



# Cottage Grove Sentinel

SOUTH LANE AND DOUGLAS COUNTY'S MOST AWARD-WINNING NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1889



SPORTS

Track teams score first and second, say goodbye to another senior. PAGE B1

**PayneWest**  
INSURANCE

PERSONAL • BUSINESS • BENEFITS • SURETY  
(541) 942-0555  
PayneWest.com/Cottage-Grove



WED  
62° H  
45° L

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2017

FACEBOOK.COM/CGSENTINEL • TWITTER.COM/CGSENTINEL

CGSENTINEL.COM

## Neighborhood watch efforts not "armed militia"

### Calls for a neighborhood watch quickly take on life of their own

By Caitlyn May  
cmay@cg sentinel.com

Social media exploded last week with such force, it made it to the Cottage Grove City Council and local radio stations with residents divided over the formation of an

"armed militia" to combat the frequent property thefts around the city. Lines were drawn and debates broke out. Except no one had ever had the intention of forming an armed militia.

At least Reece Bailey didn't. It wasn't his intention when he posted to a popular Cottage Grove social media page asking if residents would be interested in taking part in a neighborhood watch group. It wasn't his intention but within hours the post had hundreds of comments with people backing the notion of an armed group of citizens and others condemning the idea.

The issue began when Bailey said he grew tired of the petty property thefts in his neighborhood.

"I moved here to raise my children here," the New York native said. "I like the small town feel."

But Bailey soon noticed the small-town crime rate.

"They would be so brazen that I would see them come into my carport and they would look right at me in the window," he said of the alleged thieves.

Please see **NEIGHBORHOOD PG. A9**

## FORMER CG MAYOR CHOSEN FOR STEWART SEAT

By Caitlyn May  
cmay@cg sentinel.com

Former Cottage Grove Mayor Gary Williams has been selected by the Lane County Commission as its fifth and final member.

Williams beat out 27 applicants, nine semi-finalists and three finalists who included fellow Cottage Grove residents Christy Inskipp, Mike Fleck and Cindy Weeldreyer.

He replaces longtime commissioner Faye Stewart who took a position with the city of Cottage Grove as the head of its new joint community development and public works department in March.

"It's about listening," Williams said during the interview when asked what the role of a county commissioner entailed.

He told the commission he would advocate for infrastructure funding, environmental issues and health care on the state and federal level as well as affordable housing saying, "People need to be able to live their lives in dignity."

Williams also noted that he has worked with members of the commission in his previous role as Cottage Grove Mayor and would tackle issues such as infrastructure and affordable housing on the state and federal level if it was appropriate in his seat on the

Please see **WILLIAMS PG. A10**

## Within their means

Timber towns across Oregon are feeling the devastating effects of revenue losses. But while some municipalities cut vital services and struggle to keep the lights on, the city of Drain doubles down on its future.

By Caitlyn May  
cmay@cg sentinel.com

### CITY WITH A PLAN

Second St. is bookmarked by a church on either end. An auto parts chain store sits here. Off in the distance, a bowling alley, lawyer's office and bridal shop. Second St. gives way to First St. and stores give way to empty fronts and closed signs.

The newspaper used to live on First St. That closed late last year when the owner (and mayor) fell ill. The library on A Ave. followed on April 1. The wine tasting operation was doing business. But then the owner died. A tourist shop filled with re-purposed furniture and old fashioned soda is still making a go of it and the city's most successful store, Ray's grocery, is king of First St. always boasting activity on an otherwise pin-drop-quiet stretch of road. This is the city of Drain--and it's thriving.

In 2015, the money stopped. A federal program that saw counties getting a cut of the profits when timber was logged on federal land within their boundaries failed to be included in the congressional budget. The 2015 payment of \$86.4 million was projected to fall to \$7 million this year. Counties that had already been hit by the decrease in funds when environmental laws sided with the spotted owl and timber production slowed, now faced tighter budgets and life or death decisions. Josephine County cut law enforcement positions leading to a crisis of public safety. Douglas County cut all funding to its library system, shutting down all of its branches from Roseburg to Yamhill to Drain.

While the financial hit was a hard one, Drain continued to invest in its future.

"We have a 50 year plan," said city administrator Carl Patenode.

That plan includes the brand new water and sewer lines which will be joined by an \$8 million wastewater treatment center that will begin construction this year. The project is being funded 50 percent by grants and the other half is being generated by a loan with a one percent interest rate.

"Financially, we're a good company," said new mayor Rance Pillely. "We sell electricity, water and sewer."

And they do it for much less than their neighboring municipalities.

While water bills can run up to \$100 in Cottage Grove and utilities account for a large portion of rent payments in Eugene, Drain residents boast much smaller bills.

"The monthly water bill is \$31," said Patenode. The sewer bill, he says is "high" due to the new project, coming in at \$69 a month. The utilities are run like co-ops and

"People are happy with the size of our community. We have generations of people who live here. We're pro-business but we're not looking to grow and get bigger." - Drain City Administrator Carl Patenode

the city makes enough money to keep the lights on and continue offering the services to residents.

"Eggs are cheaper in the country," Patenode jokes. Drain does levy a tax that generates approximately \$70,000 a year with a total city budget estimated at six million.

"We don't have a lot of extra money," Patenode said. "We live within our means."

### MAKING IT WORK

Patenode retired from his position as city administrator in November after 20 years. He was hired by the city as an interim city administrator that same month. He never missed a day of work.

On a Thursday morning, his desk is covered. Stacks of paper decorate the surface more so than photos and mementos. He's technically a part-time employee now, leaving just nine full-time positions in the city, but his workload hasn't decreased. He sits across from Pillely who, he says got the gig as mayor like any other small-town position, he raised his hand. The appointment came after the former mayor resigned after winning the election due to health concerns. At the time, Patenode said he was concerned about filling the vacancy.

Pillely, who had been on the city council since the 1990s, said he felt the city needed a "stable force."

"We were looking for a new administrator and one of the council members who was elected was brand new," he said.

Now, the two men sit face-to-face overlooking Patenode's stacks of paper to assess the positive and negative attributes of Drain.

"The library is closed," Pillely said. The doors shuttered after Douglas County commissioners voted to

Please see **DRAIN PG. A6**

## South Lane Mental Health Executive Director Retires

### Tom Wheeler will step down next year after 25 years at the nonprofit organization

South Lane Mental Health announced on Monday, April 17 that executive director Tom Wheeler would be stepping down a year from now.

"Tom is a visionary and a trailblazer and will be difficult to replace," said Dr. Jim Harrison, Board Chair. "We are thankful for his many years of incredible leadership, nurturing and growing this organization to better help residents of our community," a press release on the retirement said.

The Board of Directors has created a transition committee that will launch a nationwide search for Wheeler's successor. A new leader will be named later this year.

"Because of Tom's leadership, South Lane Mental Health has become a pivotal force both in Cottage Grove and in broader Lane County," said Noreen Dunnells, President and CEO of United Way of Lane County. "I've always been impressed with Tom's commitment to those in our community who are struggling. This is manifested in his enthusiastic involvement in initiatives like the Community Health Improvement Plan and Be Your Best Cottage Grove, as well as in making sure that local residents have timely access to mental health services."

South Lane Mental Health had a staff of five and served about 50 adults per year when Wheeler became its first executive director

two and a half decades ago. Under his guidance, South Lane Mental Health secured state grants to build housing for adults with severe mental illness (1993); hired the first medically qualified individual in South Lane County with a specialty in managing psychiatric medications (1994); and became a contractor to provide mental health services to individuals on the Oregon Health Plan (1997). In 2008, South Lane Mental Health partnered with the City of Cottage Grove to win a Community Development Block Grant, which enabled the agency to buy and renovate its current 9,000-square-foot offices on Birch Avenue and expand programs and services.

Today, South Lane Mental Health employs more than 90 staff

Please see **HEALTH PG. A7**

**COMMUNITY**  
**Word War Vet**  
Leonard Waitman tells his story. PAGE A11



**EDUCATION**  
**\$1.8 million cut**  
SLSD waits to hear from the state if the \$1.8 million budget cut is here to stay. PAGE B1

**INDEX**  
Calendar ..... B11  
Channel Guide ..... B5  
Classifieds ..... B7  
Obituaries ..... A2  
Opinion ..... A4  
Sports ..... B1

cgnews@cg sentinel.com  
(541) 942-3325 ph • (541) 942-3328 fax  
P.O. Box 35, Cottage Grove, OR 97424  
Corner of Sixth and Whiteaker, Cottage Grove

VOLUME 129 • NUMBER 40



**Coffee with the Editor**  
**Every Tuesday 12 pm**  
**@ Backstage Bakery**

**Come chat about the community!**

