

# Meet the Candidates : Vernonia Mayor, City Council, and Columbia County Sheriff *continued from page 8*

useful.

Hobart said he looks for someone who has done the job before or has experience.

When asked about empty buildings in town and what they would do to recruit new business, Hobart said small businesses come and go in this community and the town is still in recovery mode following the floods of 1996 and 2007 and the economic crash. He said he is encouraged with the current businesses and said a lot of good things are happening. He's optimistic about Vernonia's future.

Hult said she's involved in county tourism and economic development because it's important for Vernonia to be strong in those areas. She said that takes strong, collaborative relationships. She said it's important to understand what new businesses want and need and then be welcoming, help educate them, and provide resources when they express interest in locating here.

Allen said he has seen Vernonia in worse shape and is optimistic about the future. He said there are plans for renovations at several empty properties. He said Vernonia does not have big industry but relies on small cottage industries and businesses, along with being a bedroom community for Portland and Hillsboro. He said bike trails have helped the community and brought in tourism. He said attracting people to community events like the Salmon Festival can help businesses grow and thrive. "We want Portlanders to come out, spend their money, and then go back to Portland."

Seager said he did not believe it was the direct responsibility of the Council to work on filling empty buildings, but he agreed that the City should have a positive image at City Hall and work with people as they go through the Planning Commission or getting licenses to get new businesses started.

Webb said he also did not think it is the role of the City to promote business growth, but they should be accommodating, provide rules and regulations, and make it as easy as possible if someone is interested.

## Columbia County Sheriff

Current Columbia County Patrol Lieutenant Brian Pixley of Scappoose has 21 years of public safety experience, with 15 years working in Columbia County where he has worked as a jail deputy and a marine deputy for the Sheriff's Office, and as a City of Scappoose Patrol Officer. He says as a current member of the department he has a unique insight, understands what changes are needed, and what needs to be done to implement those changes. He said it's important for the Sheriff's Office to regain the community's trust.

Dave Brown is a former Criminal Investigator with the U.S. Treasury Department, former Supervisory Deputy with the U.S. Marshals office with experience handling housed prisoners and managing detention funds, and is a former Columbia County Deputy. He has 34 years of law enforcement experience and a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration from Oregon

State University. Brown says he was asked to run for Sheriff by a number of people in the county who felt it was time for a change, and time to repair relationships with the community and "get past the chaos that has ensued during the last few years."

James Gibson of Clatskanie is a lifelong resident of Columbia County who is a former Columbia County jail Commander who also ran for Columbia County Commissioner in 2012. He currently operates his own private investigation firm. He has been a volunteer with the American Red Cross and was most recently deployed to help with recovery efforts from Hurricane Florence. Gibson says it's important for the Sheriff's Office to rebuild relationships.

When asked what specific changes they would try to implement to current policies and practices at the Sheriff's Office, Pixley said the office needs more accountability. He said he would ensure that deputies spend a certain number of hours patrolling rural areas, with a liaison officer assigned to each community. He said he would implement a citizen review board for ethics and policy violations by staff. He said it was important for the Sheriff's Office to have a clear mission and goals and important to ensure that deputies were working towards those goals. He said it was important to raise hiring standards. Pixley said a resident deputy program, where deputies live in rural communities they serve, would be too costly and wouldn't work. He said a service agreement with the City of Vernonia to provide coverage when no police officers are on duty has worked well, and he would like to consider expanding that. He said supervisors need to be out in the field and not in the office. He said transparency needs to be improved, as does accountability for deputies. "I want to open our doors and show the people the great things we're doing."

Gibson said he would institute a citizen's committee to assist in the hiring process for personnel. He said he would like to see deputies assigned to specific areas and communities, especially in the rural areas of the County, so they get to know the people in the community, and the community gets to know their deputy. He said all patrol cars should be labeled so citizens know a deputy is in

their community. "If people see a sheriff there is less chance for crime," said Gibson. He said he would like to see a limited timeline for paid administrative leave and get any ethics violations investigations that are handled by outside agencies completed as quickly as possible. He said personnel in management should not be allowed to take a demotion to a union position, but should be terminated. He said it was important to work with service agencies in the County for issues like addiction, mental health, and homelessness. Gibson said he would spend time with each and every deputy in the field. He said supervisors need to be in the field and reviewing reports, because reporting has been inadequate. He said the Sheriff needs to be a leader and the department needs a strong second-in-command. "If elected, I will be a working Sheriff, not one sitting in an office."

Brown said the Sheriff's Office has some good policies and procedures, the problem is they aren't being followed. He said he would make sure the jail is not holding anyone longer than they should be. He agreed that citizens should be involved in the hiring process and that patrol cars should be marked. He also said deputy reports need to be monitored, completed as quickly as possible, and available for the people involved in the complaint. Brown said he would like to see resident deputies who live in the rural communities and thinks he could find money in the budget to make it work. He said the reserve officer program needs to be rebuilt and could help provide coverage in rural areas and communities. He said he would look for a second-in-command from outside the agency that has no previous ties to Columbia County, which would lend transparency. Brown said change starts with the Sheriff himself and said Columbia County's Sheriff needs to be more visible and active in the Oregon Sheriff's Association. He said relationships need to be repaired, specifically with the County Commissioners and with the Columbia County Humane Society. "Mostly it's

mending fences and not bumping heads. We need to work with the Commissioners. My approach would be to treat them as partners and the same thing with our police chiefs and all our citizen's groups."

When asked how they thought the Sheriff's Office agreement with the City of Clatskanie to provide law enforcement services was working and if it might work in other areas of the County, Gibson said half the citizens in Clatskanie don't like it and don't feel they get adequate coverage. Gibson said he thinks it costs the community more.

Brown said he didn't think the Clatskanie model is working well and that it might work in other communities like Vernonia, but would probably provide less coverage than the community currently receives from their own police department.

Pixley said the City of Clatskanie just asked for another half-time position, so that shows the program is working. He said the Sheriff's Office is talking with the Clatskanie and Rainier School Districts to find funding for a School Resource Officer to work in the schools.

The candidates were asked how they proposed to provide adequate and stable funding for the jail and for patrol deputies. Brown said the jail expenditures and revenue reports need to be analyzed and verified. He said right now jail operations depend on general fund money from the County budget, funding from the U.S. Marshal for housing prisoners, and levy money approved by tax payers – he said it might be possible to keep the jail operating with general funds and just one of those external sources. Brown said in order to fund more patrol officers the Sheriff's Office will need either additional funding in the County budget or funding from grants or other outside sources. He said Columbia County wages are not competitive for deputies.

Gibson said dual certified patrol deputies are being pulled from the road to fill shifts at the jail. "With that jail

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