

# State Trooper Eyes Sheriff's Office

By Randy Sanders

Who will replace George Bush? It seems like that's where all the political attention is focused these days. Sadly, no attention is given to our local races. Voters know little about their local candidates, even though local elected officials govern our lives more than people on Capitol Hill do.

Columbia County is facing a flurry of daunting challenges; probably the most important local office you'll decide in 2008 will be the County Sheriff's position. In Columbia County, drug abuse --in particular methamphetamine-- is on a five-year high. Domestic and sexual assaults are also surging. With an ever-growing population, the Sheriff's Office is already vastly outnumbered and understaffed. Currently, there is no patrol after 10 p.m. Oddly enough, citizens have no problem with their hard-earned tax dollars ending up in the Middle East funding police departments, but have repeatedly turned down sheriff levies in their very own communities! A new sheriff will have no choice but to make ends meet with what little the voters have given him.

These and other obstacles present Columbia County with the need for a sheriff with proven law enforcement experience. That alone won't meet the challenge. Our next sheriff must also possess sharp communication and business skills.

Usually voters are forced to choose a candidate they dislike the least. Jeff Dickerson is running for Columbia County Sheriff in 2008; and because he's so passionate about the challenge, he has become a very attractive candidate. Dickerson is currently a State Trooper with almost 20 impressive years of experience working the highways of Oregon.

Most people who run for County Sheriff -- anywhere in America for that matter -- do so for two reasons: a promotion and a raise. It's common for patrol officers to throw their hats into the ring, and if elected, they become the chief law enforcement officer with a crew of deputies who now answer to them--once a patrol cop, now the boss. A pay raise is almost always forthcoming. A sheriff's salary usually amounts to more than a small town patrol officer's. But in this instance, Jeff Dickerson, if he were elected, would take a pay cut. An Oregon State Trooper is better paid than a Columbia County sheriff. Along with salary and an average amount of overtime, Dickerson's pay cut could amount to a year's worth of mortgage payments on an average home; that's substantial. Why would he do it?

As Jeff admits, "What I really love about the idea of winning an election in order to lead a law enforcement agency is the uniquely 'American' quality of it all. To be directly responsible to the people for the

kind of law enforcement service we provide, strikes a chord with me in ways that my 19 years with the state police has not done."

With limited funds, a new sheriff will have to make due with whatever means are currently offered. A new sheriff will have to roll up his sleeves, stop belly-aching about more money from taxpayers, and get to work.

"You don't go to people and say, 'If only we had more deputies, then we could do the job right,'" Dickerson explains. "No, you do the best you can with the resources you do have. You improve your customer service skills with the employees you do have. If you develop trust between the sheriff and his employees, and between your employees and the citizens the sheriff has been elected to serve, you will create support for a reasonable levy that will enhance the performance of the agency. I don't think you get much mileage with voters by telling them you would do more if they gave you more deputies. People want to see what you have done with resources you have. They need to hear about the successes. They need to see problems being solved. They need to have positive contacts with the Sheriff's Office in their memories. We need to be zealous in our efforts to create raving fans of what we do."

It's Dickerson's nose-to-the-grindstone attitude that resonates well with hard-working people who are trying to raise a family with limited funds.

"The sheriff is directly responsible to the people, and is therefore, their servant. Public service takes on its full capacity when the people choose their leader to be the chief conservator of the peace in the county," Dickerson explains. "So, if it will become my responsibility to serve the interests of those who elected me, customer service will be at the top of my list when it comes to fulfilling the duties of my office. I want to create the first impression among citizens that if you want something done, call the Sheriff's Office." Dickerson continues, "I want to create as many fans of the Sheriff's Office as I can. If employees are armed with the vision to make a difference and are empowered to deliver professional law enforcement service with creative solutions that are wise and beneficial to the community -- and if they love their missions and see them as an extension of the overall vision of the agency -- then you have the potential for creating fanatical support among the citizens we serve. Most everyone knows we have problems with crime in Columbia County. Most people want to do something to address it. They need to have confidence that an increase in taxes will have tangible results -- more than just seeing additional patrol cars parked at the Sheriff's Office."

Once officials are elected, they tend to forget promises made on the campaign trail. Perhaps more than promises, there should be plans in place before election day to outline to the voter how the job will be done.

"My idea is to run a law enforcement agency more like some of the businesses in the private sector who have cornered market share and established longevity by providing outstanding customer service."

Dickerson leads through example, motivating those who serve under him. "You cannot get ideal service from an employee whose sole motivation in working there is to get a paycheck," he adds. "If it is just a job, or if you don't see yourself as part of an overarching public safety solution, then working for the sheriff is not your calling in life. We will need people who can internalize a vision of commitment to the best interests of the people we serve, not with lip service, but with a deep-seeded desire to solve problems for the community that only a law enforcement agency can solve. How do we get those kinds of people? By making sure they realize they are part of a team with a vision. By getting them to buy in to the concept of a professional public safety service devoted to dependability, efficiency, integrity and respect. By helping them to realize they have found their niche in life by working for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office. By empowering them to be creative in solving problems and giving them ownership of the authority --with responsibility -- to make the decisions that will enhance the public's safety and establish in them the vision to make a difference in the world around them."

Jeff Dickerson is enthusiastic about the possibilities of running a productive Sheriff's Office in a community that's at the proverbial fork in the road. One direction, a stellar community and a model for the whole state; the other, a hub and depository of crime. I urge you to investigate all candidates and make an informed opinion when you cast your vote for all offices, in particular the County Sheriff's position.

You can explore more about Jeff Dickerson's experience, goals and most importantly his credentials by visiting his website, <http://dickerson4sheriff.com>.

*Randy Sanders is the former Publisher of the Columbia River Reader.*

## HOUSE FOR SALE BY OWNER

710 E. BRIDGE STREET, VERNONIA

4 Bedroom  
2100 SQ. Feet

**\$252,000**

Call Terry for a  
No Hassel Showing  
971-409-4779



## Do you need a *TUNE-UP*?

The **PERFECT HEALTH** training program is for you:

- balance the mind-body
- enhance nutrition
- reduce emotional turbulence
- restore vitality
- re-awaken the senses

Class begins January 7, 2008,  
6:30-9 PM every Monday for  
5 weeks at

**Cedar Mist Studios**  
20960 Scappoose Vernonia Hwy  
[www.CedarMistStudios.com](http://www.CedarMistStudios.com)

Learn about the Perfect Health Lifestyle Program as developed by DEEPAK CHOPRA, M.D. and DAVID SIMON, M.D. and delivered by Deborah Steffen

**CHOPRA CENTER**  
CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR  
For more information and to enroll call:  
503-429-2103

**BLUE HOUSE**  
*Cafe*

Tuesday thru Sunday  
10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

(503) 429-4350  
62467 N. Hwy 47  
Vernonia, OR 97064

*Jessica Davis*  
*Dance Class*

Regular classes Monday and  
Wednesday 3:30 - 6:30pm

ages 4 & up - ballet classes - all experience levels

The Vernonia Ballet presents ...  
*The Nutcracker*  
December 14th at 7pm

429~0850