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## the Astorian

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BEHIND THE NEWS

# 'I'm vested in this community'

any people want to be sheriff's deputies to catch the bad guys and put them in jail. For the past few years, Matt Phillips had the difficult task of deciding which inmates to let out.

As commander of an overcrowded county jail, Phillips worked with Paula Brownhill, the former presiding judge



DERRICK **DePLEDGE** 

of the Circuit Court, on a pretrial release policy that takes a scientific approach to measuring risk.

Before we had the pretrial program, no one was tracking outcomes of how our system was performing. And, since then, we have," said

Phillips, who was sworn in as interim sheriff in early January.

The commitment to the pretrial policy will be tested when a new \$20 million county jail opens at the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton and overcrowding is no longer an issue.

Phillips, who had stints as a deputy sheriff and as a leader in the criminal division before taking over the jail, is running in the May election to replace Tom Bergin, who retired.

In an interview, Phillips discussed pretrial release, the potential for mental health or substance abuse treatment components at the new jail and federal immigration arrests at county courthouses.

#### Q: What's the most pressing issue facing the sheriff's office?

**A:** The most pressing issue facing the sheriff's office isn't unique to the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office. It's something that affects law enforcement agencies nationwide and that's the community perception and the relationship with the communities that we serve.

There's been some really divisive issues nationwide that I think have impacted — or negatively impacted people's perception and trust in law enforcement.

Whether it is deserved locally or not, it has an affect on us. It can just be the trust with what the individual officers are doing. The respect for the officers when we contact people. It can also come down to recruiting.

I think that, locally, we're experiencing it, as well as nationwide. It's harder to recruit people into law enforcement, possibly because people don't want the headache, or maybe they don't have the respect for the position or authority that they once did.

Q: The former district attorney and the former sheriff were deeply skeptical of justice reinvestment — the state's push to reduce prison use for drug and property crimes. Why are you more open to the concept?

A: My introduction to justice reinvestment started not with the pure view of justice reinvestment principles, but as a way to manage the jail population.

We started the pretrial release program and found it to be very successful. Before we had the pretrial program, no one was tracking outcomes of how our system was performing. And, since then,



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Matt Phillips is the interim Clatsop County sheriff.

we have.

We know that prior to pretrial we were force releasing in excess of 450 people a year from the jail. They frequently came back. And we knew that our court appearance rate was very low

Since we've started the pretrial program, we've reduced our forced releases by 46%, our court appearance rate is up to 91.3% last year, so significant improvement. The people that are released are staying safe — our safety rate is in excess of 98%, meaning the people that go out on the pretrial program, more than 98% are not committing new crimes before their cases are resolved ..

I don't know that this is a causal relationship, but, for the first time, we have actually seen a reduction in bookings to the jail this year. That's down 5.6%.

Q: The county has made strides on pretrial release for defendants who are not considered high risk. How do vou sustain that progress when the new county jail opens and you have more space?

A: We're fortunate that we're not, for the most part, releasing high-risk people to the community. And we would not

What I'm hoping is that with the new jail we'll see the proportion of people that are pretrial to sentenced changed. Where we're currently in excess of 70% of people pretrial, I'm thinking that, possibly, the judges might be able to provide maybe a lengthier sentence if appropriate.

That we would be putting fewer people to alternative sanctions, such as electronic monitoring, that aren't great candidates. And that's certainly something that we're doing now.

If we can secure funding to do it, that we could provide programs that are part of a sentence while in custody.

One of the risks to pretrial, though, is state funding. The state has certainly pushed justice reinvestment and provided funding. They've said that it's contingent on the success of the programs in the counties.

I know that we've had success in reducing prison usage. If you look at the justice reinvestment dashboards, you'll see that we've been successful. But, this biennium, they did reduce our funding by \$20,000.

It might sound like only \$20,000, but the cost of providing the services is going up every year.

Q: The county has a lack of secure beds for people in mental health crisis and detox options for people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. Could those components be part of the new

**A:** Jails have, in the last couple decades, become the default response for mental health and public health crises.

While I don't think that that's the appropriate place to provide those services, if that's going to become our responsibility by default, then we'll try to do the best we can.

I can't promise that we're going to have a mental health program necessarily in the jail. But what we are doing is working with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare to see if they can provide additional services within the jail ...

Q: What about detox?

**A:** Detox is something that we're doing now. Detox is really just the period of time that someone is withdrawing — or going through the acute withdrawal symptoms — and clearing the substances from their body.

Detox is just a first step toward sobriety. What you need is some sort of treatment program that goes beyond, say, a week of detox. So we do medically

supervise people's withdrawal now in detox. And we would certainly continue

Like I mentioned earlier, we're hop-

to do that.

ing that someday maybe there's some sentences that come along with a treatment program ..

Q: The sheriff's office is responsible for security at Circuit Court. Should U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement be allowed to make arrests at courthouses without a judicial warrant?

**A:** I think that was decided by our (Oregon Supreme Court) Chief Justice Martha Walters. And while I don't know that there is a penalty if I violated that, I do believe that they will comply with her general order, or rule, and that they'll find other ways to execute their mission.

Q: But, philosophically, are you OK with that or not OK with it? It's vour courthouse.

**A:** It is my courthouse. I recognize that it totally interferes with the administration of justice locally.

I don't think that their actions should conflict with what we're trying to do. At the same time, I don't have the authority to tell them how to do their job and what to do.

I think that what the justice has her rule — is effective and will probably resolve the issues that we have now.

Q: The May election will be your first campaign for elected office. What's the one thing you want voters to know about you?

A: I'm vested in this community. I care about the people. I want to make sure that this is a place where everyone feels comfortable living and raising their families and coming and visit.

I'm a regular guy with a big responsibility now.

Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### All before noon

When President Donald Trump attacks Iran, Russia's President Vladimir Putin will:

- 1. Make popcorn
- 2. Sell weapons to Iran
- 3. Fix our election for us 4. Co-sign another Trump loan
- application 5. Call it a day ... All before noon.

R.D. SMITH

Gearhart

#### **Profit**

There is only one Astoria riverfront. Why must it be destroyed for the sake of profit?

**DEL CORBETT** Warrenton

### **Shoddy record**

Recent guest columns in The Astorian suggest an attempt by the paper to convince readers that the success of the Linn County lawsuit was good, and opting out was bad; the narrative of the timber industry.

If The Astorian wants to provide news

on the suit, they shouldn't rely on the dubious opinions of a timber executive and a pro-timber county commissioner, neither of whom acknowledge the climate crisis.

In his column, ("What the timber lawsuit really means" The Astorian, Dec. 28), David Yamamoto tries hard to convince us that timber harvesting doesn't harm the environment, especially clean water. He claims that Tillamook County is the best county in the state in protecting clean water, habitat and fish. A look at the facts suggests otherwise.

Within Tillamook County, Rockaway Beach has had 90% of their watershed clearcut in the past 20 years, resulting in taxpayers paying nearly \$2 million for a new filtration system. The town of Wheeler has had to go on a well system due to clearcutting in their watershed, and is now begging Stimson Lumber Co. not to cut the remaining stand of trees immediately above the town.

Coho in streams in Tillamook County are threatened, due to die-offs caused by pollution and warm water attributable to logging, and hunters have been expressing dismay at the lack of traditional habitat, driving elk and deer into residential areas.

In sum, a shoddy record in a county that puts timber dollars ahead of clean water, habitat and fish.

ROGER DORBAND Astoria

### **Scary stories**

Regarding the article, ("King tides offer a taste of sea level rise," The Astorian, Jan. 7): People worrying about "what life could be like in the near future," as the article put it, might find some relief by looking up what are known as spring tides, neap tides, and the moon's metonic

This article is yet one more in the long list of scary stories about sea level rise. RICHARD WISNER Morphed

Tt seems as though Republicans have slowly morphed from trivializing Donald Trump's hyperbole (n. An exaggerated or extravagant statement ...) to defending his hypocrisy (n. The feigning of beliefs one does not hold ...) to supporting his mendacity (n. Lies, untruths, falsehoods

People who aren't frightened by this evolution scare me.

DONNA LEE ROLLINS Astoria

Siletz