

Levy ... Continued from A-1

Josephine County residents have coped with a bare-bones criminal justice system, since federal subsidies to Oregon’s 18 O&C timber counties dried up in recent years. While some funds still trickle into county coffers from the federal government under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, the amount is much-diminished from the former annual payments that once funded the lion’s share of essential county services.

In early 2013, SOS had proposed a new taxing district to pay for public safety services, but when that plan didn’t fly with county officials, SOS threw its energy into promoting a law enforcement levy that failed by a narrow margin last May. Now, SOS, which is comprised of business owners, community leaders, parents, retirees, and other concerned citizens, is collecting signatures to secure a spot on May’s ballot for a new, albeit limited, levy that would fund only the jail and the juvenile justice system: key services that benefit all county residents.

Committee Captain for the new levy, Pat Fahey, maintains that “a fully operational jail and juvenile

justice system are the cornerstones to our criminal justice system, and the recent purchase of jail beds by the City of Grants Pass have impacted criminals and cut down on crime.” He also said that the proposal includes language that ensures levy funds would be dedicated just to these services and would be subject to scrutiny via audits.

SOS has grown over the past year. More than 600 county residents currently receive emails from the groups’ website. SOS is seeking to build bridges among disparate community groups and constituencies and endeavors to restore trust and open communication between local citizens, elected officials and other public employees, according to organizers.

“The ultimate solution to our county’s problems won’t be a top-down structure, but a grassroots bottom-up strategy that incorporates residents’ views on how we should move forward,” Meredith said. “And we’re not done collecting that input. People should reach out to us, check out our website, join our email list or attend a meeting. We meet weekly, and also, all the individual committees meet regularly.

We’re working hard and we welcome new energy and ideas. Also, our meeting agendas and notes are posted on our site as well. People can make comments.”

Enhancing their outreach efforts, SOS has embarked upon myriad public relations initiatives that include media interviews and public presentations, and also, supporting or sponsoring positive grassroots campaigns throughout the county. “To raise awareness and also a bit of funding, we’re always organizing events,” Meredith said.

“We’ve been reaching out to Cave Junction,” Meredith said. “We’ve donated to the effort to get a state-of-the-art skate park up and running at Jubilee Park, and also, got involved in the ‘Take Back Jubilee Park’ vigil held in late 2013. We also did a crime awareness event in Grants Pass last year and are planning a similar ‘Victim’s Forum’ in Cave Junction this April. These events give people opportunities to make others aware of crime in the area and the lack of safety services in the community.”

To learn more or get involved, go to SOS’s website: <http://securingoursafety.org/>



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, *Illinois Valley News*)
Stacy Skinner (left) with Lori Houston during the rally for Jarred Monday Jan. 13.

Rain ... Continued from A-1

Experts say when assessing an up-coming fire season, that timing of precipitation can be critical, for example, fire risk is heightened when vegetation dries out early in the year in the mountains. Temperature matters as well, in respect to how water moves throughout the system. Colder weather and a solid snow pack is better; whereas warmer weather combined with heavy rain translates into a lot of fast-moving run-off.

“Also, slow drizzly days are good, as that better-facilitates water soaking into the ground, where we need it,” said Lutz, who works on fire-related outlooks for the region. “Without an abundance of precipitation, 2014 is likely to be another active fire season.”

Precipitation amounts in the summer can make a big difference in the severity of fire seasons as well, especially if rain is well-timed. Conversely, hot dry spring and summer weather sets the area up for trouble; similar to last year, when the July 26 lightening storm sparked multiple wildfires.

“Last year, the monsoon effect was more prominent, bringing higher than usual late summer moisture that ended the fire season earlier than normal,” Lutz said. “There’s just so many factors, we’ll have to wait and see.”

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