

Annual week of fireworks impacted

By
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Despite the wet weather of late, Southwest Oregon is in a state of drought, which has local fire officials crossing their fingers about the use of fireworks over the coming week.

Similar conditions in Colorado this month created the state’s most destructive wildfire on record in Colorado Springs. Elsewhere during the weekend, new fires jumped from 12,000 to 30,000 acres overnight, prompting evacuation of three additional mountain towns in that state. Hundreds of homes have already been lost to wildfires this year across the western U.S. and Alaska.

Locally, fire season began June 1 with bans on the use of burn barrels and open fire pits in effect.

Due to the extreme fire danger, fireworks will not be allowed in county parks this summer. Fire officials point to a fire at Lake Selmac last year following a private fireworks display as reason enough for residents to use caution during the upcoming holiday.

“We’ve been lucky so far this year,” said I.V. Fire District spokesman Kamron Ismaili. “But, everyone needs to understand IVFD volunteer numbers are way down and that could be a problem.”

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Illinois Valley Fire District firefighters work to contain the early hour blaze Wednesday, June 19.

(Photo by Dale Sandberg, IVFD Media Dept)

Suspicious fire destroys O’Brien warehouse

By
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The June 19 fire that destroyed an O’ Brien warehouse near the Illinois Valley Airport was human-caused, according to an inter-agency investigation team comprised of the Illinois Valley Fire District, Oregon State Fire Marshal’s Office and Oregon State Police.

Possible accidental scenarios related to building system failures or potential natural causes have been eliminated, said IV Fire Chief Dennis Hoke. The team is actively pursing leads to solve the cause of the fire.

While this is the second suspicious structure fire

in the Valley in a month — the Cave Junction Post Office was destroyed May 30 — the two fires do not appear to be related, said OSP Arson and Explosives Detective Gaylon Couch.

Couch said there also isn’t any evidence linking either of the recent incendiary incidents to the fire that destroyed the My Pub tavern in Cave Junction last November.

A witness reported the O’Brien fire at 6:30 a.m. and the IV Fire District responded fast, but the 6,000-square-foot building located at 30073 Redwood Highway was already engulfed in flames by the time they arrived.

“The fire had burned through the length of the building,” Hoke said. “So we worked to contain the fire, to keep it from spreading to nearby buildings and fields.”

Multiple agencies responded to the fire, including crews from ODF, Grants Pass, Rogue River, Williams and about 17 staff and volunteers from the IV Fire District. Some of the out-of-town units were recalled before arriving.

As the site lacks adequate water, six water-tender trucks were brought to the scene. It took less than an hour to put the fire out, and by mid-morning, firefighters were mopping up the area. There were no injuries reported.

There wasn’t any power to the warehouse and the propane tanks were empty. Also, after a preliminary inspection of the burnt-out structure, nothing was found that could have created a spark or ignition, according to Kamron Ismaili, IV Fire District Division Chief.

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County adopts shrunken budget while other fiscal options are pursued

By
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In the wake of the failure of the recent levy that would have raised \$9 million to fund Josephine County’s struggling public safety system, most efforts to prop up services have run into roadblocks. The county jail, deputy patrols, the DA’s office and juvenile justice programs will operate at reduced levels for the foreseeable future.

The county budget has been approved and allocates approximately \$6 million for public safety. That’s down from \$16 million designated for the same programs ten years ago, according to County Commissioner Keith Heck.

While the total county budget is a little over \$68 million (down from \$91 million in 2011/2012), most of those funds are patched-through from and designated for federal and state mandated programs and expenditures.

The sheriff’s office will receive \$5.5 million and juvenile justice will receive \$961,700. The District Attorney’s (DA) office will receive \$1.7 million.

“That’s just not enough to get the job done,” Heck said, adding that three years ago the sheriff’s office still employed 98 people, but now only 36 remain in their positions. Overall, the county has laid off about 100 people — mostly in public safety.

One option to solve the problem with dwindling public safety services is House Bill 3453 that would empower the state to declare a fiscal emergency and impose an income tax on county citizens for three years to pay for essential services. Under this bill, the governor could enter into an agreement with county officials to take over services.

Consensus from numerous legislature watchers is that HB 3453 is not likely to pass for myriad reasons. The current legislative session is close to wrapping up and the bill has many problems — foremost among them, according to Heck and others, is how the bill violates the county’s charter that “expressly forbids” imposition of income taxes on businesses and individuals.

“The Governor is in love with this bill,” Heck

said. “But we’re not, and it would take agreement from the commissioners to be enacted.”

Heck went onto express incredulity that the governor would support a bill that violates official county mandates. “We’ll know a lot more in a few weeks, as the session wraps up,” he added.

Nine of Oregon’s 36 counties have “home rule” status, including both Josephine and Curry counties. Oregon’s other counties operate under “general law,” which means their rules more closely echo state law.

Commissioner Cheryl Walker recently attended state hearings regarding this bill, and while there, made suggestions to state officials regarding how they could realistically support the county’s efforts to stabilize its budget and provide an adequate level of public safety to its citizens.

Walker said that as the DA’s office is a state program, and the DA is a state elected official, that the state could better fund that office. She said that three years ago, when the DA’s budget was \$2 million, the state paid \$500,000 and of the \$200,000 in court security costs, the state paid \$53,000. “They could step up and pay more for those functions and that would relieve our burden,” Walker said.

Part of the trouble at both state and federal levels is that many officials feel less inclined to help counties that refuse to pay what they feel is an appropriate fair share of the burden though property taxes.

Josephine County’s tax rate is the lowest in the state and among the lowest in the nation, at 58 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Trying to find other ways to fund public safety services, some suggest the state allow more lottery money generated in Josephine County to remain and help fund the services, but Walker said state legislation mandates how lottery funds can be spent.

“Much of that lottery money goes to education,” Walker said. “Josephine County gets about \$1 million per year for economic development, but there’s currently narrow definitions regarding what that money can be spent on.”

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IV chamber presents Concerts in the Park

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The Illinois Valley Chamber of Commerce will sponsor the sounds of music for most of the summer with free concerts in Jubilee Park starting at 6:30 p.m. every Thursday through August 8.

The annual series began last week when Altered States of America played for about 100 appreciative fans. Chamber office manager Dulcie Moore reported that the weather was perfect and around \$200 was raised through the 50/50 drawing, which helps pay for the concerts.

Tomorrow’s concert will feature “old-time country music” performer Dale Hopper and Friends. Although Dale’s beloved singing Jack Russell Terrier Claude has passed away, Dale and Sharon are now working a new partner into the act. Buddy is also a Jack Russell who is learning to sing. Their show will feature many favorite tunes.

Next week’s performance will be by the bluegrass group Sequoia and the J. Barley Band will play rock and country music on July 18. The Illinois Valley String Band is next in the line-up on July 25, playing 21st Century front porch music with 14 year old Ari Dwyer on the fiddle; and the Oregon Little Big Band will give everyone the opportunity to get up and dance to ballroom and swing standards on August 1. The final show of the series also offers bluegrass with the ever-popular group East Fork.

The Chamber is also celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Siskiyou Folk and Bluegrass Festival, slated for Lake Selmac on July 22 this year. East Fork is again part of the lineup; this time, as the first act at 11 a.m., followed by Sequoia

at 12:15 p.m. and the J. Barley Band at 1:30 p.m. The Turner Moore Band will play at 2:45 p.m. with the Bathtub Gin Serenaders taking the stage at 4 p.m.

The evening starts off with Eight Dollar Mountain at 5:15 p.m. and festival headliner Siskiyou Summit will begin their set at 6:30 p.m. Their rousing rendition of “Orange Blossom Special” about a train with the same title is not-to-be-missed. Back by popular demand, the Master of Ceremonies will be KRRM radio announcer “Kuzin” Keith Fuller.

Festival tickets are \$15 at the gate or \$12.50 in advance, available through PayPal at the festival website: www.siskiyoubluegrassfestival.com. Admission is free for children 12 and under. No dogs are allowed.

Beginning Friday night, camping will be available at the Mallard Loop VIP Campground and a special late-night jam session is included with the price of admission. Rates are \$40 for tent camping and \$65 for RV’s.

Wild River Pizza and Brewing will sell vegetarian, vegan and other food as well as beer; and Bridgeview Winery will sell several wine selections. Festival guests are asked to bring their own seating and are welcome to bring their own food and non-alcohol beverages. Security will be provided by the Josephine County Sheriff’s Reserve.

Proceeds from the festival are used to help defray chamber office expenses and events including the Grape Stomp in the fall. Festival committee members include Michelle Binker, Lelo Kerivan, Peter Koelsch, Bertha Miller, Dulcie Moore, Ryan Nolan and Robert Schumacher.