

Mentors: ‘Your fear of not fitting in kind of takes over’

Continued from Page A1

wall-to-wall tattoos including a Hells Angels tat, is an imposing-looking prison veteran.

They talk about anything that is weighing heavy on Olson’s mind.

Perry said the men selected for the program were identified as aggressive and having “the highest potential to recidivate.”

“We tried to capture a very young age group so we could pair them up with mentors who have had experience with being rehabilitated inside a correctional system,” she said.

Mentor Jim Tooley described his experience of coming to prison as vastly different than Olson’s. Twelve years ago, at age 34, he entered the Oregon State Penitentiary to start serving a life sentence. He began learning the rules of prison life.

“It’s a counterculture. We separate immediately by race and by criminal conviction, and then the popularity contest begins,” Tooley said. “Your fear of not fitting in kind of takes over. That dictates the decisions you make over the first year or two.”

Nine years ago, Tooley was transferred to Two Rivers.

He volunteered to serve as a mentor in part from



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Mentors for the Two Rivers Correctional Institution’s mentor program meet during a weekly session with staff members.

frustration at not being able to father his own children on the outside. He mentors 20-year-old Caleb Sloan, who Perry said has transformed from shy and misguided to confident and goal-oriented. Recently, Sloan graduated with his high school diploma, completed cognitive development training and entered a drug-and-alcohol program, all in eight months time.

Tooley described himself and his fellow mentors as “men who have a lot of experience and who are willing to tell the truth

about themselves.”

Edwards said the program has helped him as much as Olson. “I wanted to give back,” he said. “I wanted to help people make better decisions than I made.”

Another mentor, Tyler Davis, said his prison experience started in lonely darkness.

“For me this was the bottom,” he said.

Inside, he reflected on the bad choices that had led to his incarceration. Mentoring, he said, gives him a chance to help another man

move down down a more positive track.

“It’s easy to go down the wrong roads in here. We have to move forward from our choices,” he said. “There is light at the end of the tunnel no matter how bad you mess up. With this program, we get the chance to help the young men who are coming in at an earlier stage.”

Perry said Two Rivers began planning this mentorship experiment a couple of years ago, basing the program is based on an outreach program TRCI staff

had been bringing to the Hermiston High School alternative school.

“We realized we have the same age group in (prison),” Perry said. “We have 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds. We took those resources and turned them back inside to our own system.”

TRCI Superintendent Tyler Blewett is encouraged with the program even at this early stage.

“There was a lot of doubt that this wasn’t going to last,” Blewett said. “Eight months later, that has shifted. The staff is on

board and excited. Ultimately, we want to change the culture inside.”

He said some correctional officers have started offshoot groups of inmates who talk about issues and spend time problem solving.

“This approach is spreading like wildfire,” he said.

He said so far the mentees are exceeding expectations, especially since they were considered high risk. So far, all of the mentees continue to make positive progress and none have ended up in disciplinary segregation.

The mentees, who remain in the program for around eight months, no longer meet for roundtable discussions and are easing into regular prison life. They will be tracked for a year after leaving the program for disciplinary problems and noncompliance with their case plan. The second round of mentees is currently being selected.

Olson is counting his blessings.

“I am thankful for this program,” Olson said. “I didn’t just get thrown into the ranks of different assorted gangs and violent activity. This gives me an opportunity to grow and be something.”

“This program,” Tooley said, “is a real opportunity for people to come through that door and to change.”

Fair: ‘I love the town. I love the people.’

Continued from Page A1

for the fair’s 4-H and Future Farmers of America programs for 38 years, and on a variety of fair committees. Alice has worked as the fair court chaperone and helped develop the fair court program altogether. The couple have been key in helping secure fair donations and sponsorships as well.

According to Alice, her husband even helped start the fair’s first-ever livestock sales committee, which shattered records last year by raising more than \$600,000.

But while announcing the two on Saturday night, Steve Wallace, chair of the fair board, highlighted the “dynamic duo’s” indelible impact on the youths in the community above all else.

“We can’t say just how many youth they have influenced,” he said. “But we can say with 100% certainty that in some way or another, you and your family have benefited from their service.”

After the event, Alice said she was shocked by the honor and proud to represent the people of Umatilla County.

“I love the town. I love the people. And I love the fair and everything it’s done for them,” Alice said.

The fair board also recognized its 2019 female and male volunteers of the year Saturday night, which were awarded to Jeri Jordan and Travis Glover, respectively.

Jordan was honored for her longtime service as the fair’s overall superintendent of open class static entries and coordinating the textile and needle crafts. Steve Anderson, vice chair of the board, also highlighted Jordan’s contributions to pre-fair planning and willingness to support the fair however she could.

“She is someone who leads and takes charge, which takes pressure off of the fair board,” Anderson said.

Glover’s fair participation began while he was young and in the 4-H and FFA programs. Now, he’s someone the fair board has relied on to show up and help no matter the job and no matter the time of day.

“He’s someone who specializes in the grunt work, the down and dirty work,” fair director Micheal Hampton said during Glover’s announcement. “He’s someone who does the work that others don’t want to do.”

The fair board also awarded Andy and Trevor Wagner with special recog-



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Umatilla County Fair Princess Baylee Marshall smiles after receiving her crown during Saturday’s Umatilla County Fair Appreciation Dinner from 2019 Princess Madison Pryor. The court also includes Brielle Youncs, Keeva Hoston and Kyleigh Sepulveda.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Travis Glover, holding his son Teagan, receives the 2019 Volunteer of the Year award from presenter Michael Hampton during Saturday’s Umatilla County Fair Appreciation Dinner.

nitions for their volunteerism, along with Stuart Rice and Hermiston’s Midway Bar and Grill as the 2019 business partnership of the year.

Rice doubled down on his support of the fair Saturday night too. Rather than accepting \$617 he won from the banquet’s 50/50 raffle,

Rice donated that money to the fair court, which netted them a total of \$1,234 in donations for the night.

It was also a time for royalty Saturday night with the introduction of the 2020 court. Kyleigh Sepulveda of Hermiston will serve on the court for the second consecutive year and is joined by

Keeva Hoston, also of Hermiston, and Baylee Marshall and Brielle Youncs, both of Pendleton.

The night began with the announcement that the 2020 fair theme will be “Ready, Set, Show,” and the countdown is now on until the Umatilla County Fair opens Aug. 11-15.

Compensation: Salary change has the potential to impact the contest

Continued from Page A1

her retirement if she were elected. Commissioner Don Russell said it could.

“It’s something I don’t take lightly,” he said.

Russell added that Rea’s explanation to him for dropping out of the race didn’t “make a lot of sense.”

“Right now we haven’t made any changes in the position, this is the time to analyze. If we’re going to make a change, we want to make the change before the filing deadline,” he said.

Lindsay said she was disappointed Rea dropped out of the race before a decision was made. She added that the commissioners and the budget committee are aware a salary change, if any, could impact the candidate pool for the treasurer’s position.

“I think that’s an obvious concern. We want to make sure we have some people who want to run,” she said.

Lindsay and Russell both said that reconsideration of elected official salaries are not uncommon. Typically, the recommendation originates from the county compensation committee but in the instance of the treasurer position, the committee will review the decision retroactively.

Before Glen Diehl was appointed to replace Ann Spicer as Justice of the Peace, the budget committee convened and chose to lower the pay for the justice position.

Russell said the budget committee previously elevated Spicer’s salary during her time on the job because of her extra qualification — an attorney’s license.

According to documents from a December budget committee meeting, Diehl is currently paid \$74,820 in yearly salary, not including benefits, compared with Spicer’s annual salary of \$77,249.90.

“I wouldn’t say it’s anything out of the ordinary,” Russell said of the budget committee’s current salary deliberations. “All 36 counties do things

IF YOU GO

What: Morrow County Budget Committee Meeting
When: 9 a.m. Wednesday
Where: Bartholomew Building, Upper Conference Room, 110 Northeast Court St., Heppner

a little differently.”

Nearby Baker County, with 16,820 people — closest to Morrow County’s 12,680 according to recent Portland State University population estimates —lists the treasurer salary as \$72,216 this year. During the budget meeting Wednesday, committee members will likely take a look at the salary surveys of other counties.

The *Heppner Gazette Times* noted that the proposal to change the treasurer’s compensation follows a disagreement that occurred between Gutierrez and the commissioners nearly three years ago.

Gutierrez said that in 2017, the board of commissioners requested that commissioners, the finance director and the county administrator gain informational access to county bank accounts. It was the first time in her treasurer career that the commissioners made such a request, she said.

“I’ve told them over and over again that if they want to see the information, to come over to my office and I’d be happy to show them everything,” she said. “It’s public information. It didn’t start us off on the right foot.”

Gutierrez said she resisted the move at the time. Currently, the county administrator has authorization to access the accounts. She said that authorization for the commissioners was denied.

“It was just about transparency and making sure that best practices were in place. It was just a conversation with how to get there so everyone is comfortable,” Lindsay said. “Transparency has been my No. 1 since day one.”