



Tom O'Brien



Eric Shepard



Kevin Hayes



Curtis Pitt



Jeff VanLannen



Allister Bunch

## Grand Ronde's Sheriff's Force grows

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investigations," said Bunch. "Down there its like you get a call — you go. You take the report. Boom — it's off to the detectives. You're done. Next call.

"I used to go home with headaches it was so intense," said Bunch. "Here you have time. When you get a case, you have time to investigate it. You've got time to see it through. Down there you would never know what happened."

Bunch said he likes the differences between Los Angeles and Grand Ronde. He said he likes being able to talk to people and spend time in the community.

Bunch said he hopes to start a bike patrol and help with the establishment of a Grand Ronde reserve police force.

One of Grand Ronde's newest Polk County Sheriff's officers isn't new to Grand Ronde.

Sgt. Jeff VanLaanen is now serving his second stint in the area after recently being appointed to the supervisor position here in Grand Ronde.

VanLaanen, 34, served in Grand Ronde five year's ago as a young officer just getting started in Oregon. VanLaanen began his law enforcement career in Sacramento, California after attending the California State Police Academy.

"When I got started here in Grand Ronde, there was just two of us (Deputy Tom O'Brien and VanLaanen) and I was out here for two years," said VanLaanen. "Then, I got promoted. They didn't have any supervisory positions out here then. So, I had to go back over to Dallas. I did three years there as a supervisor. I kept my finger on things out here and made sure I kept up my contacts. I would come out here and visit with the friends that I made. This place kept growing and growing and we got two more officers last year bringing us up to four and then this contract year everybody made the right decision and decided they wanted to go to 24 hour coverage and so we have six of us out here now. They said they needed a sergeant and I said 'pick me.' I was lucky enough to be able to come back.

"About the time my son was born (now eight years old) we started thinking that we did not want to raise our child in Central California. I got an opportunity to transfer up here and I jumped on it. My wife (Lisa) quit her job and sacrificed all her friends and her family and we came up to Oregon. I got on with Polk County soon after that and I have been here ever since."

When asked how he likes being

part of the Grand Ronde community, he responded in the positive.

"I love it. This is my favorite place. This is my home away from home," said VanLaanen. "When I was a young officer and out here for the first time I met a lot of people. This place was a lot rougher then. I established friendships out here."

He said people went out of their way to let him know they were glad he was here and they wanted him to stay.

"I would be on a traffic stop at night and see over my shoulder someone would pull up cautiously behind me and stay far back and then they would stick their head out the window," said VanLaanen. "I would see who they were and it would be somebody here from the community that knew that there was no one else that was going to come out and help me because it was 30 minute drive time for the next deputy to get out here. They were just pulling over to make sure I was okay. That kind of response from this community and the friendships that I made really made a difference to me.

"And, although I'm a non-Indian, I really connected with the culture here and the spiritualism," said VanLaanen. "I took a lot of that with me when I left for those two years and I maintained a lot of contact with my closest friends out here and so just to come back and be able to do it again was fantastic. Sometimes I wish I had never left."

VanLaanen said he is all about helping people although he admits to liking the excitement of being a cop. He said it is those two reasons that he has found his career choice both personally and professionally rewarding.

"I enjoy the fact that you come to work everyday and you don't know what is going to come out of this little box (dispatch radio) and where you are going to go next," said VanLaanen. "You could save a life. You could arrest a heinous bad guy. You're in a fight. You can take a cat down out of a tree. Find a missing child. It could be absolutely anything and you just don't know. As far as I know, there is no other job in the world that that happens on a regular, daily basis. You never know. You can get satisfaction from this job. Not all the time, but there is true satisfaction.

"The best part about being in Grand Ronde versus being anywhere else is you get more satisfaction in a small, close-knit community like this because you take care of families," said VanLaanen.

Law enforcement and the way officers are viewed by the community



Photo by Teresa Henry

Thanks to a grant from the Grand Ronde Tribes' Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the Polk County Sheriff's presence in the area has grown to six full-time officers. For the first time, Grand Ronde and its surrounding communities now have 24-hour a day law enforcement coverage. The deputies display the Tribal logo on their squad cars and uniforms.

has changed drastically in Grand Ronde over the past few years. Old stereotypes are being broken, daily.

"Our current administration, from Sheriff Wolfe all the way on down, has made a concerted effort to break down past stereotypes," said VanLaanen. "We're all just people. That is the goal of every police department, but I've never seen it or heard of it being as successful as it is out here. A lot of that credit goes to the community for being so accepting and the Tribe especially for supporting us. And, the officers that have been out here have all been exceptional community relations-type officers. I know who's in the hospital. I know who's having a baby. You're part of the family."

Tribal Council members Bob Mercier and Val Grout said they and other members of the Council have decided to put the Tribe's money into better community policing efforts and getting the new deputies is the latest step in that effort.

"The increased law enforcement presence is out here if for no other reason than to show that we do have the desire to get protection out here that we have needed for a long time,"

said Mercier. "Their presence here might curb a lot of things that have gone on just by being here. We increased the presence of law enforcement because of the need for increased protection. Now, we have coverage right here. Before, it might have taken hours for a response. A lot of times, that is too long. We need them to be here when we need them."

Grout said it is important to point out that it is not just the Tribe that benefits from the added law enforcement presence in Grand Ronde, but the whole community.

"Everyone is better off with the officers out here," said Grout. "In the past, we had to wait for officers to get here and sometimes that wait was long. Now they are here when we need them and they are part of the community."

Mercier agrees with Grout that the officers will benefit everyone in the area.

"This area has always been a community area with the Indians and the non-Indians here," said Mercier. "We all deserve the same coverage from our officers. I believe that we as a Tribe show how much we think of that by the money that we have put into the investment to have the officers here."

### Polk County Sheriff

Grand Ronde Substation: 879-2420

Emergency number: 9-1-1

The substation is located in far modular building west of the Community Center.