

Deputy Lehman reflects on his first 6 months in CJ

Anita R. Savio
IVN Contributing Writer

With about six months under his belt as a new sheriff's deputy detailed to the Cave Junction Substation, Ken Lehman cited commitment to his community as the reason he left a five-and-a-half-year stint with the Medford Police Department for a job with Josephine County that offers lower pay and less job security.

"I wanted to help out my local community. I live in Grants Pass. I knew I had skills I could apply over here. Sheriff Daniel is working very hard to improve community relations, and I wanted to be part of that."

The city of Cave Junction has a contract with the sheriff's department to provide 40 hours per week of coverage.

Lehman brings a set of people skills to the job that some may identify as more often seen in the social work profession.

"I do pretty well talking and communicating with people. I like to build a rapport. A lot of criminals out there are in bad situations, and with a little help they can improve their lives."

But, Lehman admitted, "We can want these people to get help, but until they decide they want it there's nothing we can do. That's one of the biggest things I struggle with."

He referred to Trevor Praszek, who recently died in an automobile accident: "I heard about that accident, and first thing that went through my mind was, he's an 18-year-old kid, and had he been able to see the help he needed he could have avoided that downward spiral."

Praszek was suspected of recently engaging in a spree of vandalism and other crimes that had enraged the people of the Illinois Valley.

Another hot button issue in Cave Junction has been the marked presence of street people and associated problems. But Lehman sees progress on that issue.

"I was surprised to see how much we've worked with transients to address the problem. For the most part they have been cleaning up after themselves. They've mostly moved to the back of Jubilee Park, and for the most part they are leaving children and families alone. The regular homeless have enough respect for us that they behave themselves. Usually it's those traveling

through that cause problems.

"We will make arrests," he explained, "when they become a danger to themselves or others. Or when their behavior becomes excessive or unruly, causing public alarm."

Lehman added that Sheriff Daniel has been working with mental health people to try and get some of these individuals help before releasing them from jail.

Another struggle Lehman faces is the county's lack of law enforcement personnel. He explained how sheriff's deputies work together to provide coverage: "I'll go and back up another deputy in another part of the Illinois Valley. Or an extra deputy will back me up in Cave Junction, if needed."

As an example, Lehman cited an arrest he made of a disorderly woman at the Speedy Mart. He made the arrest, but another deputy transported her to the jail.

Lehman explained that Cave Junction, because of the contract with the sheriff's department, gets a lot of attention.

"Because I am out here it allows me to spend a lot of time on investigations. I've been trying to do extremely thorough follow-ups and investigations when a crime occurs, because that's going to help solve the crime.

"And because of the contract with Cave Junction, I can lodge crimes [jail arrestees] that otherwise I couldn't because of overcrowding in the jail."

Nevertheless, according to Lehman, the lack of law enforcement funding means there are substantial limits to the coverage that can be provided.

"To be out here after hours is much more complicated logistically than to just have one or two deputies out here. Dispatch [911] also goes off-duty after hours."

Lehman lauds the response of the Illinois Valley public in addressing the crime issue.

"You guys have come leaps and bounds in coming together to protect yourselves," he said, adding that good leads from the community have helped the sheriff's department solve crimes.

"And volunteers at the Cave Junction Substation are also taking a huge burden off dispatchers by taking reports, returning phone calls and assessing needs."

But citizen efforts can only do so much to address the lack of law enforcement. Lehman referred to a recent meeting with citizens, where the suggestion was made that local security company, Concierge Home and Business Watch, can take up the slack from the sheriff's department.

"Concierge will not get involved other than being the best witness they can be. They do have authority to make a citizen's arrest. But even if they arrest someone, there's a question about whether a jail bed is available. In Grants Pass, where there's a 24 hour police agency to respond to their calls, they're much more effective ... But if a problem comes [in the county], let's say a domestic assault, they can respond, but they cannot go inside the home and conduct an investigation."

But Lehman is upbeat about the efforts being made to provide law enforcement services.

"I know that Sheriff Daniel is committed to considering any options to improve our effectiveness with the resources available. He's very open-minded and willing to look outside the box for opportunities.

"The people working for Josephine County are working for a lot less pay than in other counties, but they're all happy to be helping out. We're doing the job because we love it, and because we love our community.

Lehman added that he is available to anybody who has questions, comments or concerns. He can be reached at 514-218-5164, and will return the call of anyone who leaves a message. Lehman stressed that this is not the number to call to report a crime.



(Courtesy photo for The Illinois Valley News)
JoCo Deputy Ken Lehman

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Cave Junction

Thursday, April 14
Rain
High --51 Low --35

Friday, April 15
Partly Cloudy
High --66 Low --37

Saturday, April 16
Clear
High --78 Low --44

Sunday, April 17
Partly Cloudy
High --83 Low --47

Monday, April 18
Clear
High --78 Low --45

Tuesday, April 19
Clear
High --79 Low --45

Wednesday, April 20
Partly Cloudy
High --73 Low --43

Following are the high & low temperatures, and rainfall recorded at The End of the Road in O'Brien by Cheryl & Harry Johnson:

Apr	High	Low	Rain
1	78.4	36.1	
2	74.8	39.3	
3	72.5	36.0	0.06
4	63.2	40.8	0.03
5	69.8	33.6	
6	85.0	39.4	
7	89.9	43.0	

Apt Rain: 0.09" YTD Rain: 83.03"
Average Yearly Rain Total: n/a Inches

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