

Three headlines to watch for in 2017

By **ERIC A. HOWALD**
Of the *Keizertimes*

With 2016 in the rear-view, *Keizertimes* staff thought it worthwhile to look ahead to the coming year and some of the stories readers can expect to see in the coming 12 months.

The list kicks off with a pair of city government funding stories:

A fee to support Keizer parks

Talks about adding a fee to Keizer residents' utility bills have usurped *Keizertimes* headlines for the past eight months. Don't expect that to change anytime soon.

Parks currently receive about 2.5 percent of the city's general fund, but it's not much considering Keizer has 240 acres of parks and only two full-time staff who split time

between work in the parks and maintenance on the Keizer Civic Center.

Residents have until mid-March to return a survey and voice their park preferences moving forward. The Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee will collect the data and then make a recommendation to the city council regarding whether to pursue the fee, which would not require a vote at the ballot box.

Even if support for the fee falls short of hopes, parks board members expect to be taking a close look at responses when it comes to planning future projects.

The city is considering the fee because it cannot raise property taxes, which were locked in at 1996-levels as the result of voters passing a state-wide ballot measure.

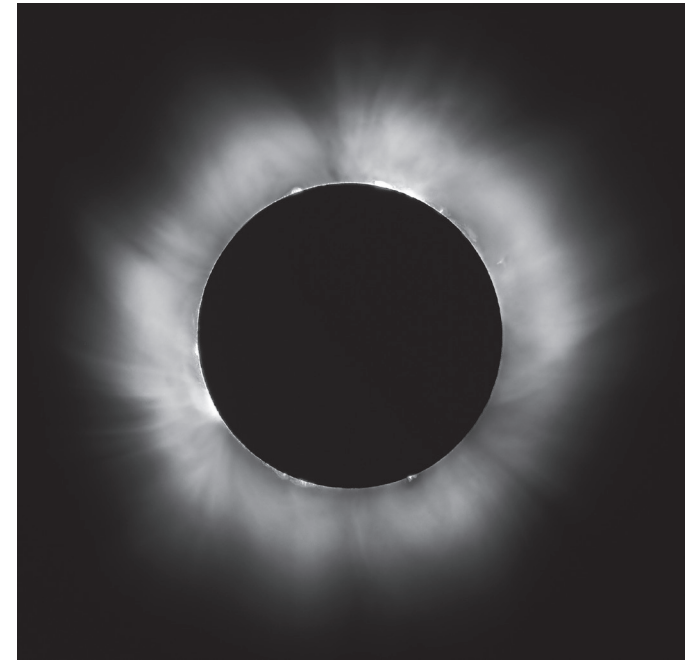
What to do about police staffing

By most measures, Keizer Police Department is understaffed. Towns of a comparable size average about 44 officers while Keizer has just 36, and two of those are still undergoing field training.

There is funding for 37 officers, but an additional hire has not yet been made.

The desire to add more officers has been a top priority for the city's recent budget committee for the past few years, but it doesn't seem any closer to becoming a reality. City Manager Chris Eppley is on record saying he wants to see more stability in the city's reserves before pulling the proverbial trigger.

While the cost of a single officer is substantial, averaging about \$110,000 per year including benefits, expanding the roster also means expanding the department's fleet of vehicles and other staff to cope with the additional workload. On top of that, the city keeps getting hit with PERS expenses that would only grow



File photos

with the addition of more officers.

When the city council tackled the issue in August 2016, KPD Chief John Teague said he would like the department to add five officers, but stressed that the need is not yet

dire.

As with parks funding, public safety funds come from the city's general fund, which is encumbered by the same property-tax stifling legislation affecting parks that was passed two decades ago. That means the most likely solution is another fee added to utility bills.

To pay for one officer, the fee would be \$1.85 per bill, while the cost of all five officers would be \$9.25 per bill.

Teague cautioned city councilors against confusing more officers with an immediate decrease in crime. The effects would more likely be seen in a detective rather than a patrol officer showing up at the scene of a burglary.

At its peak in 2007, KPD

had 41 officers.

A total solar eclipse

It may seem like a lot of build up for an event lasting less than two minutes, but total solar eclipses passing right overhead don't happen every day – or even every decade.

On Monday, Aug. 17, Keizer will bear witness to a celestial phenomenon that not everyone will get a chance to see in their lifetimes. The moon will pass completely between the earth and sun blotting out the center of the solar system for a minute and 47 seconds.

Total eclipses happen with some regularity but, most often, they are only visible from the open ocean.

The Keizer Parks Foundation (KPF) and the Salem-

Keizer Volcanoes are both planning events to mark the occasion. KPF will turn Keizer Rapids Park into a camping ground with numerous associated activities while the Volcanoes are planning a game after a scheduled "eclipse delay."

The Keizer Rapids event, already in the planning stages, will be a fundraiser for Keizer parks and may amount to a much-needed \$27,000 shot-in-the-arm.

Salem-Keizer is expecting an influx of 20,000 to 30,000 visitors the day of the eclipse as watchers flock to the path of totality. The window of totality is so narrow even those in Portland and Eugene will only get a glimpse of a partial eclipse.

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Roundabout cows get nod

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A proposal to put recycled metal cow sculptures in the roundabout at Chemawa Road Northeast and Verda Lane Northeast received tentative approval at a Keizer Public Arts Committee KPAC meeting in December.

Members of the committee addressed the proposal for a second time on Dec. 20.

A few months ago, KPAC

members approached Keizer artist Ric Smith with a request to work up a proposal for sculptures of cows to be placed in the roundabout and he turned in a bid calling for \$2,000 in materials and supplies and \$7,500 in labor, but he would donate half of the latter amount to the project for a total cost of \$5,750. That amount is more than the Arts Commission has on-hand – about \$530 that has to last through June 2017 – so fundraising would be required.

Smith is the artist behind the *Iron Glory* flag in front of Copper Creek Mercantile and he also donated sign work to the Big Toy at Keizer Rapids Park last year.

Members of KPAC initially balked at the idea of cows in the roundabout out of fear of rubbing salt in a wound opened when the cow pasture south-

west of the intersection was rezoned to make way for apartments. However, a *Keizertimes* poll saw the cow idea stamped to the top of short list of alternatives.

Lore Christopher, Keizer's former mayor and a member of KPAC, said there's potential for securing a grant from a local business with some modification to the plans.

"The grant is contingent on there being a public education piece, so I am planning on meeting with Ric to find out if there is a way for us to invite schools for field trips to his studio and make kids part of the design process," Christopher said.

A day after the meeting, Christopher said her talk with Smith went well, but any immediate progress would likely hinge on obtaining a grant.

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