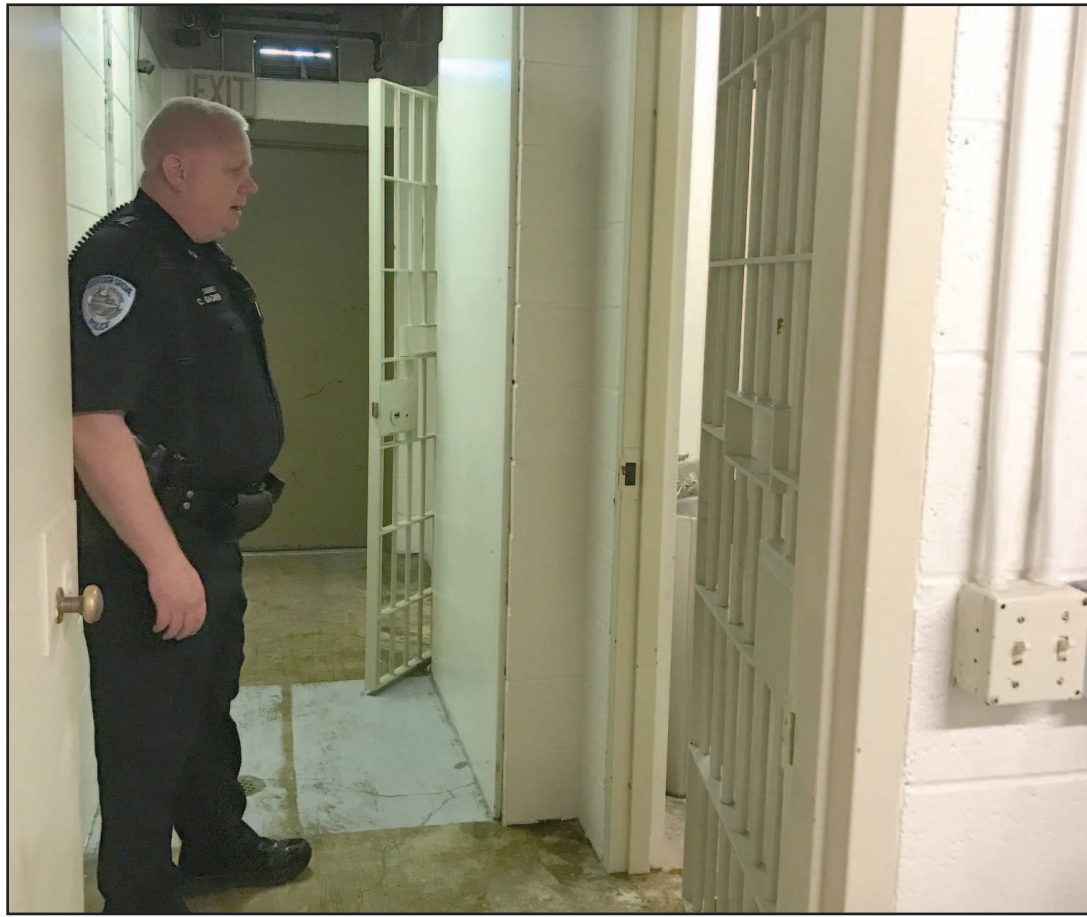


ARRESTED: WHERE DO ALL THE GIRLS GO?

What happens when a female is arrested in a city that has no place to house them?



Captain Conrad Gagner stands in front of the two cells used to house female inmates in the Cottage Grove Jail inside city hall.

By Caitlyn May
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In the middle of a narrow hallway and down a two-tier staircase in the basement of city hall is the Cottage Grove jail. It has a booking desk, fingerprint station, a storage closet for uniforms and toiletries and cells. What it doesn't have is women. At least, not usually.

According to Captain Conrad Gagner, a female may be kept in the basement cells if she has court upstairs the next morning. It saves the local staff from driving the inmate to Lane County's facility only to turn around and bring them back. But that rarely happens. The majority of the time, the two cells at the far end of the row, reserved for female inmates, are empty.

"We will send them to Lane County and even though what

they did was a crime and they're terrorizing our community, they'll be released," said Sgt. Doug Skaggs.

Cottage Grove does not rent beds from Lane County and on the matrix of crimes, shoplifting falls well below assault and other, more serious crimes the county facility is overrun with. The combination would see a female arrested in Cottage Grove, transported to Lane County and released, sometimes within 24 hours. The cycle, according to CGPD was frustrating to say the least. And then, Skaggs had an idea.

"I'm usually the first one to be hesitant about his ideas but so far it's working," said Gagner.

The premise is simple: females arrested and sentenced to jail will join the work crew and perform manual labor in lieu of

taking up residency in one of the city's cells.

"Where the inequity comes into play is that the males have to return to the jail every night," said Cottage Grove Police Chief Scott Shepherd.

Male inmates are also permitted to join work crew to satisfy their sentence but because the city's police force is predominately male, there are no obstacles to housing male offenders overnight in the city's jail.

"We don't have the staffing to hold females. With a mostly male staff, you could see the insurance companies being uneasy," Shepherd said.

Currently, when females are housed in the city facility, they are placed in two cells that are around a corner and behind a door to keep females separated from male inmates.

"Luckily, our dispatcher has

prior law enforcement experience and so, we can have her go down and help the inmate change into the jail clothes," Gagner said. But that isn't always the case. In some instances, male officers have to stand around the corner and out of sight and have the female inmate call out when she's completed the wardrobe change.

"I don't foresee us having the staffing to house females in the near future," Shepherd said.

Until the facility is upgraded or an increase in staffing is funded and approved, Skaggs work crew brain child will continue to be a sentencing alternative for females who are convicted of crimes in Cottage Grove.

So far, the program has had two participants. One has finished her sentence and the other is still working through her remaining days.

"We'll have them wash cars and paint rooms but we work around their schedule, especially if they have a job," Gagner said. "What we don't want is people thinking they can commit a crime, get assigned to work crew and then not show up and complete their sentence."

While that may be a tempting option for some inmates, Skaggs says it's not an option.

"We haven't had anyone do that but if they did, they'd be picked up for contempt of court and that is a more serious crime than shoplifting. So, they would most likely be held in county," he said.

As for whether or not the work crew option creates a gap between rights of female and male inmates, Gagner says, "They're both on work crew and they're both satisfying their sentences."

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