

County Commissioners Election *continued from front page*

the storage tanks.”

Lichatowich said she sees a bright future for Columbia County in jobs and innovation. She noted that the Port of St. Helens has worked with three of its tenants - small but growing manufacturing companies that offer living wage jobs, good benefits, and good relationships with their employees - to expand, including Composites Universal, RainShadow Labs, and Pacific Stainless. She also mentioned the Oregon Manufacturing Innovative Center (OMIC) being developed in Scappoose, which will provide training internships and apprenticeships in collaboration with Portland Community College. “Because of the livability of our communities, I see people and entrepreneurs coming here and wanting to stay and grow with our communities. I think we’re going to see small business, industry development, and innovative ideas here – that’s our future.”

When asked about economic development specifically in Vernonia, she suggested tourism and service jobs were helpful. She asked about the possibility of the community supporting small business that feed into the tech industry in Hillsboro and noted transportation routes, lack of developable property, high utility rates, and a lack of quality services (high speed and reliable internet) as barriers. She suggested the community work to create a list of limiting factors and ideas of what kind of jobs would be acceptable, which could feed into a county-wide Comprehensive Economic Plan.

Lichatowich said the road conditions in Columbia County are “absolutely terrible” and said the County does not have stable funding to maintain them. “Columbia County’s Transportation plan projects we have \$20 million for the next 20 years to maintain roads. We have to figure out how to do it, whether it’s through grants or is legislation going to be forthcoming? Through a Comprehensive Plan we can restructure our funding and make recommendations on how to find money for our roads.”

When asked about the lack of public transportation access in Vernonia and the C.C. Rider system, Lichatowich suggested local volunteers and car pooling might fill the gap by providing rides to those in need. When residents in the audience reminded her that the system is supposed to provide affordable public access for all citizens in the County, Lichatowich backtracked somewhat and

suggested the community develop potential suggestions they could present to the County to meet their needs. “Transportation, whether it’s buses or roads, is something that needs to be available for everyone for health, safety, and economics. Can the community work on that? The Commissioners may not be the best place to look for your solution, the solution might need to come from you to the Commissioners.”

Lichatowich said she is an advocate for creating new parks in the County and improving current parks in the system. “I believe there is an outcry to do that,” she said. “I think people see the value and health benefits by having access to parks since the forests have been shut off. So people need access to trails and we need more trails.” She said citizens need to be a strong force and advocate for funding for parks and make their wishes known to the Commissioners. “You can become more powerful. You take on this challenge and then you just grow from there by networking together and create groups that are interested in additional issues.”

Lichatowich said she doesn’t think the Commissioners spend enough time talking with each other since they only meet officially once a week in a public meeting; if they talk to each other outside of a public meeting it is considered a quorum and has to be publicly announced. “They need to spend more time in work session so they can delve into more ideas.” She said she would also like to see the Commissioners leave St. Helens and meet in the different communities around the County, either in a formal meeting or an informal setting.

Kimberly Johns – Johns is an interesting character in this race with a unique background and perspective. He currently owns and operates USIA Underwater Equipment Sales Corporation, currently employing about 20 people manufacturing and exporting diving wetsuits, waders, and other waterproof equipment for military and public safety organizations from a small industrial site in St. Helens.

A visit to his campaign website, KimberlyJohns.com, provides links to various pages which showcase his other diverse accomplishments – college football place kicker at Oregon State who received several invitations for tryouts with NFL teams; Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Air Force; television personality and Adventure Expert on “The Oregon Coast Show”; EMT, Staff Chief

with St. Helens Fire, Columbia County Reserve Sheriff’s Deputy and Search and Rescue team member; Dive Instructor at Reed College; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Licensed Falconer.

Johns said he is concerned about the polarization between the political right and the left and said he doesn’t want to see that happen in his own communities. Johns said he doesn’t like career politicians and is running on a platform of two term limits for County Commissioners, and said he would also like to see the Commissioners take a 4-5% pay cut. “We have a two term limit for our President and I’m not sure why we don’t have it for Congress and the Senate. I think we should have it in Columbia County. I’m also not sure why our County Commissioner get paid \$87,000 a year, plus benefits. I think that’s outrageous. I want to show the citizens that I’m serious about changing how money is spent around here.”

Johns said while he is pro business and pro growth, he is also a sportsman and wants to see more public access to the Columbia River. He said he is not completely familiar with the Port Westward projects, but wants to see any development there be environmentally friendly and protect the clean air and water in Oregon. “I will bring a business perspective to the Board of Commissioners. We can be pro business and pro industry here because we have the State of Oregon and environmentalists who are going to put anything we try to do in check. The Commissioners main job is land use - how to figure out zoning regulations and what we can and can’t do in the County. Let’s not impede business from being here, but cooperate with business to be here.”

He said local established businesses should be taking advantage of, and participating in, defense contracting; his company USIA has received \$8 million in defense contracts from 2000-2018, almost half the defense funds spent in the entire County during that time period. “I spent three years as a Department of Commerce appointee and I know how to deal with the Federal government and I know how the commerce system works on the federal level and how to funnel business here and how to get our products exported overseas.” He said he would like to see the County create more SBA HUB zones and Enterprise Zones. “Enterprise Zones are enticing and they can help a business for a few years to get established and then



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they can start contributing tax dollars back to the community. We can’t be giving business at Port Westward a 15 year Enterprise Zone.” He said he sees two types of businesses, smaller businesses like his that have a responsibility to their employees and the local community, and then businesses that have shareholders who are only responsible to those shareholders. “When businesses come to Columbia County the first thing we should determine is if they’re about the people of Columbia County or are they about their shareholders who don’t live here. Let’s attract medium size businesses that can make it here, paying family wage jobs.”

He said he doesn’t understand why public safety has been such a low priority for so long for the Commissioners. He has served as a Reserve Deputy so he’s seen the dangers of not having

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