

MADRIGAL, from page 4

politician' because she's the politician that we all want to have," says Hagins. "She's kind of a badass. She's going to get stuff done and not take credit for it."

"Marissa is a true believer in the mission of county government, which is about taking care of people," says Mayor Charlie Hales. "She's a very good partner. She's willing to reconsider the status quo, and to roll up her sleeves, with the goal of making things work better for everybody."

For example, after the recession hit, the Oregon Food Bank was strained from increased demand from hungry people. Madrigal came up with the idea of using vacant county land to grow fresh vegetables, which could then be passed on to the Oregon Food Bank. The program called, C.R.O.P.S. (Community Reaps Our Produce and Shares), is now in its second year.

Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack says she has worked with Madrigal on a range of issues from public safety to the Sellwood Bridge. Madrigal's past experience running political campaigns has also made her more effective at the county, she says.

"She understands that the county works with substantive issues in the bright light of public opinion, and it requires some savvy, which she's got," says Shiprack.

Madrigal, says Shiprack, was particularly helpful in hammering out a new policy with the sheriff to release undocumented immigrants held for low-level offenses, preventing federal immigration officials from deporting them.

"I would not describe her as just a caretaker," says Multnomah County Commissioner Diane McKeel, noting that Madrigal has been very hands-on as the county begins its budgeting process.

"You can't just care-take that office," adds



Marissa Madrigal and Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack at a recent council session.

PHOTO BY KRISTINA WRIGHT

**"You can't just care-take that office. The functions of county government are so broad and complex that it can't be passively managed."**

— JUDY SHIPRACK  
MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Shiprack. The functions of county government, she says, are so broad and complex that it can't be passively managed.

Indeed, Madrigal does not treat her job as a nine-to-five. Austin says that Madrigal will call her during the weekend to ask about something she saw in the news. Cogen remembers one time Madrigal went out of her way to connect a homeless woman she met with housing and other resources. When a reporter mentions that he has an elderly neighbor facing eviction, she offers to connect him with senior services and later sends a text message following up about it.

"In a political office, you deal with policy a lot, but you also hear sad stories from

Last January, Madrigal got a call from an old friend who was having trouble with his landlord. His mother and his cat had died, and he was struggling with mental illness. His apartment had a severe mold problem. His friends helped get a lawyer and an inspector, but his landlord retaliated, putting a fake eviction notice on the door. Worried about becoming homeless, he killed himself.

"His story is a reason why we need to continue doing everything we're doing at the county," says Madrigal, who notes that her friend had access to resources many do not.

And the county could be doing more, she says. For instance, mental health funding only reaches 30 percent of the need, and it

shows, she says. Madrigal also says that county departments operate as "silos" concentrated on their mission. However, many social problems, says Madrigal, don't confine themselves to the scope of the county's departments, and she has tried to foster a more collaborative approach among them. One issue she's particularly concerned with is making sure the county communicates with non-English speakers.

"I think a lot of political people talk about, let's end homelessness or fix mental health, and they talk about those things like they're these silver bullets," says Madrigal. "And people are just more complicated than that, and we have to do all of it, and we can't just pat ourselves on the back and add more shelter beds because that's not what's going to give people a healthy chance at reaching their potential."

Madrigal says that she might run for office when her kids are older, but she's reluctant to ever work for a politician again. Madrigal explains that when you work for a politician, you lend your reputation to them, and it's clear that the scandal has had an impact on her.

"A lot of people get into politics for ego, and that is a destructive force," says Madrigal.

It's been nearly a decade since Madrigal worked on her first campaign, which taught her the possibilities of politics. The circumstances that swept her into the most

powerful position at the county underscored for her another dimension of that lesson: It matters who is at the levers of power.

"For me, what happened with Jeff is a huge setback in my idea of what was possible," she says. "I thought we were on the right track, and I've had to do a lot of soul searching to think is it possible to have good people in politics that will be ethical and will do the right thing? I think it's possible, it's just not everyone, unfortunately."

In May, a new county chair will be elected, and Madrigal is not running for the position. When she steps down she will be taking a job as a manager in the county's human resources department, where she will work on the finer details of the county's operations.

"She really smoothed the waters and made sure that the work at the county continues, and its employees could exhale," says Gail Shibley, who, as chief of staff to Portland Mayor Charlie Hales, has worked closely with Madrigal. "That said, everyone knows that things are going to change again."

It seems fitting for Madrigal. "The only constant in my life has been change," she says. "My experience is that I've learned to accept and move with the change. Life happens. Good things and bad things are going to happen in our lives, and the only thing we can control is how we as a community respond to it."

 Follow Street Roots on Facebook

 and Twitter!

 Welcome

... to the health care you know and trust.

Working in partnership with providers, community health centers and social service agencies to serve people on the Oregon Health Plan, Health Share is building a more accessible and coordinated care system throughout the Tri County area.

503-416-8090 | www.healthshareoregon.org

 

Together we are **health share**  
Health Share of Oregon