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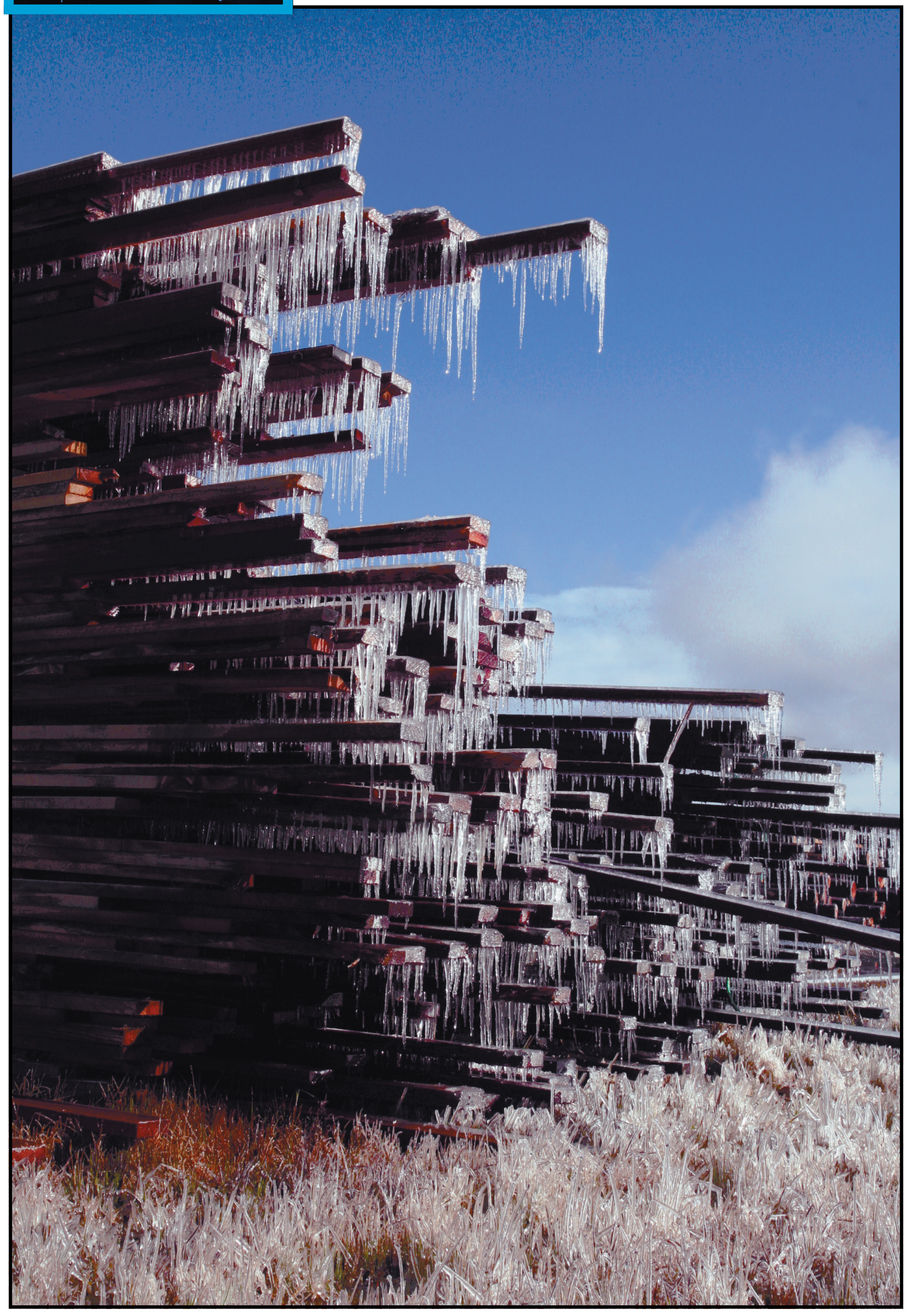

HOW COLD IS IT? -- Cold enough to freeze water and form icicles. The winter weather, with examples of its effect, such as this icy scene at Rough & Ready Lumber Co., demonstrates the work of Jack Frost. However, it's predicted that daytime temperatures during the next several days will be in the 40s. (Photo by Michelle Binker/IVN)

County worker hiring freeze in effect

Commissioners planning tax levy due to lack of federal funding for budget

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Even though Josephine County is taking steps to prepare for the worst because of the uncertainty regarding future federal funding, no employee layoffs are planned during January, at least temporarily allaying fears among many county workers.

"I've heard the same rumors," said county Chief Financial Officer Rosemary Padgett. "It's not happening," she said.

Instead, the county is using other methods to start cutting payroll-related expenses. Padgett said that every time an employee leaves, the county will evaluate whether or not to refill that position. A hiring freeze also has been instituted.

The 2006-07 fiscal year will end June 30. As such, the county is currently reluctant to hire new employees and train them, in case they may need to be layed off between now and then.

In a Dec. 27 memo to county employees, the board of commissioners warned of the possibility of layoffs later in the year.

"While we have hopes for a possible tax levy, or an O&C funding resumption, we must continue to prepare for a financial crisis in county government," the memo read.

It continued with, "Over the last two years, painful efforts have been undertaken to reduce county expenditures and maximize existing resources. Having done that, the board will submit to the voters at the May '07 election a ballot measure seeking additional revenue. However, we cannot delay or avoid service and labor reductions in the meantime. That process will begin shortly."

The memo states that the county anticipates the

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New top cops ready to lead deputies

Lame ducks on leave, but sheriff's office not lacking direction

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

The new year represents a changing of the guard at the Josephine County Sheriff's Office (JCSO), as outgoing Sheriff Dave Daniel is making way for Sheriff-elect Gil Gilbertson.

According to Sue Watkins, JCSO business manager, Gilbertson and Don Fasching, his appointed undersheriff, have spent the last month learning the JCSO policies and procedures; going over the budget; and meeting county department heads, elected officials and employees.

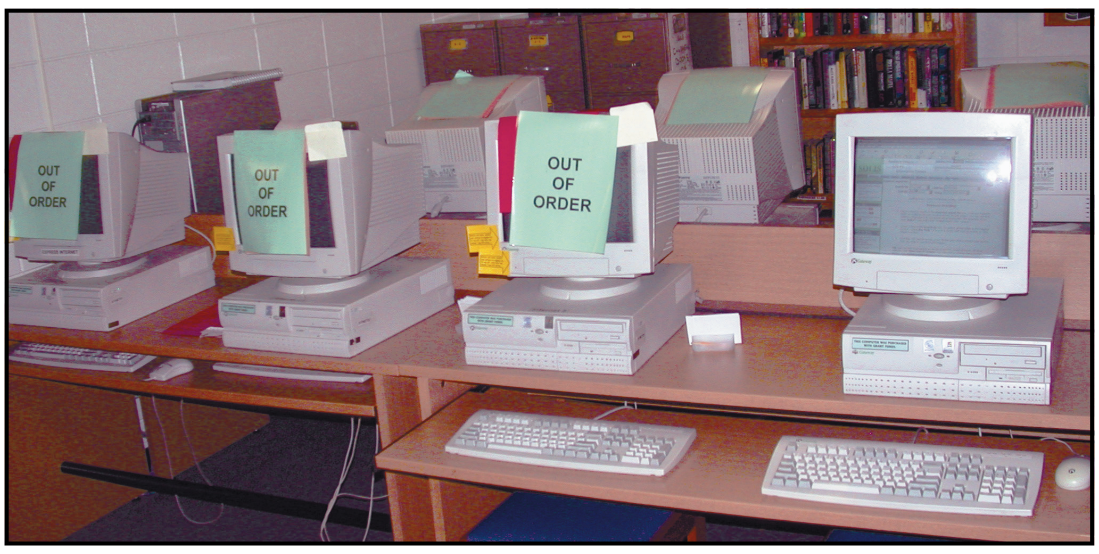
Daniel lately has not had much of a presence at the office, but Watkins said that he is still technically in charge until Gilbertson is sworn in on Monday, Jan. 8.

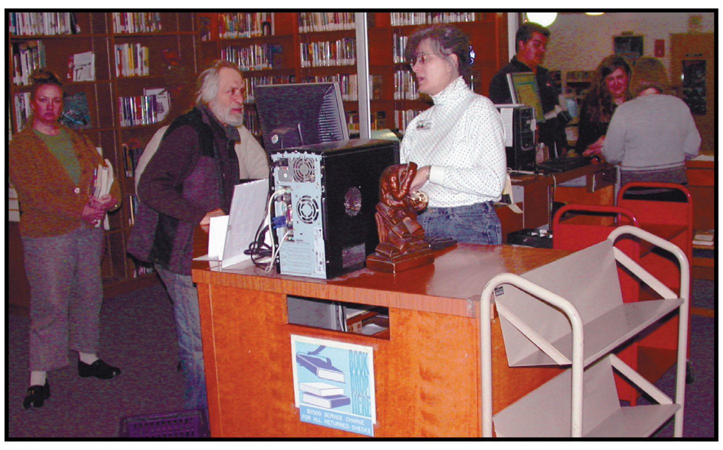
"He took a couple of days off, but if there's an emergency, we can contact him," Watkins said. "If we need him, he's only a phone call away."

Watkins has been handling administrative duties for JCSO, while Sgt. Ken Selig is in charge of the patrol and detectives division, and Lt. Robin Ward supervises the jail.

Undersheriff Brian Anderson resigned as of Jan. 1, but took a vacation to spend the holidays with family. Watkins said that the vacation was planned six months in advance.

Based on information from Jackson County Sheriff Mike Winters, Anderson will become commander of the Jackson County Jail. He was to begin that position this week. Fasching was sworn in on Tuesday, Jan. 2.





Funding gaps are in evidence at the Illinois Valley branch of the county library system. (Top photo) Internet PC connections have been terminated, although the card catalog computer is still in operation. (Bottom photo) Patrons line up to check out books during one of the two days of library operation in Cave Junction (Photos by Scott Jorgensen/IVN)

Funding gap speaks volumes at library

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

When patrons line up at the counter at the Illinois Valley Branch of the Josephine County Library System in Cave Junction it appears at first glance to be business as usual.

However, hovering over the building is the growing fear that it may not be open much longer.

Current hours have been reduced to noon to 6 p.m. Wednesdays, and 1 to 5 p.m. Saturdays.

Behind the counter, Marianne Dwyer, a library system employee for eight years and current I.V. Branch manager, checks books in and out. But eight years ago, the county and library were in much better shape, with stable funding and regular hours.

During subsequent years a situation described by Dwyer as "death by a thousand cuts" has occurred; not to mention the uncertainty currently facing the county's library system.

"We still don't know anything for sure about the future," Dwyer said.

Nearby, library volunteer Lavada Hart meticulously places books on the shelves of the children's section.

Although she has had a lifelong love of libraries, Hart has become especially fond of the facility during recent months. And after her husband died last year, Hart found herself spending more and more time helping out "any way that I can."

Hart said that she still remembers hearing the bad news on election night: the county's proposed library levy had failed by a substantial margin.

"I was crushed," Hart said. "I can't believe it. I've had libraries my whole life, and I can't believe we might be losing them. It's so sad."

As she sat in a corner reading a newspaper, Pat Rorden said that she has made it a point to visit the library as often as possible during the past eight years.

"I come here as I often as I can, which is only two days a week," Rorden said. "It has a very big impact on my life."

As bad as it may look right now, Josephine County Library System Manager Cessa Vichi has seen worse. She recalls how the county closed its libraries in 1992, ironically enough, due to a reduction in federal O&C funds. Those funds were eventually restored and the libraries were reopened.

Vichi said that the library system has been operating on a series of serial levies for the past 15 years, but that 2006 was different.

"This year ('06), we were supplementing from carryover and a trust fund

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Awash in red ink, county fair board prepares solutions to budgetary problems

BY SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

The Josephine County Fairgrounds Board of Directors has until Wednesday, Jan. 10 to develop a business plan to stabilize its financial situation.

At the end of November 2006, the fairground's balance sheet was awash in $68,000 worth of red ink, said county Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Rosemary Padgett.

"They're not meeting payroll," Padgett said.

Padgett said that the fairground's monthly expenses total $40,000. Its monthly payroll is approximately $18,000; and other expenses include utilities and liability insurance.

The fairgrounds have operated at a deficit during the last five years, but the county has made up the difference through a series of short-term loans. Typically, the county loans the money during the winter months and the fairgrounds board pays it back in June.

But last December, the county board of commissioners sent a letter to the fair board stating that the loans would be discontinued due to the possible loss of federal O&C funds. That letter was accompanied by a final loan, which has been repaid.

However, attendance during the summer 2006 fair was the second-lowest in the past decade, and bad weather caused a shortened horseracing season. The loss of those racing days cost the fairgrounds $74,000 in anticipated revenue.

"The fairgrounds have been struggling for a number of years," Padgett said. "They're not unique. Every fair in Oregon, including the state fair, has had monetary problems."

Fairgrounds throughout the state have long been subsidized by local municipalities. But there has been increased pressure on fairgrounds during recent years to try and become more self-sufficient.

In neighboring Jackson County, steps have been taken during the past six years to wean the fairgrounds from dependency on general fund dollars.

"Now we're told we have to run at a profit," said Jackson County Fair Manager Chris Borovansky. "With the funding situation being what it has been here, we saw some time ago the need to operate like a business as best we could."

The Jackson County Fairgrounds took several small steps toward financial independence, many of which are being considered by the Josephine County Fair Board. A business plan was established, along with a series of public-private partnerships.

Also, user fees were increased, and the facility has been marketed to large horse shows. Borovansky said the horse shows have proven to be "fairly lucrative."

"We're one of the luckier departments in that the fairgrounds can generate revenue," Borovansky said. "We're not dependent entirely on general fund contributions or taxes."

Josephine County Chief Operating Officer (COO) Marie Hill is working with the fair board to develop its business plan. She said that directors have met several times during the past month to try to find long-term funding solutions.

"The board is putting a lot of energy into seeing where it's at financially," Hill said. "They're real committed people trying to make it work."

Padgett said that corporate sponsorships for the fair may be another possibility, and that local community service organizations might step up to offer assistance. As such, she is optimistic that the fair can remain open far into the future.

Indications are that there will be a 2007 fair.

"I believe the community will pull together and find a way to make it work," Padgett said.

*** Vandals hit Downtown Cave Junction**
*** Firefighters respond to rescue dogs**
*** Kate Dwyer offers diet resolution tips**
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