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Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian

Jennifer Schermerhorn, left, and Elise Rankin handle calls on a Friday afternoon at the Seaside Dispatch Center.

## Astoria emergency dispatch temporarily moving to Seaside

Call center short on staff

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
The Astorian

Short on staff for nearly two years, Astoria's emergency dispatch center will temporarily move operations to Seaside in October.

The dispatch center has been running with only a handful of dispatchers since early 2020, a situation that has required staff to shoulder a significant amount of overtime each month and that Astoria Police Chief Geoff Spalding said is undesirable and unsustainable. Meanwhile, the Seaside Dispatch Center has been fully staffed for a while for the first time in more than a decade.

Over the past year, Seaside dispatchers have traveled north to help out in Astoria, but the new agreement between the two cities will place Astoria's four dispatchers in the Seaside office until four new hires can be fully trained. The arrangement could last as long as six months.

The combined office will handle 911 calls countywide, together covering all the fire and police entities served under separate Seaside and Astoria dispatch agreements.

The arrangement means there will be more dispatchers available to field calls at any given time — a major plus for emergency responders, said Mitch Brown, the communications manager for the Seaside Police Department. The combined dispatch could shorten the time it takes to organize mutual aid calls.

### Staffing levels

The Astoria Police Department



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria dispatch has struggled to find staff.

can't point to any one reason why staffing levels have dipped so low. Some dispatchers retired and others left unexpectedly. Four new dispatchers are in training or set to begin training soon and could be on board in the next three to six months. The dispatch center is authorized for nine full-time dispatch positions, one operations supervisor and one communications manager.

It can easily take up to six months to get someone proficient in dispatching. Then some hires ultimately discover the job is not for them once they are working the desk. It is a difficult job that requires a high level of multi-tasking skills, Spalding said.

Then there are the peculiarities and challenges of dispatching within small communities. A dispatcher must remain professional no matter what,

said Jennifer Schermerhorn, a Seaside dispatcher.

"And you may know someone who is calling 911 on the worst day of their life," she said.

Talks of consolidation — to combine the two dispatch centers — have occurred at various times over the years with no concrete steps toward a single countywide dispatch center. Seaside has continued to invest in its own equipment and continues to fine-tune radio issues to reliably reach all corners of its coverage area.

The combined operations set to begin in October could act as a sort of test run for future consolidation, Brown allowed.

"We'll be able to see what works and what doesn't work," he said.

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### WARRENTON

## Crimes show a gap in system

Agitated suspect released after jail would not house him

By ERICK BENGEL  
The Astorian

On Sept. 8, Steven Michael Wolf allegedly threatened a Warrenton family, at one point stepping into their house when a mother and her daughters were inside.

When Warrenton police detained Wolf, 44, he was in an agitated state and a worker at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare's crisis team determined he was on something. A doctor at Columbia Memorial Hospital's emergency department did not think Wolf belonged at the hospital and cleared him to be booked at Clatsop County Jail.

The jail nurse also examined him at the jail's sally port when he arrived and worried that the facility was not set up to care for Wolf. Warrenton police took him again to the hospital, where Wolf was again cleared for the jail. Once more, the jail said it did not feel comfortable lodging him, given his state.

Unable to house him themselves, Warrenton police cited Wolf in lieu of an arrest and released him that day. He still appeared to be under the influence, Warrenton Police Chief Mathew Workman said, but had calmed a bit by then.

On Sept. 9, Wolf entered another Warrenton home and allegedly attempted to rape the woman who lives there. Her screams awoke her husband, who began loading a shotgun, and Wolf took off. On Sept. 12, he was arrested at the house of his mother, who has a restraining order against him.

Wolf is now in jail and faces nine charges covering three incidents: the two home invasions and the restraining order violation.

His case speaks to law enforcement's limitations when it comes to handling subjects whose conditions, often drug induced, require an extra level of care. Wolf fell into a gap in the system, where a hospital did not believe he qualified to be a patient, but the jail was not prepared to provide the care he would have required.

"We are not a hospital," Sheriff Matt Phillips said. "Our jail isn't an urgent care. It's not an emergency department."

### 'Hell no, you don't'

There have been instances where the sheriff's office has monitored subjects with medical issues, even

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### MORE INSIDE

Dozens of new coronavirus cases reported in county • A7

## In Knappa, schools turn to therapist to help manage stress

Knighton brings 'a little sunshine'

By GARY HENLEY  
The Astorian

The last year-and-a-half has been one big bundle of stress for schools, students, parents and teachers. Nationwide, convenience just hasn't been on their side.

Remote learning, social distancing, masks or no masks, the coronavirus pandemic caused more than just the illness it resulted in a lot of pressure in and around schools.



The Knappa School District has taken a proactive approach by bringing in a community connector to help in heal emotional wounds.

And they found just the right person for the job.

"My expertise is in education, I am a registered behavior therapist," said Ian Knighton, the Knappa district's recent hire.

Knighton works primarily with the students. "What I like to say is, I am enhancing the rich culture that has already been established here at Knappa, and trying to bridge the gap

between the community and the culture of our school."

In regards to COVID, he said, "Statistically, what has happened is we have been deprived of our social interactions in the world since December of 2019. It really took great effect in March of 2020.

"What I have seen is that our students are of the generation that's pretty much technology dependent. But due to the fact that we went virtual in the hybrid schools, they really don't have interest in using computers," because students were always on computers during the pandemic.

"They have been socially deprived, and they're not getting the social interaction that they normally get from their peers and educators in the school systems.

"That's not just in Knappa, that's nationwide," he said. "I have seen it

in different communities and different demographics."

Knappa Superintendent Bill Fritz said the job of community connector "is a brand new position. Community members wanted to have a position like this in our school to support the students, the parents and the staff."

The school district "went on a national search, and we ran into Ian, who was working in Hawaii at the time. It felt like it would be a good fit, and he's been a great addition to our team."

### 'Reminds me of home'

Knighton, who worked in the Vancouver School District several years ago, is originally from Cuthbert, Georgia.

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Ian Knighton is the new community connector for Knappa schools.

