

JAIL: Murdock supports Rowan’s plan

Continued from 1A

beds to the intake area.

The only new construction would be for storage.

Jail Sgt. Kenny Franks said housing more inmates means needing more clothes, more bedding, even more rubber gloves for staff. Franks showed how little space is left.

Large red plastic bins for inmate belongings fill nearly all the shelves in one room. Files about inmates threaten to take up another. The mobile rack for inmate clothing has no closet and sits next to a wall. Franks said staff cram extra mattresses into a closet.

“Storage would be a huge help to the whole facility,” he said.

Restructuring the jail also would make it more efficient, Rowan and Franks said.

Umatilla County Jail is the regional hub for transferring inmates. Buses drop off multiple inmates each Wednesday and others take them away. That happens in the second sally port, where inmates wait inside a wire cage up to five hours.

Franks said while the sally port has video cameras, staff have to be in the room monitoring the inmates. New holding cells would allow video surveillance alone and not tie up an officer for half a shift on one task.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock backs Rowan’s plan. He said just as the jail is a transfer hub, it could serve as a regional mental health drop-off facility.

“We’re talking about what to do with individuals who are a danger to themselves and others and who are on the street,” Murdock said. “We would benefit Wallowa, Morrow, Union, and Umatilla counties.”

The commissioner also pointed out when the state’s prison population was growing too large, lawmakers



The Umatilla County Jail running out of storage space for the personal affects of inmates, files, and necessary supplies for the day to day operation of the facility.



Jail uniforms sit out on a rack in the booking area at the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton.

created the Justice Reinvestment Initiative Act, the grant program to provide counties with funds to keep offenders out of prison while keeping the public safe. Murdock said the state should follow a similar model to help local governments deal with mental health problems.

Amy Ashton-Williams, director of Umatilla County Human Services, said most people who have mental health issues do not commit crimes. They take medications, follow their therapy and

are productive members of the community. But 10 percent, she said, tax the system.

Still, she said, the environment in jail can harm people in crisis. Someone displaying mental problems, for example, could spend more time in lockup than other offenders. She said space and staff at the jail for mental health would help stabilize someone and get them into services they need.

Rowan gets to make his pitch for state funds Friday afternoon in Salem to the Legislature’s

Subcommittee On Capital Construction. He discussed the proposal in November with Republican state lawmakers Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena and Rep. Greg Barreto of Cove, but neither serve on the subcommittee.

Both Hansell and Barreto said they support the plan and see the need for it, but could not guess what the subcommittee might do. Barreto said he hoped to talk to Rowan on Friday to learn more about the project.

Rowan said if the Legislature does not come through, he is not done pushing for this. He said there might be some opportunity through Justice Reinvestment grants.

Mental health is a local, state and national problem, Murdock said, and this proposal makes sense to house mental patients on an immediate basis.

“In Eastern Oregon,” he said, “you may need to sometimes find solutions that aren’t perfect but that work.”

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

COURSON: Stormed the shores of Iwo Jima

Continued from 1A

over Europe during the war. Johnson is a retired psychiatrist and neurologist and an accomplished musician.

This week, Stangier and Johnson reconvened at the Rainbow without their friend.

Courson, who died Tuesday at the age of 94, left behind a legacy of adventure, military service, music and time on the bench. His two buddies spoke of the judge’s life, which unspooled like an adventure story.

Courson was 19 when he landed on the beach at Iwo Jima. In a 2007 *East Oregonian* interview, he recalled stark terror. That morning, the men shaved, donned clean uniforms and ate a huge breakfast before scampering down nets to the landing crafts.

“We ate a breakfast of steak and eggs, thinking it might be our last meal,” Courson said.

Of the 30,000 troops who stormed the Japanese island, only 6,000 came back alive from the week-long battle. Courson, a rifleman and paratrooper, was one. While on the island, he witnessed five Marines and one Navy corpsman plant a flag on the summit.

Back from war, Courson worked as a Forest Service smokejumper at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base in Cave Junction. The 22-year-old paratrooper learned to parachute smokejumper style, wearing a heavy canvas jump suit with stand-up collar and helmet with open-lattice face protector. He jumped from bush planes onto the mountainous rocky terrain of northern California and southern Oregon to put out fires.

After a couple of seasons, Courson became a spotter, laying on his stomach and gauging wind drift and possible landing sites and signaling each jumper to go. When they all had gone, he leaped into the sky himself. In a 2011 interview, Courson recalled some precarious situations, including encountering hives of angry bees and a bear that scattered embers outside the fire line.

Courson eventually



Richard “Doc” Johnson and Bob Stangier have coffee Thursday morning at the Rainbow Cafe without their good friend Richard “Judge” Courson. The friends met for coffee for years at the Rainbow until Courson could no longer travel, then they met at McKay Creek Estates.

“We ate a breakfast of steak and eggs, thinking it might be our last meal.”

— Richard Courson, on preparing for Iwo Jima

enrolled in law school. He moved to Pendleton in 1956 to practice law and later was elected as Umatilla County district attorney. Gov. Tom McCall appointed him in 1967 to the bench, where he stayed for 25 years.

Courson is also credited with reviving the Pendleton Cowboy Mounted Band. The group originally launched in 1911, a year after the first Round-Up. Musicians on horseback entertained the rodeo crowd prior to the main event. The group disbanded in 1938.

In 1985, Courson rebooted the band for the Round-Up’s 75th year, corralling 18 musicians with varying degrees of riding ability. The band’s performance during that rainy Round-Up week went off without a hitch. Mounted musicians have played every year since. Doc Johnson, who plays bass drum with the band, first got to know Courson as the group’s director.

At the Rainbow, perhaps spurred on by high-octane coffee, Johnson pulled out a few stories. The Judge, he said, got bucked from the saddle occasionally. As the director, he took his job seriously. One year in Reno, the band played a prank on their leader by whipping out kazoos and playing the national anthem. When Courson heard the loud hum, his eyes bulged a bit. The Marine wasn’t at all happy, Doc said, at the idea of the national anthem being played on the kazoo.

He got over it. On Courson’s 89th birthday, the band played “Happy Birthday” to him on kazoos. When then-band manager Gary Zimmerman presented him with a kazoo, Courson grinned.

Courson played his own pranks, too. Stangier and Johnson recalled a story of Courson loading a horse into the elevator at the ornate Baker Hotel in Baker City

and going to the roof, where he took a short ride.

“I will miss his impish sense of humor,” Johnson said. “He’s the kind of guy who’d put a horse on the roof of the Baker Hotel.”

The men recalled Courson’s epic Round-Up parties with his wife Coralee. The judge, Johnson said, drank champagne at the annual celebration.

The men will fondly remember their final days with Courson at the assisted living facility, where they sipped coffee in a sitting room perched on overstuffed chairs and looking out a big window. Several residents usually joined the group.

They are now back at the Rainbow, where they will solve the world’s problems, talk about the weather, tell stories and raise their mugs to the judge.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810

GUN BILL: Republicans worry about ambiguity

Continued from 1A

require Oregon State Police to notify other law enforcement when they learn someone has tried to obtain a gun illegally.

Brown described the bill as “bipartisan,” and in the House, the bill did receive support from both parties. However, in the Senate, opposition, rather than support, was bipartisan.

Representatives of Giffords, the anti-gun violence group led by former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords of Arizona, and her husband, NASA astronaut Capt. Mark Kelly, praised Thursday’s vote by the Oregon Senate. “Oregon is continuing to step up to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people,” said Robin Lloyd, Giffords government affairs director. “Guns and domestic violence are a particularly lethal combination that have deadly consequences. Once this bill is signed loopholes will finally be closed in state law that let domestic abusers possess guns.”

Twelve Republicans and one Democrat, Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, voted against the measure. Johnson said she opposed the bill because it would

give estranged dating partners a way to seek revenge. “This is no time for an emotional response,” Johnson said of the bill.

Under existing law, only convicted abusers in domestic relationships, such as a spouse, former spouse, co-parent or live-in partner, are prohibited from having guns. The bill expands the ban to stalkers and current and past intimate partners of all kinds.

Sen. Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass, said existing law already bans abusers who have been intimate sexual relationships with their victim from buying or possessing guns. He said the language in the bill is full of “ambiguity” and would likely result in other loopholes.

A study by the Oregon Department of Justice showed that more than 16 Oregonians were killed in nine separate domestic violence incidents between Dec. 25, 2016, and Jan. 16, 2017. Not all of the fatalities involved romantic relationships. Laws aimed at keeping guns from abusers have reduced homicides of intimate partners, according to recent research published in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

QRT: 12 suicides a year

Continued from 1A

cares enough to reach out.” She added that someone is either thinking about suicide or not — another person cannot put the idea in their mind.

QPR, she said, is comparable to CPR in that it allows laypersons, rather than health professionals, to help someone in crisis.

“It’s a brief intervention, and most people will refer those at risk to a provider for ongoing treatment,” she said.

Walsborn noted that Umatilla County over the past decade has averaged about 12 suicides per year. In 2016, she said, that number jumped to 16. Oregon has one of the higher suicide rates in the U.S., coming in at 12th. States with the highest rates were Alaska, Wyoming and Montana, and the lowest rates were in New Jersey, New York and Washington, D.C.

Walsborn said the rates likely are related to population density, as well as the availability of providers.

“They may be in major metropolitan areas, where they can walk to a doctor’s office,” she said. “We don’t have that here, and certainly not in Alaska.”

She said that while availability of providers does heavily impact people’s ability to receive mental health treatment, it’s an obstacle that can be overcome by training civilians with the QPR process.

“It’s important to have individuals trained as suicide prevention gatekeepers,” she said.

Walsborn reviewed some clues people can look for to determine whether someone may be considering suicide. She said those clues could be verbal, situational or behavioral, and direct or indirect.

Many behavioral clues, she said, will include previous suicide attempts, stockpiling guns or pills, moodiness or depression, putting personal affairs in order, or drug and alcohol abuse or relapse.

Situational clues often include experiencing some type of loss, whether a financial setback, death of a loved one or an unexpected loss of freedom or fear of punishment.

Walsborn noted that it’s important to watch people for signs of abnormal behavior — which may be different for different people.

She recalled a student in Pendleton who was typically unruly and didn’t do homework or participate in class. The student came back one weekend, and was subdued, doing her work and not making a scene in class.

“Thank goodness her teacher noticed and took action,” Walsborn said. “She was able to communicate to the student some resources — she was experiencing some behavioral health issues, and was likely at risk for suicide.”

Walsborn had the students role play some scenarios where a person might be at risk for suicide. She encouraged the person asking to be direct with their questions.

“You want to be very clear and intentional with your questioning,” she said. “If you’re in doubt, don’t wait to ask. Talk to the person alone in a private setting, and give your full, undivided attention.”

She added that the person asking questions should be careful not to ridicule, or imply that thinking about suicide is stupid.

“You’re setting them up for a ‘no’ answer,” she said.

Then, she said, listeners should offer their help, and refer the person to a provider who can assist them further. Ideally, she said, take the person directly to someone who can help them. If that’s not possible, call and make an appointment for them.

Juli Gregory, the hospital education coordinator, said this was the first QPR training that Good Shepherd has hosted.

She said it was a good introduction, and that many in the health field don’t even know the correct way to respond to those who may be suicidal.

“I think (Amanda) kind of nailed it. Suicide has affected most of our lives — it has in mine,” she said.

She was happy to see a mix of community members and hospital employees at the training.

Erin Stocker, the Human Resources director for the Morrow County School District, was at the training with her 14-year-old son Tyson, and her mother Barb Gibbs, a licensed nurse practitioner at Good Shepherd. She said she was glad to receive the training to be able to support staff and students.

“I think it’s good to be able to identify classmates or help anyone in that situation,” Tyson said.

Gibbs said she was at the training not as a nurse, but as a community member.

“I’m at a loss to help,” she said.

Stocker said the subject of suicide is uncomfortable to discuss, but she hoped talking about it through trainings like this one would provide some resources, and some relief.

“If we do talk about it, there’s only one outcome — the improvement of the crisis we’re facing in our society with this type of thing.”