

DISPATCH: Calls involving children one of the toughest parts of the job

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Milton-Freewater and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the sheriff's office dispatches emergency response for the entire county, a total of 25 public safety agencies.

Dispatchers spend several weeks training at the police academy, and return for three days of emergency medical dispatch training, where they learn skills such as how to instruct someone about how to administer CPR. Before they start taking calls, dispatch trainees will run through many practice scenarios.

There are lots of specialized trainings as well, including how to deal with calls specific to veterans, or how to handle mental health situations. Dispatchers also have to be trained on how to use LEDS, or the Law Enforcement Database System. Through that system, dispatchers can map calls, and can enter warrants, runaways and stolen property, among other things.

A minimum of three dispatchers staff the station at any time. They work as a team, assisting if one dispatcher is dealing with a more serious situation.

The job has changed over the years, according to Primmer and Lt. Kathy Lieuallen, both of whom have been dispatchers with the county for more than 20 years. But according to Primmer and Lieuallen, the qualities of a good dispatcher remain the same: patience, empathy and a cool head in a crisis. They also have to be adaptable and able to multi-task.

"We're doing at least three to four things at the same time, efficiently," Primmer said.

The dispatchers

Umatilla County has 16 dispatchers and is hiring another. Many of the current group have

"People call 911 on their worst days. That's what we listen to all night. We try to be the point of light on the worst day of their lives."

— Eva Van Beek, dispatcher for Umatilla County Sheriff's Office

been at the job for several years, and have come to the job from a variety of backgrounds.

Van Beek, who has been with city/county dispatch since 2014, was a paramedic for years before injuring her knee and coming to work on the other end of the line. Tabetha Koehler, who has at the job for about three and a half years, worked as an ophthalmic technician and was looking at an EMS program, before coming across the job and deciding she liked it. Kerri Roberts worked with the county juvenile department before becoming a dispatcher.

Dealing with daily crises can take an emotional toll, which can be made worse by the lack of closure to any of them.

"You don't get the resolution," said Roberts, who has worked at the county as a dispatcher since 2010. "You hear the start of something, but you don't get the resolution. That's the part of our job that's really frustrating, that can send you home crying sometimes."

Many agree that taking calls involving children is the most emotionally challenging aspect of the job.

"Whether a kid can't wake a parent up, or a kid is home alone and someone's breaking in, or a mom's screaming that her baby's not breathing," Van Beek said. "Nobody's going to tell you a kid call didn't affect them."

Though the dispatchers receive training, there are many aspects they can't prepare for.

"My first day was overwhelming," Roberts said. "We speak

in "10" codes. It feels like gibberish. You have to look at the screen and give an officer information in an instant. I remember looking at the scene and going, 'There's no way.'"

Koehler said she didn't expect the number of people that call in on a regular basis: non-emergency calls from people with mental health issues who need to be calmed down. She said they also handle a lot of angry and difficult people.

"I've been surprised by how rude or upset people can get with someone they're not face-to-face with," she said. "We screen a lot of what happens for the officers and emergency crews."

Koehler added that while the job is emotionally challenging, the adrenaline can become normal for dispatchers, as well.

"It is that roller-coaster feeling most of the time, and you learn to crave that," she said. "That's the twisted aspect — we like it busy, we like to be challenged. But it does take a toll."

Russell said he tries to put things in perspective.

"I didn't cause the situation. Somebody has to be there to help, and that person is me," he said.

Koehler said she finds solace in her spiritual background. Many also turn to each other when they need support.

"If there's something that's really bothering us, it's important we talk about it," said Nicole Kellas, who has been with the job for nearly nine years. "We talk with coworkers, supervisors, the ambulance crew on scene. Anyone to give us an outlook

on what happened. I need to be confident I did the best job I could."

The county also offers counseling and debriefing services for its employees.

Recent issues

The dispatch center has been the subject of plenty of recent debate.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan proposed earlier this year to hire another dispatcher, which would have brought the total number of staff to 18. Several agencies opposed the idea of paying for another dispatch operator. The average annual salary and benefits for a county dispatcher is around \$78,118.

In 2016, Hermiston's city council voted to contract with Umatilla County for dispatch services. The city and county had combined services since 2014, but for years were unable to agree on a formula for how much cities should pay for dispatch services.

Hermiston will pay \$303,487 this year for emergency dispatch. Last year, the sheriff's department had cities and agencies increase the amount they paid to the dispatch center. The increase had an outsized impact in smaller operations, like Pilot Rock and Stanfield.

Some agencies said they weren't opposed to staff increases to deal with the workload, but that they weren't satisfied with the service they'd been receiving.

Earlier this year, Rowan also said he couldn't promise there would not be more increases in dispatch costs.

In a crisis

Around 6:30 p.m. on a Thursday, the center gets a call from a family in Hermiston: They can't find their toddler son.

The dispatchers immediately spring to action, with each of the six dispatchers on duty doing different tasks: some calling emergency

responders, some trying to locate the area on the map to see any potential hazards (like bodies of water) and Primmer on the phone with the family member who is reporting the missing child.

"You're doing really well," she says calmly. She continues to ask questions about the child: "When did he go missing? Is it possible another family member has him? Does he like to wander off? Have you checked everywhere in the house?" She notes that sometimes in cases like this, toddlers are found hiding in laundry rooms, or have fallen asleep in odd parts of the home.

As Primmer keeps the family member on the phone, and reassures them, other dispatchers call up marine deputies. There is a body of water near the house, and they want to be prepared to go search.

Then, as quickly as the search began, Primmer calls out that the boy has been found, and things settle down again — until the next call comes in.

Despite its challenges, dispatchers agree the job has a lot of positives.

"You get to deal with true, panicked emergencies," Koehler said. "Those are the rewarding parts of it. You got a person out of a fire, you helped them resuscitate someone."

Roberts recalls times that she has been in the room when babies are born, or when a dispatcher helps a caller that was anxious or having a breakdown.

"You calm them down, you smile a little bit," she said.

"People call 911 on their worst days," Van Beek said. "That's what we listen to all night. We try to be the point of light on the worst day of their lives."

LIVE WIRE: 'I was bedazzled by the richness of the arts in Pendleton'

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presents an opportunity he is eager to try out. While Live Wire is no stranger to going on the road, it's usually to larger urban areas. Other road shows on Live Wire's current slate include Seattle and Minneapolis.

Pendleton was recommended by Portland artist Molly Cliff Hiltz, a member of Live Wire's resource council.

In an email Monday, Hiltz wrote that her recommendation was inspired by her own trip to Pendleton last June.

A printmaking workshop at Crow's Shadow Institute for the Arts was Hiltz' first time in Pendleton outside of Round-Up week and she spent her time patronizing Pendleton's Farmers Market, Prodigal Son Brewery & Pub and Sundown Bar & Grill.

Hiltz later attended a concert from Pendleton

band Misty Mouth when she began thinking of ways to highlight the 25th anniversary of Crow's Shadow and was struck with the idea to stage a Live Wire show in Pendleton.

"I was bedazzled by the richness of the arts in Pendleton, from the music to the Pendleton Arts Center, the Tamastlikt Cultural Center to Umatilla's Crow's Shadow, to all the makers, and the blending of eastern Oregon cowboy and Native American culture," she wrote.

Hiltz is approaching the weekend like a "mini Round-Up" and has invited people from Portland, Seattle and San Francisco to attend the show.

Burbank said there's advantages to broadcasting their show from a small town.

Burbank said he plans to immerse himself in Pendleton before the show,

something much harder to do in a large city, so that he can give the broadcast audience a clearer picture of what Pendleton is about.

"People know the blankets and the Round-Up, but they don't know Pendleton," he said.

Additionally, Burbank said Pendleton still has a story to tell that much of the nation is unfamiliar with, as opposed to larger metro areas like Los Angeles and San Francisco that have been heavily documented.

Doors will open for the Live Wire broadcast at the Slick Fork Saloon at 6:15 p.m. while the show starts at 7:30 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at livewireradio.com and the broadcast can be heard on Oregon Public Broadcasting.

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ROADKILL: Another bill to curtail urban deer populations is also moving forward

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the bill before the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, expressing concern that people might shoot a deer or elk first and then strike it with their vehicle, in order to pass it off as a humane killing.

They pointed out there are five roadkill poaching cases ongoing in Washington since the program was established.

Hansell said there is no way to make the bill 100 percent poacher-proof, and the good of the program outweighs the potential for poaching.

"Providing the ability to salvage the meat would be able to add just a little bit of a positive result to a negative experience," he said.

If passed, SB 372 would make salvage permits available no later than Jan. 1, 2019. The bill would sunset on Jan. 1, 2024. Senate Bill 373

Another bill sponsored by Hansell and Barreto that attempts to curtail urban deer populations is also moving forward in the Legislature.

Senate Bill 373 would create a pilot program where cities could petition ODFW to euthanize deer "that constitute a public nuisance" within city limits.

The program would be voluntary, Hansell said. First, a city would need to

pass an ordinance declaring a nuisance urban deer population. The city would also need to have local laws that prohibit feeding or luring wildlife into town.

"If the deer are there because they're getting a handout, obviously they're going to stay there," he said.

The city would foot the bill to kill the animals, while retaining the antlers and hides. The meat would go to the Oregon Food Bank. The program would specifically prohibit killing deer by dart or lethal injection.

The program, which would be crafted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, must also contain provisions that the number of deer that are killed "do not exceed the number necessary to be taken to reduce the deer population to a level that no longer constitutes a public nuisance."

Hansell said the idea

started with Dennis Sands, the mayor of Joseph, who pointed out the high number of deer in the city. And though Joseph residents ultimately rejected the proposal, Hansell said the League of Oregon Cities has indicated the program could be used by other communities statewide.

"(The League of Oregon Cities) was very clear, this is a bill they support," Hansell said. "I think it's a win-win, if this is something the cities want to pursue. If they do not, then they don't have to."

SB 373 also passed the Senate on April 6 by a vote 28-1 vote, and has a sunset date of Jan. 1, 2029. Sen. Fred Girod (R-Stayton) was the only nay. Sen. Winters was excused.

Both bills are now in the House for consideration.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Defense rests in Nevada Bundy trial

By KEN RITTER
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — An Idaho man whose photo as an armed protester in Nevada was seen around the world was the only one of six defendants to testify before the defenses rested Monday in the first trial stemming from a 2014 standoff involving cattleman and states' rights advocate Cliven Bundy.

Eric Parker was asked during cross-examination about his Facebook post during the confrontation saying that protesters planned to free Bundy cattle "by any means." He was also asked about his comments after the standoff ended in an interview recorded by a man with cellphone video on a freeway overpass near Bunkerville.

"You said this could have potentially turned violent?" prosecutor Nicholas Dickinson asked.

"Absolutely," Parker answered.

In the video, he gave his

name as Eric from Idaho, and he was still holding the AK-47 style rifle and wearing his ballistic vest with two spare clips of bullets for his handgun.

Minutes earlier, flag-waving riders on horseback and more than 100 unarmed protesters including women and children faced off with about 30 heavily armed federal agents near a gate of a corral in a dry riverbed beneath the highway bridge.

Parker, now 33, was famously photographed prone on the pavement, looking with his rifle through a seam in a concrete freeway barrier toward the federal agents in the U-shaped wash below.

The crowd demanded the release of cows rounded up in the Gold Butte area about 80 miles northeast of Las Vegas.

Parker testified he remembered the wind carrying the words "lethal force," "will be shot," amid muffled warnings from loudspeakers used by agents to warn protesters

not to take another step.

Parker's defense attorney, Jess Marchese, asked during direct questioning how Parker interpreted calls by Cliven Bundy for a "range war" to stop federal agents from confiscating his cattle.

"Did you want to start a shooting war?" Marchese asked.

"No sir," Parker answered.

Defendants Gregory Burselson of Arizona, Richard Lovelien of Oklahoma, Idaho residents Todd Engel, Scott Drexler and Steven Stewart told Chief U.S. District Judge Gloria Navarro they decided not to testify.

The judge gave both sides until Tuesday to prepare for closing arguments Wednesday in the trial that opened Feb. 9.

Defense attorneys are expected to argue the government didn't prove conspiracy, weapon, assault on a federal agent and other charges that could, combined, get each up to 101 years in federal prison.

UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

ANNUAL MEETING & MEMBERSHIP DINNER



Saturday, April 22, 2017
Hermiston Conference Center
5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Our Annual Meeting theme

"Reaching New Heights" is a recognition of the milestones reached over the last 80 years and what we expect in 2017.

As always, attendance is free to UEC members. We hope you will join us!



Featured Speaker
Bob Welch, of Eugene
a celebrated author,
will highlight Umatilla Electric's 2017 Annual Meeting!

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