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IN FRONTIER LAW ENFORCEMENT

NEW FACES, OLD PROBLEM

EO Media Group/Tim Trainor/

The streets of Fossil were mostly empty in November as the county sheriff's office prepared for a change in leadership.

By **TIM TRAINOR**
For the East Oregonian

If your car drives off the road, your house catches fire, or your ex is pounding too loudly on your door in Wheeler County, know this: It's likely to be a long time before help arrives.

Currently, a four-person sheriff's office patrols the rural county in north-central Oregon. Yet a system of volunteer firefighters and EMTs, in place for more than a generation in the county, is in danger of collapse.

The number of volunteer firefighters has dropped by more than half since the lumber mill in Fossil closed more than 20 years ago, taking with it most of the local economy and much of the population. The regional emergency dispatch center in nearby Condon is down three positions. To cover, dispatchers have been working 12-hour shifts for nearly a year. There are no city police departments in Wheeler County and no Oregon State Police troopers are based there, though some can respond from neighboring jurisdictions many miles away.

Despite that, public safety could have been worse following a changeover of its entire county sheriff's office in 2018. When former sheriff Chris Humphreys announced in June that he wanted to resign his position, each of his deputies decided to move on as well.

"It's just kind of like when a band breaks up," Humphreys said. "When one person leaves, no one else wants to be here. And by here I mean in law enforcement ... no one wants to be here without each other."

Humphreys stayed on until December as a new band began to form. That crew is now led by Sheriff Mike Smith, who was approved by the county court after his most recent stint as deputy in neighboring Gilliam County. Undersheriff Mitch Elliot, who joined the force earlier in the year, has experience at both public and private law enforcement agencies throughout Oregon. Two recently hired

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Surprising career change for former Wheeler sheriff



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

After facing frustration and two controversial on-the-job incidents while serving on the Portland Police Department, Chris Humphreys ultimately left his law enforcement career to work in the field of mental health.

"I HEARD MORE FRUSTRATION IN MY VOICE THAN HOPE."

Chris Humphreys, former Wheeler County Sheriff

Chris Humphreys takes job in mental health

By **TIM TRAINOR**
For the East Oregonian

After seven years as Wheeler County Sheriff, Chris Humphreys found he could no longer connect with his family. The "gloom" in his head just wouldn't go away.

"I was never completely there," he said, cleaning out his office during his last days on the job. "That's a hard thing to realize when you're talking to your daughter."

For Humphreys, the years of shoestring budgets, hand-me-downs and lack of time away from the job led to burnout and a need to find a new career.

"I heard more frustration in my voice than hope," he said.

A frustrated police officer can be dangerous. In 2006 and 2009, Humphreys faced scrutiny for two separate on-the-job incidents while working for the Portland Police Department, according to *The Oregonian*.

James P. Chasse, a Portland man suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, died of blunt force trauma to the chest after a struggle with Humphreys and two other officers, who did not tell paramedics the extent of force they had used and then failed to insist that an injured Chasse be taken to a hospital. Chasse later died in the back of Humphreys' patrol

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Pendleton hits housing goal, falls short on infrastructure

As new units go up, roads continue to get worse

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

In his first act as mayor-elect in 2016, John Turner detailed his plans to form a committee that would help draft goals for the Pendleton City Council.

"If you don't like the list of goals we have set, tell us what you want. With your input, we can establish a prioritized list of the top three or four goals, and assign them measurable outcomes," he said in a statement. "I expect these goals to drive the deliberations of the new city council in 2017-18."

After going through a survey and a committee, the city council approved its four goals in January 2017: cre-

ate sustainable infrastructure funding, increase economic development activities, develop commercial, industrial, and residential property, and increase available housing.

Two years later, the results are a mixed bag.

By the council's own measures, the city has achieved some of its goals while falling short on others.

Infrastructure

Funding for road maintenance was one of the council's top priorities, but its numbers are going in the wrong direction.

While the council had a goal of maintaining a pavement management



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

The city set a housing goal in 2017 of increasing housing construction by 50 units a year.

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