

Illinois Valley News

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(Courtesy photo for the Illinois Valley News)

Once quiet neighborhoods now have the all too familiar fences popping up as OLCC and OMMP grows become an all too common sight in some RR 5 residents' minds.

County Planning Department, pro-cannabis, voices concerns

"... We can make this a win-win for most but we need everyone to work together and think not just of themselves, but of their community,"

Julie Schmelzer, community development director of Josephine County

Jason McMillen

IVN Contributing Writer

"I believe the cultivation of legal cannabis can help reduce poverty and add a lot to our local economy," Julie Schmelzer, community development director of Josephine County, said. Schmelzer added that the sale of both medical and recreational cannabis has a place in the county's economy as well.

However, Schmelzer's approval of this economic boon is not unconditional and she made a point to explain her views on the matter. Most specifically, Schmelzer said that she believes the cultivation of commercial cannabis should be done according to code and on agricultural land as opposed to residential in an effort to reduce conflicts between neighbors that include, theft, trespass, aggressive dogs and code issues. It's important to note that all of the county's complaints have arisen from medical (OMMP) and illegal operations as opposed to recreational (OLCC).

"In my 30 years in community development I didn't think I'd ever see the day when land use code enforcement staff, or building safety staff, would spend 75 percent of their time following up on marijuana complaints or violations versus addressing health and safety matters," Schmelzer said.

Continuing on the topic, Schmelzer said that many people accuse recreational (OLCC) growers of destroying the land and neighborhoods and that the "out of state people" are ruining everything. "I don't agree with this," Schmelzer said, "We have less than 100 OLCC licensed growers and only two of them are from out of state." Another part of her



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Fences and light noise are a constant reminder of the changing landscape in the Valley.

reasoning to move cannabis cultivation to agricultural land is because Josephine County doesn't have as much farmland as Jackson County. As a consequence, it's hard to attract large, lucrative operations like dairies so the land might as well be used for the cultivation of cannabis. Schmelzer is also greatly worried about illegal water usage.

Further adding to her list of concerns, Schmelzer said that she works with businesses that won't locate here "because of cannabis." Other businesses also have issues retaining

employees because there's more money in the cannabis industry. Additionally, Schmelzer added that some people, who are interested in the area, refuse to buy land when they find out that a cannabis farm could be next door. Schmelzer also said that schools have expressed their concerns regarding the future of their students because they can make more money trimming than most anything else around. The fear of increased dropout rates has also been voiced as a concern but according to Gene Merrill, the Illinois Valley High School's College and Careers Coordinator, this is untrue for, at the very least, his school.

"I believe people thought the legalization of recreational marijuana would bring thousands of tax dollars to our depressed county. Not true," Schmelzer said, "The big tax dollars go to those areas with the highest sales—meaning Portland and other urbanized areas," Schmelzer added that she thinks the current tax distribution system is grossly unfair and asserted that the majority of taxes should be directed to wherever cannabis is grown. Her primary reasoning behind this opinion is that the areas participating in the cultivation of cannabis experience the most law enforcement issues associated with the industry.

"For these reasons, I am concerned the ill-effects are outweighing the good. But, we can change all this—we can require everyone to be on the same level playing field and enact rules that are mindful of communities and good neighbor practices. We can make this a win-win for most but we need everyone to work together and think not just of themselves, but of their community," Schmelzer concluded.

Carol Dickson awarded for service to fire district

Jason McMillen

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Carol Dickson, a member of the Illinois Valley Fire District's (IVFD) Board of Directors, has stepped down from office after serving the full duration of her four-year term. The position is unpaid. She decided against running for a second term and her successor, Joe Feldhaus, was elected to office unopposed. The IVFD awarded her with a plaque and thanked her for her service June 8 at a public board meeting.

Throughout her time on the board, Dickson felt that she didn't hesitate to cast her vote toward the best interest of the district and the taxpayers. "Whereas a lot of boards, and what I found in the case of this board, is that a lot of them just 'go along to get along,'" Dickson said, going so far as to label the board's conduct as a "good ol' boys" system.

At the last moment before the election, two days specifically, Dickson attempted a write-in campaign. Though it failed to win her the office, she received more than 200 votes.

When Dickson first started, she had zero direct experience with regards to the fire service though she had a background in law enforcement. More specifically, she was a deputy sheriff for Josephine County. Dickson believed, because of this lack of experience when she started that the other board members questioned her potential as a director. "I think I showed them that if you're a critical thinker, and you can objectively evaluate information, it doesn't matter what background you come from," Dickson said, concluding her thoughts on the topic.

Dickson also mentioned that it was unusual, though not unheard of, for a woman to fill the position.

Dickson initially ran for the position four years ago because she likes to do community service and because she was approached by a friend who asked her to run. The unnamed friend said that they wanted a voice on the board that would not "go along to get along" and thought Dickson would be perfect because she was fair, honest and would do what was right as opposed to just saying yes.

Dickson grew up in the Illinois Valley and graduated from Illinois Valley High School and though she lived in Grants Pass for 20 years, she has been living in the I.V. for the past 13. She decided not to run for re-election because she is moving back to Grants Pass.

SEE IVFD ON A-10

Board rules in favor of Southern Oregon miner

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — Miners rejoiced after the Josephine County Board of Commissioners ruled that a man doesn't need county permission to mine for gold on a property in the Sunny Valley near Grants Pass.

The latest round of mining controversy in Southern Oregon brought about 100 people to an auditorium Friday. Commissioner Simon Hare read a statement and adjourned the meeting shortly after it began, the Grants Pass *Daily Courier* reported.

SEE MINER ON A-10

Hiker airlifted from Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area

Gabriel Howe

Siskiyou Mountain Club

On Friday, June 9, Matt Denberg set out to backpack the Leach Memorial Loop in three days. The 48 mile route traverses the rugged Kalmiopsis Wilderness, a place known for its rugged and unforgiving terrain. He forded the Chetco River on Bailey Mountain Trail 1109. Then it started to rain.

Then he hopped onto Upper Chetco Trail 1102, contouring westward along the Chetco's rugged banks, and climbed up and over a ridge to Box Canyon Creek. But the raging tributary it was too high to ford, and he'd later tell Josephine County Search and Rescue volunteer Ann McGloob that he almost drowned there. "I think he got a scare from that," she said.

SEE HIKER ON A-10

Hot nights and family entertainment stage for good times

I.V. Chamber of Commerce and The Selma Center announce their summer lineups for Concerts in the Park and the Selma Drive-In Theater.

Read all about it on A-3