

KeizerCommunity

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Bethell endures eventful first seven weeks as Marion County commissioner

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After serving as the Keizer Chamber of Commerce executive director for four years, Danielle Bethell was elected Marion County Commissioner in November 2020 and began her term last month.

Until two years ago, Bethell had never considered running for commissioner. But when the opportunity presented itself, she jumped at the chance to serve her community in a greater capacity.

"I wanted to put my energy and my skills to greater use. There are many different components to the commissioner role," Bethell said.

Along with serving on the Salem-Keizer School Board — a role she has held for almost two years — Bethell serves on over a dozen different boards and committees that represent services in Marion County, working alongside fellow commissioners Kevin Cameron and Colm Willis.

"The first couple weeks were an adjustment, but it has been an exciting transition. There is never a dull moment," Bethell said. "We are all different, but we all equally have the desire to serve our

neighbors. It's exciting for me and I am learning a lot from both of them."

In a nutshell, county commissioners are responsible for county administration, management and policy, serving both executive and legislative duties — they approve budgets, oversee spending and hire county employees. County commissioners also appropriate funds for all county activities and enforce civil and criminal resolutions not in ordinance with state law.

"We are policy makers and decision makers, but we are also developers and we have the ability to work on projects ourselves," Bethell said.

One of Bethell's main responsibilities in the early weeks of her tenure was communicating with local health departments about COVID-19 vaccinations and figuring out how vaccinations could be properly distributed to older adults, local educators and first responders.

"We want to do whatever we can to get our local businesses back and get our kids back in school," Bethell said.

Bethell is also working with local officials in Keizer to seek out potential COVID-19



Bethell

outbreaks to try and minimize the spread.

"I have the relationships in Keizer where I can look at the hot spots in the 97303 zip code and make sure people are still doing what they need to do — wear masks and distancing. Keizer is still impacted by COVID and people need to be aware," Bethell said.

Another current topic Bethell has become passionate about is traffic safety in Keizer. After getting an email from a Keizerite about the striping on River Road, Bethell checked out the situation for herself, concluded that there was a safety issue and began

working to attempt to resolve the problem.

"I am constantly communicating with public works trying to figure out this situation because it's dangerous out there," Bethell said. "Any time someone reaches out, I want to use my resources to help if I don't know the answer."

Additionally, Bethell serves on a committee called the Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS) and is involved with the study on the Wheatland Road corridor — whose goal is to develop a multimodal corridor plan and street design on Wheatland that removes barriers for all modes of travel.

"I live on Wheatland so I am anxious for this conversation to progress," Bethell said.

During the Oregon wildfires in September 2020, Bethell spent nearly a week at the state fairgrounds helping out those who had lost their homes. Wildfire recovery was one of Bethell's primary concerns while running for office as she has continued to assist the communities of Gates and Detroit in any way she could.

Bethell says there has been numerous conversations with Oregon Department of Transportation about the trash and debris removal process near Detroit Lake. She is also working with the cities of Gates and Detroit

on the infrastructure of the community and is currently attempting to allocate revenue-seeking measures for each community.

"People are eager and anxious to move forward. But unfortunately, there is no money coming in," Bethell said. "Gates, for example, couldn't pay any of their city employees. We knew we had to figure this out."

On Jan. 29, the Marion County Board of Commissioners presented a \$50,000 check to Gates Mayor Ron Carmickle and city recorder Traci Archer. The County has also pledged additional support to help meet the town's current needs and long-term recovery.

"This is why I am doing this job. All the elements and levels of government shouldn't take away from taking care of our people," Bethell said.

With three children in Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS), and as the school board director in Zone 6, Bethell is incredibly passionate about education in Marion County and has been a part of the planning process of bringing students back to in-person schooling, not just in Salem-Keizer, and is working on county-wide PSAs for parents explaining why it is safe for their kids to return to school.

"I feel like I am able to offer a unique perspective as not

only a county commissioner, but as a school board member and as a parent," Bethell said. "Parents need more info and they need to be confident in sending their child back to the classroom."

After Gov. Kate Brown released new guidance last week for outdoor sports that would make a return of high school sports a probability this spring, Bethell got in contact with SKPS Superintendent Christy Perry to offer assistance and help facilitate rapid testing that would be required for athletes to return to competition in Salem-Keizer.

"That's something I couldn't do if I was only a school board member. Being a commissioner requires being more involved," Bethell said.

Even with the long hours and time away from family, Bethell is thankful to be in the position she is in — helping people through a tumultuous time.

"I have had some pretty remarkable jobs, but I can honestly say that this is the most emotionally rewarding job I have ever had," Bethell said. "I am lucky because I love what I am doing."

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4505 River Road N, Keizer • 503-393-4507
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