

Sheriff Cautions Public on Use of Force

About thirty local residents gathered at the Vernonia Scout Cabin to hear a presentation on Use of Force and other firearms issues by Columbia County Sheriff Jeff Dickerson.

Dickerson's message was very clear: Citizens are within their rights to use deadly force only to protect themselves if they believe they are being threatened.

Dickerson stated that he "wholeheartedly" supports ownership of firearms, not just for sport, but for self-protection, but that a firearm should be considered a last resort. "I carry my weapon all the time when I'm off duty, but I never want to have to use it," said Dickerson. "I hope I never have to shoot someone."

The presentation was the second meeting with local law enforcement officials organized by the newly formed 'Vernonia Neighborhood Watch' group.

Vernonia Police Chief Mike Conner has been working with the neighborhood watch group to provide information and local status updates on the Vernonia Police Department. Conner invited Dickerson to speak at this second informational meeting.

Conner opened the meeting by briefly discussing local crime enforcement issues, before turning the meeting over to the Sheriff.

Dickerson took time to explain Concealed Carry License and Open Carry laws and other basic firearms rules and regulations. Dickerson noted that Oregon is an Open Carry state, meaning citizens can openly carry their firearms in cities that have not passed an ordinance banning it.

Dickerson shared his own personal viewpoint on the Open Carry law. "I'm pro Second Amendment and people's rights," explained Dickerson. "But in order to keep those rights and not alarm the reactionaries, let's keep it concealed. My personal preference is that everybody just carried concealed. Don't draw attention to yourself. That's just my viewpoint."

Dickerson pointed out that he almost always carries concealed when off duty in order to protect himself and his family.

"If I'm at the mall or out to dinner with my family and I see something bad happening, I'm not going to take my gun out and make an arrest," said Dickerson. "First of all, I'm not going to get shot without being prepared. I don't want to get into a gunfight."

The main topic of the evening

involved Dickerson explaining the use of force in protecting private property and answered questions throughout the evening about different scenarios for use of force.

Dickerson's message concerning use of force was also very clear:



Citizens may not take the law into their own hands and use deadly force to protect property. "No, you can't do that," said Dickerson. He used the example of someone going into your garage, taking some of your possessions and running away when you confront them. "You can't shoot them," said Dickerson. "They are committing one crime, trespassing, and potentially a second, burglary in the second degree, and your committing a homicide. It doesn't equal out."

Dickerson was clear that if you are being physically threatened you are within your rights to protect yourself, but suggested that anyone who uses a firearm to protect themselves should expect significant legal and civil ramifications and actions, including civil lawsuits, investigations and expenses.

"If you end up having to use deadly physical force you have to be justified," said Dickerson.

Chief Conner noted there is a large difference between a criminal trial and a civil trial. "The burden of proof in a civil trial is far less than in a criminal trial," said Conner.

Dickerson stated that sometimes people who use force have to do so because they make the situation worse by their own actions. Dickerson called this scenario, "creating your own jeopardy." He used a real life example of an offi-

cer who jumped in front of an oncoming car, driven by a suspect in a crime, in order to hinder their getaway. The officer claimed he had to shoot the driver because they were going to run him down. "They said, 'You didn't have to shoot him because you didn't have to jump in front of the car,'" explained Dickerson.

Both Conner and Dickerson emphasized that citizens should refrain from taking the law into their own hands and instead be a good witness. They suggested getting good descriptions of any perpetrators including age, hair color and any clothing they are wearing, as well as of any vehicles involved. They suggested using a camera phone to take photographs. "If you want to shoot someone, shoot them with your cell phone," said Dickerson.

Dickerson addressed several issues during his hour discussion, including the current status of the Sheriff's Department. Dickerson also spent some time explaining the matrix the county jail uses to decide which prisoners they hold and which to release. Dickerson noted that the jail is still not fully staffed following the passage of the jail funding levy this spring and is currently only housing twenty-five local inmates. Dickerson says he hopes to have the jail fully operational and able to house 100 local prisoners by the end of the year.

For more information about the Vernonia Neighborhood Watch program go to vernoniawatch.org. You can contact them at alert97064@gmail.com or by phone at 503-705-5751.



City Administrator Candidates Interviewed

The Vernonia City Council voted on Saturday, July 12 to offer the permanent City Administrator position to one of the three candidates following a series of interviews on the same day.

The candidates were interviewed by three separate panels: a panel of citizens including representatives from several city committees; a panel of city staff; and a panel made up of the four current City Councilors. Current Vernonia Mayor and acting City Administrator Josette Mitchell was one of the candidates being interviewed for the

position. Following the interviews the Council met in Executive Session and deliberated for almost three hours about the interviews and the recommendations from the citizen and staff panels. Following the Executive Session, the Council met in open session and instructed city staff to begin negotiations with their first choice candidate. The Council's choice will not be made public until negotiations are complete and an offer has been accepted.

VERNONIA'S
voice

reflecting the spirit of our community

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One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098



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