

Letters to the Editor

(Editor's Note: Views and commentary, including statements made as fact, are strictly those of the letter-writers.)

Typed, double-spaced letters are considered for publication. Hand-written letters that are double-spaced and legible also can be considered. "Thank you" submissions are not accepted as letters.

Cave Junction perceptions From Don Moore, President, Illinois Valley Chamber of Commerce; and Cave Junction City Council member

Many in our community are dismayed and concerned at the harmful and depressing picture painted by the three-part series in the *Daily Courier* regarding what is portrayed as an unsafe Cave Junction community full of crime, unruly "street people" and thugs on our streets.

In fact, the city of Grants Pass has a much higher crime rate than the city of Cave Junction -- and Grants Pass has a full-time police force. This is not to condemn the Grants Pass officers. It is simply a statement of fact that armed robberies, major incidents of criminal mischief, and assaults occur in Grants Pass.

Police officers anywhere, Grants Pass included, cannot be everywhere at once. They do the best they can with the resources and schedules available. It's the same for Cave Junction.

Yes, there have been and there are crimes in Cave Junction. However, the two incidents so vividly outlined by the *Courier* -- the murder

of former Mayor Tom Green and an incident outside a downtown bar -- are not part of the main fabric of our city. They are, for the most part, isolated incidents.

Our situation is nowhere near as grave as depicted by the *Courier* articles. We have a fine community, with upright citizens doing their best. And we have, as all cities and towns, a handful of trouble-makers.

Our city is on the verge of major development. Good things are happening. The *Courier's* misleading, pessimistic and harmful approach has caused great harm to our community that will serve as an impediment to many who might have wanted to move here or relocate their businesses.

The damage is irreparable.

'Misleading, negative' From Linda Corey-Woodward Cave Junction

I am writing in response to the misleading, negative stories in the *Daily Courier* about the Illinois Valley. Shaun Hall and Patti Richter, who do not live in Cave Junction, wrote front-page stories dramatizing how lawless we are out here in the "remote Illinois Valley."

I beg to differ on the slant of their stories.

Approximately 20,000 people live in this part of Josephine County. We are ranchers, merchants, wine-makers, retirees, school children, preachers, teachers, wood-carvers, entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, writers and medical professionals. We operate tourist attractions, some work in Grants Pass, and we care very much

about our community.

Many residents are volunteers with nonprofit community service organizations, including me. We have phone trees and community message boards on the Internet to communicate information about fires, thefts, lost dogs, hay for sale, and local craft-and-skill workshops. Some monitor the police radio for trouble and alert neighbors.

Most of us are armed; we lock our homes and vehicles and take other precautions to protect life and property. We are a tight-knit community, and we come together to help our neighbors.

Despite the slanted picture painted with a wide brush in the Grants Pass newspaper about two events in July, the Illinois Valley is a wonderful place to live. We love it here. The air is clean (except when the south wind blows smoke in from fires in California).

It's quiet. We don't have traffic jams, malls or big box retail, and we like it that way. We are 45 minutes from the Pacific Ocean or from Grants Pass and I-5. Close enough for travel or weekend jaunts.

We see several sheriff's office patrol cars around the Illinois Valley more than just 40 hours a week. We also have state troopers keeping busy along Redwood Hwy. We are not as isolated and lawless as the articles make it appear.

The criminal problems mentioned in the articles are the same all over Oregon. In fact, Grants Pass is far worse and more dangerous than Illinois Valley. These stories are just more of the same old Grants Pass attitude toward the Illinois Valley. Apparently, the *Courier* profits by perpetuating this myth that we are all homeless or hippies. Not!

In truth, we have no more problems than any other small town. We do have many benefits in living away from cities and interstate highways. We enjoy our community where everyone knows everyone else. Illinois Valley residents wouldn't trade places with the harried people in Grants Pass for anything.

Kickin' back in my hammock, watching a hawk over Hope Mountain or riding my horse is my idea of quality of life.

(Editor's Note: For full disclosure, we wish to note that the author, a free-lance writer for this newspaper, submitted her letter as a concerned citizen.)

Safe in Cave Junction From Zina Booth Cave Junction

"C.J. 'Hornet's Nest' keeps buzzing." "C.J. businesses 'button up' at night." "Criminals running amok in Cave Junction?"

Oh please, don't be such a 'Worrier'.

The *Daily Courier* recently ran these dramatic headlines in a three-day series of crime in Cave Junction, trying to make CJ sound like a really scary place to live.

Based on my experience living just outside CJ city limits for three and a half years, yes, I absolutely do feel safe here.

Is there crime here? Of course, isn't there everywhere? Nearly three years ago, my home was broken into, with nearly \$4,000 stolen -- everything from jewelry to food to my grandchildren's Christmas presents. The responding deputy handed me a loss report and told me to drop it off when I had a chance.

When asked if he was going to test for fingerprints, he told me "What do you think this is, CSI?" He informed me that it was the "norm" between Thanksgiving and Christmas each year

for a rash of home burglaries. He also warned me to "Get used to it, because if the levy doesn't pass, and the O&C funds dry up, you'll have even less protection."

So I prepared myself. I started talking to fellow CJ residents. They told me to "Get a dog, and get a gun." My "vicious dog" is excluded from my home owner's insurance policy, but I haven't had any more burglary claims.

Radio Shack sells quite inexpensive, but very effective alarm systems.

Neighbors have graciously offered to bring their artillery; if I ever need backup, I am calling them, not 911.

Yes, we have transients here. In fact, a neighbor recently advised me that one had taken up camp on my property. My neighbors stood by, armed and ready in case of trouble. I walked through the poison oak and blackberry bushes, and indeed, there was David, quite cozy in a little den carved out of the undergrowth. He had obviously been there a while, as there were two different "rooms" decorated with a CD hanging from the branches.

I asked him what he was doing, and he told me his story. He had just received his Oregon Trail card, and was heading to Grants Pass in the morning. He moved his belongings about in a grocery cart. I told him that he couldn't just live there in the bushes, and true to his word, he moved on.

Was he scary? No, he was a person living amid poison oak, wearing a child's jacket on a 6-4 man's frame. Did he try to hurt me? No, I never even knew he was there.

One *Daily Courier* article quoted Becky Johnson, a drug and alcohol counselor: "Many people are homeless, and others are unemployed. Many also have limited transportation, and others suffer from mental illness. Others lack education, and many don't have health insurance."

Gee, and here I actually thought this was a nationwide problem.

Johnson went on to say "Still, people like it in the valley."

Doesn't that say it all? I drove through Grants Pass and Medford after 1 a.m. Sunday and saw plenty of blue-and-red flashing lights. I saw no law enforcement in Cave Junction after 2 a.m., but there weren't any criminals running amok either. Businesses were buttoned up and secure: just like in Grants Pass.

You know what they say about hornets -- leave them alone and they won't bother you, but don't ever disturb their nests.

(Editor's Note: The preceding letter is from an employee of this newspaper, submitted as a concerned citizen.)

Public safety funding From Josephine County Sheriff Gil Gilbertson

We have all been waiting with anticipation for someone from the state level to provide us with an opinion or some clarification of what to expect with our foreseeable future.

Reportedly, nine of our 36 counties are in serious trouble. The loss of the federal subsidy (frequently referred to as the O&C) is having a devastating effect on the many of us that have become dependent on those resources. Our federal government now has terminated its commitment in continued funding; causing a definite hardship on many aspects of our lives, including public safety.

Josephine County is at the very top of that list. However, it should not come as a surprise to anyone. Although we enjoy the lowest tax rates in the state, there is a downside;

and we are now facing that reality. Albeit there are many other dimensions to this dilemma, we are concerned with our public safety and the quality of life we all deserve.

This sheriff's office administration is committed to cutting as close-to-the-bone as possible to stretch out our funding to provide the best service possible. We recently turned in 11 vehicles; some deputies are now sharing a vehicle to save on gas; our volunteers on patrol have been put on hold.

We are looking into different uniforms for jail personnel which could save us more than \$100 per uniform; we've recently relocated our substation in Cave Junction to save more than \$7,300 per year; we continue to aggressively seek grants and other funding sources -- we have even approached private industry to seek funds.

We have relocated our jail personnel to a more confined area to enhance their productivity, without loss of safety -- evidenced by our ability to book more inmates last year; we assumed our own dispatch center at a savings of approximately \$130,000; and to control our overtime and provide some level of safety to our deputies we operate one shift per day.

We cannot answer for what other administrators may or may not have done. Fingerprinting does little to solve any problem. We believe in dealing with what we have in front of us, plan for the future, and move forward. Today, we have become a very transparent organization, embracing public scrutiny (i.e., establishment of the Citizens Sheriff Advisory Committee).

We are dedicated to our goals, ideals, objectives, and performance -- which revolve around the community. We are asking that citizens also look to our future. "Earning" that trust was one of the compelling forces driving the changes in this administration. We will continue to strive toward that goal.

Driving to college From William Robert Johnson

I can barely understand why most students in certain programs; for example, Human Services and others, who live in Josephine County, must drive to Medford to attend classes. I have always considered the Redwood Campus in Grants Pass the core campus, as have many others.

Gas prices, construction, driving through the heart of a city, and losing precious study time are big considerations for students. I realize that certain sacrifices must be made, but the aforementioned conditions are unbearable for a lot of low-income and working students. I have heard it mentioned by many students that the reason they dropped out of school was because of the commute and the associated hazards.

I totally realize that times are tough all over, but concessions are always a good stepping stone to serenity. Stress and tension are definitely

counterproductive, and I have noticed a lot of it concerning the above issues. I remember driving to the Table Rock Campus, and although it was a very efficient campus, the three-hour round-trip was very stressful as well as counterproductive.

Not to be sarcastic, but most students are not in college to sharpen their driving skills.

Simple math From Curt Bynum Grants Pass

If ever there were an issue that needs to be freed from politics it's our families' safety. If ever there was a time we need clarity of facts it is now.

I know it can be hard for any of us to get our arms around things involving hundreds of people and services and tens of millions of dollars. Maybe there is an easier way to understand the magnitude of the county's funding crisis and what it means to public safety and our shared quality of life.

Timber and O&C payments have always been the largest part of the General Fund, recently providing approximately 67 percent of the money available. With the loss of O&C support, we are left with only 33 percent of the money required for all of the things paid for from the General Fund, most importantly, our sheriff's office.

Clearly, no form of cost efficiencies, organizational magic or higher math can replace two-thirds of the whole with the remaining one-third without major and wholly intolerable consequences. Even if the entire remaining 33 percent were dedicated to the sheriff, it would not begin to cover the already reduced cost of operations and declining services, let alone return us to the level of safety that the tax districts will support.

It would shut down essential services including the assessor, treasurer, surveyor, and juvenile justice including all detention and shelter facilities. In addition, it would badly affect essential programs including Legal, Finance, IT, HR and the County Clerk. Libraries, anyone?

In point of fact, the average county resident pays little more than \$6 a month for county services, excluding money collected for the schools, cities and bond payments. Under the proposed tax districts the average rural household can expect to pay less than \$25 per month, and for Grants Pass it's approximately \$12 per month. This is truly a bargain for the benefits we stand to receive and the consequences we can avoid.

Why are we confused? Our unfortunate political experience has led to a public discussion that gets twisted and is deceptively off topic. A small, yet loud, faction is dominating the public discourse, confusing facts and actively misleading our community. They portray the entire county budget as being far bigger than it really is and make us think it is available to spend any way we like.

(Continued on page 3)

Bob's Corner

As we're coming up on Labor Day, it seems that having a special observance means that some of us should take advantage of less work, when we can manage that, so this is a shorter-than-usual column. We members of the Fourth Estate, you see, will have to work on that special day of Monday, Sept. 1, although most people with jobs will have a day off.

Matter of fact, that's the way it is with most holidays. There are times when we can avoid working on such days, but not often. It's amusing to us, in a black sort of way, that many people think we only work one day a week. Nope. You've got to walk a mile in our sneakers before you can understand that's not how it works, to use a pun of sorts.

At newspapers, whether daily or weekly, the deadlines stand ominously; the newspaper must be published. As my Granny Vicky was wont to say, "No rest for the wicked."

I am reminded of my first work day in Oregon. It was Labor Day 1979. I was in Brookings as news editor at the *Curry Coastal Pilot*, sitting in the newsroom and looking at an absolutely torrential rainstorm. Jan and two of our three children were still in Escondido, Calif.

So the thoughts came: Did I do the right thing? Was this a good move? It was a bit late to be soul-searching, but hey, I'm a guy. That's how we are.

And now, 29 years later, after two admitted heart attacks and 22 years at *Illinois Valley News*, I can say that it was a good move. Probably.

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Anna from Germany, 16 yrs. Likes to play tennis, swim, loves to dance. Anna hopes to play American softball and learn American 'slang' while in the USA.



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