the same arrangement with both Wallowa and Umatilla Counties as well, but we were unable to verify if those arrangements had been renewed in time for print.

Smith also recently accepted an Executive Director position for the Columbia District Authority (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Morrow County, Umatilla County, Port of Morrow, and Port of Umatilla) with a \$100K salary. This is a full-time position, by the way—and not one that places him logistically anywhere near Baker County. Or Malheur County for that matter.

Then there are his responsibilities as a State Representative when the legislature is in session, and when he isn't.

Imagine if the County, instead of passing along the big bucks to Smith, instead simply gave out 10, \$10,000 grants per year to 10 existing local businesses to help with expansion? No strings attached? Or how about five grants of \$20,000 to help five new businesses open their doors each year?

Can you imagine the sort of business that could have been created with those hundreds of thousands of dollars? How many jobs?

Perhaps then we'd be supporting true small town entrepreneurial spirit instead of throwing money down the proverbial rat hole.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

On the hunt for Bigfoot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

He moved to Baker City five years ago and, being new to the area, he needed to get reports and find out the history of Bigfoot here. For five years he did some exploring by himself and he needed to get more data.

After setting up his Facebook page and his website, his story went viral. His website crashed from so many people using it and he gained over a hundred followers on Facebook in a matter of days.

Currently, Violette explained he has about 25 people who are on his mailing list who want to go squatching.

Violette has a Master's Degree in Anthropology and his focus was on Native American Studies. His particular expertise was how to read Native American Petroglyphs, the carvings in stones, and Pictographs, paintings on stones. His studies are what interested him in Bigfoot, as he found every Native American tribe in the nation has a Bigfoot legend.

Violette has not taken people out Squatching yet. He explained that he has been doing test runs, as he does not know what to expect with other people.

"I'm kind of slowly gathering people and taking them out to get the feel of how I'm actually going to run these things," Violette explained. "I have a sense of how I'm going to do it. My thought is, when I start getting into the actual taking groups out, we're going to do a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday thing. We're going to go out on Friday afternoons. We're going to get to the location, I'm going to set everybody down and we're going to go through a little bit of a training program where I'm going say, 'This is how we do things.'"

Violette explained that those attending will have different tasks, such as one person on sound recordings, one on tree knocking, one on night vision, and others. He is estimating that he will be able to take people out in the beginning of August.

"We are also trying to think outside the box and not do your typical Bigfooting like most people do," said Violette. "Sure, that's great, but there's been nine seasons of 'Following Bigfoot' and they've done the same thing every episode and have not found a Bigfoot yet. So, my thought is to do things differently, that's why the Squatch Pod is

something different; it's using all the technology of today we can get our hands on.

"Secondly, I have a couple other different ideas that we're going to be implementing and I think that maybe longer term, that's why the Squatch Pod can sit in the woods for 30 days and record constantly for 30 days, but I think mine is coverage and time.

"My idea is, I have a new one, that we're going to tether—once I have enough money to do this—thermal cameras that see heat to balloons and we're going to have them in the air but tethered to the ground, covering an area from high up above the trees, so we can get altitude and film that for months at a time.

"My other idea is putting cameras on blinds and floating them in lakes, so we can have this thing that looks like a rock or island on the water and it has cameras on it that are recording for like 30 days or so, like the Squatch Pod, floating out in the lake, so if anything comes to the shore to get water, we've got it on film from the lake."

Violette's website is squatchoregon.com for people to sign up on for future expeditions.

Letter to the Editor Policy: The Baker County Press reserves the right not to publish letters containing factual falsehoods or incoherent narrative. Letters promoting or detracting from specific for-profit businesses will not be published. Word limit is 375 words per letter. Letters are limited to one every other week per author. Letters should be submitted to Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com.

Advertising and Opinion Page Disclaimer: Opinions submitted as Guest

Opinions or Letters to the Editor express the opinions of their authors, and have not been authored by and are not necessarily the opinions of The Baker County Press, any of our staff, management, independent contractors or affiliates. Advertisements placed by political groups, candidates, businesses, etc., are printed as a paid service, which does not constitute an endorsement of or fulfillment obligation by this newspaper for the products or services advertised.

Tragedy strikes during parade

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Suddenly about 20 minutes in, without warning, the parade came to an abrupt stop. Confusion spread quickly as did news of a young boy falling from a float.

Baker County Search and Rescue (SAR) was in the parade line not far from the YMCA float. Trained personnel sprang into action immediately working to save the young boy, later identified as Dylan Thomas, who was coincidentally celebrating his seventh birthday.

Baker County District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff, who was riding on the Baker County Republicans' float was alerted of the situation. He jumped from that float and took off at a dead run to the scene unfolding at Court Avenue and 2nd Street. The parade was nearly immediately cancelled.

Facebook began lighting up with posts offering prayers to the family, first responders and spectators that witnessed the horrific event, although few details were available. The YMCA removed the video it had posted on Facebook of their float at lineup only shortly before.

Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner, who per tradition led the parade, left the end of the route and made his way back to the scene. Reserve Commander Jerry Boyd who had been positioned a couple blocks away and others helped clear the remaining parade floats from downtown. Over 50 floats had registered, with around 15 making it to the end of the route before the tragedy.

Lohner put out a call for all available chaplains to respond. Scott Knox arrived first, with two additional pastors not long behind. Sgt. Mike Regan, who was off duty watching the parade, was called to work, as were officers from Sgt. Wayne Chastain's team. Regan and other officers assisted in crowd control and keeping the accident scene clear of spectators.

OSP Trooper Eddie Mercado had the difficult task of diagramming and photographing to help process the scene.

A little after noon, Lohner released the following, "... at about 11:17

hours a seven-year-old Baker City boy fell off from a float in the Miners Jubilee Parade and was struck by the rear wheels of a commercial motor vehicle, killing him. Although all indications are that this was a tragic accident, the Baker County Major Crime Team, along with patrol units from the Baker County Sheriff's Office, Oregon State Police and Baker City Police Department are working with District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff to thoroughly investigate the incident. Baker County Public Safety Chaplains are also on scene, along with Mental Health workers from New Directions Northwest. Prayers are appreciated for all involved."

This accident happened in plain view of countless parade spectators and children on the YMCA float, including Dylan's 10-year-old sister Kaydance.

Witnesses reported that the chair on which Dylan sat atop the trailer wobbled, and when it did, he lost his balance and fell off the lowboy and beneath the tires.

Among those eyewitnesses, several stated that Dylan had passed almost instantly; however, per protocol, members of SAR attempted lifesaving assistance until the ambulance arrived and transported the boy to St. Alphonsus, where he was officially pronounced deceased.

Sheriff Travis Ash and Shirtcliff set to work setting up a trauma center for the public where citizens experiencing trauma after witnessing the accident could go for support.

Shirtcliff said, "I was in the parade two floats up from the YMCA float. When I learned that a child had fallen from a float and was in serious condition I ran to the scene. Members of the Baker County Search and Rescue were working to try to save Dylan's life. I activated the Baker County Major Crime Team. This was not done because there was a crime but was more of an effort to get more resources to the scene.

"Once the primary witnesses were interviewed we were able to quickly move from an investigation to more of a critical response team to try to get counseling resources to the many children and adults

who were clearly very traumatized at the scene.

"Sheriff Ash and I began bringing witnesses over to the courthouse where crisis workers and local pastors were available to assist those in trauma. Heidi Dalton, YMCA Director, was able to provide names to us and we were able to contact families of children who were at the scene to see if they would like to come to the courthouse for services.

"Counseling services were provided by Total Health crisis workers from New Directions Northwest and local pastors into the early evening. The first responders from Search and Rescue, the Baker City Police Department, the Baker County Sheriff's deputies and EMTs were amazing in their efforts. Sheriff Ash was instrumental in helping ensure that the proper managers and crisis workers from New Directions were notified and available."

Shirtcliff added, "It was great to see so many come together to assist those in need during this horrible tragedy. On behalf of the District Attorney's Office, our deepest sympathy goes out to Dylan's family and those touched by his loss. You will continue to be in our prayers."

After the crowds from the parade route dispersed, many filtered into Geiser-Pollman Park where booths of vendors awaited the crowds. Many of the vendors described the atmosphere as somber.

Russell Taylor of Baker City described a touching scene that unfolded on the playground: "To the man from the Elks band that played TAPS at the playground today for the young boy that died during the parade, that was very touching and I am sure appreciated by all."

As the day progressed, the love the community has for each other and the Thomas family unfolded in various ways.

That evening at the Baker City Bronc and Bull Riding, Inc. bull riding event, over \$16K was collected for the family with donations rounded out by Baker City Auto Ranch, Grumpy's Repair and The Sunridge Inn. Those funds were delivered to the family that evening.

SEE PARADE TRAGEDY PAGE 5

— CONTACT US —

The Baker County Press

PO Box 567
Baker City, Ore. 97814

Open Monday-Thursday for calls
9 AM - 4 PM
Open 24/7 for emails

Phone: 541.519.0572

TheBakerCountyPress.com

Kerry McQuisten, Publisher
Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Wendee Morrissey, Advertising and Sales
Wendee@TheBakerCountyPress.com

David Conn, Advertising and Sales
David@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Published weekly every Friday.
Subscription rates per year are \$29.95 all areas, e-mail delivery. \$39.95 print issue, home delivery, Baker City city limits only. \$49.95 print issue, mail delivery, outside Baker City city limits only.
Payment in advance.

A division of
Black Lyon Publishing, LLC

Copyright © 2014 -2017

YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump

202.456.1414
202.456.2461 fax

Whitehouse.gov/contact

US Sen. Jeff Merkley

503.326.3386
503.326.2900 fax

Merkley.Senate.gov

US Sen. Ron Wyden

541.962.7691
Wyden.Senate.gov

US Rep. Greg Walden

541.624.2400
541.624.2402 fax

Walden.House.gov

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

503.378.3111
Governor.Oregon.gov

State Rep. Cliff Bentz

503.986.1460

State Sen. Ted Ferrioli

541.490.6528

Baker County Commissioners Bill Harvey; Mark Bennett; Bruce Nichols

541.523.8200
541.523.8201