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VETERANS HONORED

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, citizens gathered near the flagpole at Prairie City Park to honor veterans.

About 20 people attended the Veterans Day ceremony presented by the Prairie City American Legion Post 106.

Prairie City resident Janine Goodwin sang the national anthem, and seven veterans participated in the ceremony, presenting the flag and performing a gun salute.

Tom McAuslan, a Navy veteran, offered a prayer and gave a speech.

"We are gathered to honor those who have served and are serving," he said. "... We remember those who bear a greater burden; may they find peace. God bless America."



Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter

Tom McAuslan (Navy) of Prairie City American Legion Post 106 gives a speech on Veterans Day at the Prairie City Park, honoring those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

TOP IMAGE: Prairie City American Legion Post 106 members give a gun salute on Veterans Day. Lined up in the ceremony are Dick Thiede (Navy), Dale Duby (Marines), Terry Williams (Marines), Ed Negus (Navy), Neale Ledgerwood (Army), LB Adams (Army) and Ab Bezona (Army). Tom McAuslan (Navy) led the ceremony with a prayer and a speech to honor those who have served.

Elliott's bail reduced to \$500,000

Witnesses say they are concerned for their safety

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Circuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr. declined to significantly reduce the bail for Thomas Joseph Elliott, 55, John Day.

Elliott faces a manslaughter charge connected with the shooting death of Todd Alan Berry in the Dog Creek area east of John Day on Aug. 24.

During a Nov. 9 hearing, Cramer agreed to allow Elliott to have contact with his wife, either in jail or if he is able to post bail and is released pending trial.

According to a grand jury indictment, Elliott faces one count of first-degree manslaughter with a firearm and one count of unlawful use of a weapon.

A murder charge filed the day after the shooting incident was dropped from



Thomas Joseph Elliott

brought back to the grand jury for more serious charges.

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the grand jury indictment. But Colin Benson, an Oregon Department of Justice attorney assigned by Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter to prosecute the case, told Cramer that depending upon additional evidence that could be forthcoming, the case might be brought back to the grand jury for more serious charges.

County court throws support for broadband

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Following an emotional meeting Nov. 8, the Grant County Court voted 2-1 to move forward with a proposal to join with the city of John Day in forming the Grant County Digital Coalition and providing broadband internet access to local residents.

Commissioner Jim Hamscher, who opposed the court's vote for consensus, had concerns about language in an agreement binding the county to the coalition and the need for a market analysis.

John Day City Manager Nick Green, who will bring the agreement back to the court

at their next meeting, said he hadn't conducted a market analysis but expected the task force working on the proposal would do so in the future.

Green said bringing broadband to the John Day area was part of the city's strategy for growth. Limitations to download and especially upload speeds in the area stops many businesses from moving here and hampers economic development, a point emphasized by Scott Fairley, who came from the Business Oregon office in Pendleton to support the proposal.

"The issues and problems you're hearing now will only get worse in the future," Fairley told the court. "Competition in

the future will grow more difficult."

In an emotional plea to the court, Grant County Economic Development Coordinator Sally Bartlett said the county needed to embrace the 21st century.

"It hurts me to see Grant County struggle because people can't agree," she said. "We're so divided and can't move forward."

Bartlett noted that the \$1.8 million in state funding that John Day will receive for construction of a high-capacity fiber cable from Burns to John Day could be doubled by obtaining other grants and funding.

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911 dispatch tax defeated

Ballot measure didn't address voter concerns

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County voters turned down a local option tax proposal intended to fill a funding gap for 911 dispatch by 1,503 to 1,194. Overall turnout was about 52 percent of eligible voters.

The goal of the ballot measure was to raise \$208,916 per year beginning in fiscal year 2019. The impact of the tax was \$38 on a \$100,000 home.

The cost of running John Day's emergency communications center, which services all of Grant County, is \$429,115 for the current fiscal year, but the city will only receive about \$270,000 from the state's 75 cent surcharge on monthly telephone bills and \$22,921 from Blue Mountain Hospital and the U.S. Forest Service, leaving a deficit of about \$199,194.

The measure lost in all five county precincts, where voter turnout ranged from 44 percent of eligible voters in the North Fork precinct to 53 percent in the John Day Valley precinct. Precincts are based on local school districts, Grant County Clerk Brenda Percy said.



Eagle file photo

A desk in the John Day Dispatch Center. An option tax to fill a funding gap for the 911 dispatch center was defeated in the election.

Voter opposition

"I think most people think they pay too many fees and taxes as it is," Grant County Judge Scott Myers said about the results. "I also think they believe it should be paid by phone users, not just property owners."

Comments posted on the Blue Mountain Eagle Facebook page indicated some voters were concerned about declining 911 dispatch service if the John Day facility was shut down and local emergency calls were re-routed to a regional 911 center, such as Frontier Dispatch in Condon.

But others were concerned about ever-rising taxes.

"For some of us, a 'few' dollars add up," Ellen Warner Bush wrote. "Taxes already

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Dispatch center a state mandate in 1989

Cost of joint service intended to be shared

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The joint 911 dispatch center in Grant County was organized in 1989 after the state set a 1991 deadline for all communities to establish an emergency call center with two dedicated 911 phone lines.

Emergency calls from residents had been made to local police departments and then routed directly to officers' homes, according to the Eagle archives. Calls came in at all hours of the day and night. The state's goal was to establish a uniform emergency phone number for people traveling around the state, with calls answered by trained dispatchers.

But the cost of the state-mandated system for smaller communities exceeded their share of the revenue from a 3 percent excise tax on telephone bills collected at the time by the state. The monthly cost for 911 service for Seneca was more than the community received from the state over three months, Grant County 911 Coordinator Elvin Webb said at the time.

County and city officials developed a plan for a single dispatch center for the entire county, with the excise tax collected from rural county residents used to cover what the cities alone couldn't afford.

The new dispatch center was set up in the John Day City Hall building and managed by the John Day police chief. By June 1990, the John Day Emergency Communications Center

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Eagle file photo

Grant County Judge Scott Myers speaks during a Grant County Court meeting.

