

# Columbia County Sheriff's Office Transitions to Body-Worn Cameras

In an effort to undergird accountability and protect against unfounded misconduct allegations, the Columbia County Sheriff's Office is moving to on-officer body cameras for deputies working both in the jail and on patrol.

The transition in the jail has already begun, and in the coming weeks, it is expected that deputies on patrol will also have issued "body cams" designed to more fully document official contacts between deputies and the public (and between deputies and suspects or inmates).

"The move to on-officer body cameras is critical to my commitment to transparency with the public," said Sheriff Jeff Dickerson. "Deputies are given tremendous responsibility under my authority, and I want them to have the confidence that there is an independent record of their activities that will protect them from false allegations of misconduct--and also hold

them accountable to the high standards expected of them."

Deputies are undergoing training and policy updating for the purpose of designing consistent use of the "body cams." It is expected that



all official contacts will be recorded and kept in storage for the appropriate length of time, according to state public records laws. The cameras will also be used to document events to which deputies respond and provide evidence in criminal and civil court cases.

The sheriff believes that on-officer cameras are a substantial improvement over dashboard and other mounted devices that do not adequately capture the officer's point of view. "These cameras stay with the deputy no matter where he or she is deployed," Dickerson said. "When it comes to documenting use of force cases, for example, these cameras afford a better chance of documenting more closely the conditions deputies face at the moment force is used, or the moment the decision to arrest is made. Our deputies make good decisions, I believe the use of these 'body cams' will document these decisions in decisive ways that will help underscore the good work they do."

# Miller Foundation Awards \$25,000 Grant

The Vernonia Hands on Art Center was the grateful recipient of a recent grant from the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation. Hands on Art has a long standing relationship with the Vernonia schools, most visibly in the form of the Junior Salmon Auction which is held as an arts program and scholarship fundraiser at the school each May. Hands on Art has been working with the school district to finish the various in-building needs that were unmet during the construction of the school.

"It became obvious very quickly that our current portable P-A system was insufficient for our needs," said Principal Nate Underwood. Hands on Art offered to obtain a high quality portable sound system for both school and general community use. By only buying equipment that could not be fixed to the building, the system is a resource that can be used anywhere in the community.

The system will first be used at the Vernonia Has Talent show on March 19<sup>th</sup>. The first person to sing, Lovey James of Hillsboro, will not be competing in the talent show, but was gracious enough to agree to visit Vernonia after departing American Idol. Ms. James will be singing The Star Spangled Banner.

Due to the success of this initial purchase of equipment, valued at over \$20,000, Hands on Art and the district are looking at opportunities for completing the audiovisual needs of not only the commons and stage areas, but also both gymnasiums. District Board Chair Bill Langmaid commented, "We have a world class facility, and we need to finish it. This generous grant from the Miller Foundation is a great start."

# Ride Inn to Open this Spring

The Ride Inn, the new hotel on the site of the old Vernonia Inn, is scheduled to open this spring.

"We are shooting for sometime in April but we'll be open by May 1 for sure," said property owner Jerry Cordell in a recent interview. Cordell said he and his partners have been working through the winter at their own pace, renovating and cleaning up the property to get it ready for guests.

"When it's ready we'll open it," said Cordell. "We're getting close now."

Cordell says he has already taken reservations for several upcoming wedding parties.



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One year subscriptions  
(24 issues) \$35

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

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