

Director: Agency has struggled to attract, retain expert staff

Continued from Page A1

a text message. "I trust that my leadership team and staff continue to respond to the needs of the community in my absence. I look forward to serving Clatsop County's residents again soon."

Debbie Morrow, the chairwoman of the agency's board, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Ben Paz, the agency's crisis services manager, was named interim executive director. "Every CBH employee deserves privacy as it pertains to his or her employment, so I can't really comment on

those issues," he said when asked to explain the circumstances of Baker's leave. "CBH does remain in a strong clinical position. No services are going to be impacted by current events."

Some of the staff at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, speaking privately to discuss internal operations, are unnerved by the cryptic nature of Baker's exit. The agency's human resources director sent out an email Wednesday afternoon explaining Baker would be out of the office for the next two weeks and that Paz would be their contact. On Thursday and Fri-

day, sources said, word surfaced that Paz was interim executive director.

While Baker serves at the discretion of the agency's board, the county contracts with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare to provide mental health coverage, so the county manager and the Board of Commissioners have oversight responsibility.

"We were kind of caught off guard by this, to say the least," said Monica Steele, the county's budget and finance director and assistant county manager.

Baker arrived in June 2016 after three top administrators at the mental health

agency left under a cloud of management dysfunction, staff turnover, legal trouble and complaints about patient care. She was the director of prevention and trauma informed systems at Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc., which helps administer mental health treatment in Clatsop and several other counties.

Over the past 2 1/2 years, Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare has also operated a crisis respite center in Warrenton and launched mobile crisis services to help relieve pressure on local hospitals and the county jail. The agency has partnered with Columbia Memorial Hos-

pital in Astoria on medication-assisted treatment to help combat opioid abuse.

Baker emerged as a voice of compassion for the needy in policy debates over the homeless and a new county jail. She has also improved relationships between the mental health agency, the county and law enforcement through more frequent communication.

But the agency, like many in rural areas, has struggled to attract and retain expert staff. Some staff also still complain privately about a toxic and unhealthy work environment.

"I thought she's been doing a good job," said

Scott Lee, who served as the chairman of the county commission.

Josh Marquis, the former district attorney, has been critical in the past of the county's handling of mental health treatment. "Amy has been much, much more responsive than most — if not all — of the previous CBH directors," he said. "The only concern I've had is that there has been an alarming turnover."

"But, in fairness, I think that probably has very little to do with Amy and more to do with the pay that's offered and the nature of the work, which is very, very high intensity."

Mo's: Will seat up to 200 diners

Continued from Page A1

Jolee Bancroft, the company's president, said in a release. "We are so excited to bring our culture of family dining to this esteemed community."

Mo's has been in Cannon Beach since 1991 and opened a new location and commercial chowder kitchen in Astoria in 2017. Shilo Inns reached out to Mo's about moving into Seaside, said Riley Plesha, the restaurant's director of marketing.

The new location will have a mix of indoor and outdoor seating for up to 200 diners. The restaurant is closed for renovation until March or April.

Representatives for Shilo Inns were not immediately available for comment.

Council: It's been rare to see more than three candidates run

Continued from Page A1

Leahy is a former retail store owner and department store executive who graduated from Astoria High School. He has led Clatsop Economic Development Resources and Clatsop Community College's Small Business Development Center for the past several years. CEDR provides business, financial and workforce guidance to entrepreneurs and business owners in the region.

Jessamyn West, the co-owner of the Odd Fellows Building downtown and the executive director of the Astoria Arts and Movement Center, has also applied for the vacancy.

Clifford Hunter-Gammon, a software support manager, and Pamela Mattson McDonald, a writer and researcher, are the other applicants. Mattson McDonald ran for a position on the Clatsop Community College board in 2017, but was defeated by incumbent Patrick Wingard.

"We were pleased that we had four people interested," Jones said, noting that even for elections it has been rare to see more than three candidates run.

Each applicant will have up to five minutes to introduce themselves on Monday and talk about why they should be appointed. Jones said people in the audience will also have a chance to provide public comment before city councilors discuss the applicants and vote.

Jones is also in the middle of considering appointments to several other city boards and has received a large number of applications for each opening.

"Lots of well-qualified people," the mayor-elect said.






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