

from the editor

The Vernonia community lost one of its young members last week.

Ariel Masog took her own life on June 29 and her family, the community and especially her schoolmates are left with many questions.

It's always sad when a small community loses someone, and especially tragic when it's a young person – even more so when it is by suicide.

I didn't know Ariel, and in a small town where almost everyone knows everyone else, I don't know the rest of the Masog family either, but I think all of us feel a little bit closer to each other when something like this happens, even if we don't directly know those involved.

While I haven't found out any of the details of her passing, what I have learned about Ariel is that she was a studious girl who loved to read, who cared about learning, and constantly kept a journal. She was shy and kept to herself but loved her family. She would have been a junior at Vernonia High School this upcoming school year.

Our thoughts are with her

family and friends as they go through this extremely difficult time of grieving and loss.

In today's world we know so much about each other, especially about our differences and the things that divide us like politics, religion, race, and wealth. There is so much discord, anger, and frustration in our country, but my hope is that this terribly sad situation can be an opportunity for us to examine how we treat one another. Maybe we can try help each other and try to be more kind and caring towards one another. Maybe we can try to treat each other with more compassion, kindness, and understanding and reach out to those we disagree with. Maybe we can try to be more respectful, and to look past our differences.

We are all human and we all just want to be loved and accepted for who we are. A smile, a kind word, or a nod of understanding can go a long way, especially towards someone who is struggling.

I know when there is a loss through suicide there can be a lot of guilt for the family, friends and acquaintances

left behind. I know, I've been through it in the past. It's so hard to know what someone needs when they are struggling and often we are unaware they have reached a crisis point in their lives. While it is often our tendency to think "what if" in these situations and think maybe we could have, or should have, done more to help, often the sorrowful reality is they made a decision for themselves.

Unfortunately the impact of that decision is heartbreaking for those left behind. There really isn't much we can do once this kind of decision has been made, except to embrace the family with love and caring and try to help them deal with their grief and mend in whatever way they need.

While there is no way to turn back the clock, we can try to learn from this and think about how we choose to treat each other in the future. Can we be more accepting, more compassionate, more inclusive, more understanding?

That would be my hope in this saddest of circumstances.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

Jail Operating Citizens Advisory Committee Releases Report on Columbia County Jail Operations

In May 2014, the citizens of Columbia County approved a levy to provide funds to operate the Columbia County Jail for three years. One provision of this levy was the creation of the Jail Operations Citizens Advisory Committee consisting of 10 members representing a diverse cross-section of the County including members that voted for and members that voted against the levy.

Although the Committee's only charge is to advise the Sheriff and the Board of County Commissioners "concerning the proper appropriation of jail levy funds," the Committee believes that the knowledge they have gained over the past 20 months on jail financing and operations should be shared with the citizens of Columbia County. The complete report, listed as JOCAC Report, can be found in the General Link section of the Columbia County website (co.columbia.or.us) and on some local city websites. Hard copies of the report are available at all city halls and libraries in Columbia County.

The Committee has received thorough briefings on the budget, jail operations, personnel hires, and equipment upgrades and replacement in order to verify that all funds raised by

the levy were spent on jail operations. In examining County quarterly and year-end financial reports the Committee has verified that all funds raised by the levy, and all other funds raised for jail operations, have either been spent on jail operations or are in an account reserved for jail operations.

The goal of the levy was to support a jail to house offenders in Columbia County and with sufficient capability to eliminate early releases. This goal was fully met on March 12, 2015, with the cessation of early releases. The local jail population was 81 inmates on March 6, 2016.

Several years of underfunded operations necessitated capital projects to maintain safe, efficient, and cost-effective operation of the jail. Two of those projects, a new jail management system, and a new transport vehicle, are summarized in the complete report.

The uncertainty of continued operation of the jail prior to passage of the levy lead to the loss of several deputies. The rigorous and time-consuming process for a person to become a certified deputy is described in the report.

Addressing the question of the cost of housing U.S. Marshal Inmates the Committee believes that the relevant

question is, how do the costs of housing U.S. Marshal Inmates, over and above the cost of housing local inmates compare with the \$80 per day per inmate that the County receives from the U.S. Marshal Service. Because many of the costs to house 80 to 100 local inmates are fixed, the cost to house 60 U.S. Marshal Inmates is \$201,000 per year or \$9 per day per inmate. Since the County receives \$1,752,000 from the U.S. Marshal Service, this leaves \$1,551,000 to be used to reduce the cost to house Columbia County inmates. See the report for the detailed evaluation.

The Committee believes the Columbia County Jail is extremely well run. The Sheriff, Jail Commander, and deputies are professional and are mindful of the community's welfare; they treat inmates with an understanding that they will eventually return to the community. On the last biennial Oregon State Sheriff's Association comprehensive inspection in January 2015, they were found in compliance with 306 of 308 standards and are now in compliance with the remaining two.

This article was provided by the Columbia County Jail Operating Citizens Advisory Committee.



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The Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD Board of Directors will meet Tuesday, July 19, 2016 at 7:00 pm at the Main Station, 12525 HWY 202, Mist, OR. Agenda items include but are not limited to usual order of business, citizen input, Fire Chief's report, financial reports and any other business needing to be discussed.

William DeJager
-Board President

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