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ONE DOLLAR



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Craig Yamasaki draws the simulated Taser while participating in the MILO use-of-force training simulator May 15.

Church and state

Warrenton city commissioners mull whether to fund church food pantry

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — When the Warrenton City Commission approved the city's budget for this fiscal year, the group unwittingly approved a line item that devotes city funds to three religiously affiliated organizations, possibly violating the Oregon Constitution.

At its July 28 meeting, the commission will discuss whether to let stand one of the would-be expenditures: \$5,000 for the Warrenton Food Bank Pantry — which is operated by the Calvary Assembly of God — to be spent on utilities and other reimbursements. If the spending doesn't pass legal muster, the commission may explore indirect ways of giving the grant to the pantry. Or it may decide to spend the money elsewhere.

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USE OF FORCE

Citizen Police Academy opens dialogue with video simulation

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

Given the national attention surrounding police use of force, the Astoria Police Department decided to focus a portion of its Citizen Police Academy on the sensitive topic.

The police invited community members to meet once a week to experience the day-to-day operations of the department. For the first time since the academy started in 2001, the dozen participants had the chance to go through a use-of-force simulation and have a conversation with Chief Brad Johnston on use-of-force issues.

Such outreach is a priority for the department, which recently hosted a "Coffee with a Cop" event and is actively engaged on social media.

As a result, Johnston said, he does not see the same mistrust with police as other cities around the country. Still, he wanted to have a dialogue with the students during their final session Wednesday.

"It seems appropriate," Johnston said. "The police and community can become the most out of tune because of differences in the way we see the world. It's a good thing to spend a good amount of time there."

Astoria City Councilor Drew Herzig, who



ABOVE: Police Chief Brad Johnston speaks with the class about an officer-involved shooting that took place Feb. 12, 2012, in Astoria. LEFT: Richard Wolf responds to a simulated drunken person in public call using the MILO use-of-force training simulator May 15.



participated in the academy, said he found the entire five-week program to be a valuable experience. The academy's students learned about criminal investigations, the functions of patrol, basic defensive tactics, and shot various firearms and toured the police department and county jail. The amount of training each officer has to go through to stay sharp on duty was eye-opening, Herzig said.

"They are the first responders to most of our social problems, whether it's mental health or drug or alcohol abuse," Herzig said. "They are it."

Use-of-force simulation

Last week, the police department brought an interactive video use-of-force simulator, known as MILO Range. The simulator uses a large video screen to recreate real-life scenarios meant to teach officers when to shoot.

Officer Andrew Randall went first to show the class how it worked. His scenario was a call to a parking lot for a suspicious male subject. In the simulation, Randall approached the vehicle and found a man in the driver's seat fidgeting with

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Plea deal reached on sex abuse allegations

Tampering, bribery involved in case

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

An Astoria man accused of multiple sex abuse charges against a girl under 14 accepted a plea agreement Thursday, canceling a trial next month.

Michel Thomas Mitchell, 45, entered an Alford plea to first-degree attempted sex abuse, tampering with a witness and bribing a witness.

An Alford plea is a guilty plea from a defendant who proclaims their innocence, but admits the prosecution has enough evidence to prove they are guilty.

Judge Cindee Matyas sentenced Mitchell to five years probation and 90 days in jail, 60 of which can be completed alternatively. If Mitchell violates his probation, he will face 70 months, or nearly six years, in prison.

The attempted sexual abuse occurred between 2007 and 2012, according to court documents, and the charges of tampering with and bribing a witness occurred last August.

Had the case gone to trial, Deputy District Attorney Dawn Buzzard said, the state would have presented evidence strong enough to possibly convict Mitchell.

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Rebuffed Riverwalk Inn suitor prepared to sue

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Ganesh Sonpatki, the Portland hotelier with Param Hotel Group interested in operating the Port of Astoria's Astoria Riverwalk Inn, is ready to sue to enforce the contract he said he signed with former operator Brad Smithart.

The Port announced Tuesday Smithart's lease had been terminated last week, and that local entrepreneur Kruparao Kancharla and his family would operate the hotel. But the Port has yet to sign a lease with the Kancharlas.

"Mr. Sonpatki long ago entered into a contract to take over operation of the Riverwalk Inn from Mr. Smithart and his com-

pany, Hospitality Masters," said a statement released Thursday by Sonpatki's attorney Colin Hunter. "That contract remains in effect today, and Mr. Sonpatki intends to enforce it by litigation, if necessary."

"Indeed, on the basis of the contract with Hospitality Masters, Mr. Sonpatki had already begun negotiating a new lease with the Port. In short, Mr. Sonpatki intends to enforce his valid, pre-existing contract for the hotel."

Sonpatki first approached the Port in October, saying he was interested in operating the Riverwalk Inn as a budget hotel. He owns several budget hotels in Portland and another in McMinnville.

On June 3, the Port Com-

mission voted to allow staff to assign Smithart's remaining lease to Sonpatki, contingent on him paying off Smithart's debts. Smithart had fallen behind by more than \$250,000 in payments to the Port, around \$100,000 to the city and about \$16,000 to the county.

Port Executive Director Jim Knight said Tuesday Kancharla paid off Smithart's debts to the county, while making a \$25,000 down payment on his debts to the city and giving the Port a check for \$55,000, which the Port has waited to cash until the relationship is finalized.

At the meeting Tuesday, Knight said he has encouraged the Kancharlas to speak with Sonpatki. The conversation just got more urgent.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

A lawyer for Ganesh Sonpatki, left, released a statement Thursday saying he is willing to sue to protect a contract he said he has with former Astoria Riverwalk Inn operator Brad Smithart, second from right.

