

## Continuing to build a community-driven Firewise program

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Communities in Grant County see progress as they continue to become Firewise.

Irene Jerome, Grant County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Firewise coordinator, updated the county court on Dec. 11 on the progress communities are making.

"We've been enormously successful through a group effort in the county, and we are going to continue on that trajectory," Jerome said.

Over the year, Jerome has worked with Deputy Dave Dobler of Grant County Search and Rescue and assisted them with mapping. There was also a mock wildfire evacuation in the Middle Fork Firewise community in Galena. The team learned how the community can improve, according to Jerome.

Firewise community members also talked to the Forest Service about fuel reduction along their boundaries, and the Forest Service responded and plans to clear some of the fuel by summer 2020 to help the community.

"They (Forest Service) did that because the community was Firewise," Jerome said. "Firewise communities have enough of a framework and push from a well-informed group that the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management can support them and their requests."

While establishing a Firewise community has its benefits, Jerome has looked into additional ways to inform the public about preventing fires. Jerome met with Mark Howell, a prevention officer for the Forest Service in the Blue Mountain District, to inform Grant County students on fire behavior and the excess of fire fuel in the forest.

"We did a 'What's involved in fire prevention' workshop at Grant Union, and the John Day fire department came with one of their structure engines, and Dave Fields, the former state fire marshal, also came," said Jerome. "Getting kids involved is what really makes it work."

Jerome has also reached out to teachers to see if any students would be interested in doing a senior project where they can go out and gather information on fire hazards in communities.

The biggest trial in forming



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

**Irene Jerome, Grant County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Firewise coordinator, updated the Grant County Court on Dec. 11 on Firewise communities.**

a Firewise community has been communication. A misunderstanding has been that the cities are in charge of promoting Firewise, but the program is driven by community members.

"The point of the program is to help folks who can't help themselves," Jerome said. "I need someone from a community to say, 'I'll help you do this' and show a little bit of initiative. The program falls down when they want me to do it all."

If a community has a project or needs additional funds to complete fire prevention, Jerome can approve the project and then reimburse the money needed to hire the contractors. Such projects as brushing roadways, providing improved mapping and clearing fire fuel near homes can be reimbursed, but the amount varies per project.

"I do all the bookkeeping for this, and some of the folks wanted to do some of the work themselves and have me pay them, but that is not what the program is designed for," Jerome said. "If you want to hire somebody and choose a contractor and make a deal with them, I'll make an agreement with the resident, on behalf of the county, that they will keep up with the project."

Jerome plans to visit areas that have expressed interest in joining Firewise such as Canyon City, Monument, Canyon Creek Lane, Prairie City and several neighborhoods.

For more information about establishing a Firewise community, call Jerome at 541-575-2210.

## Justice Court looking for more hours with increasing case load

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

One item on the agenda for the Grant County Court meeting had nearly every seat filled in the room.

Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett talked to the county court on Dec. 18 to increase the hours for the Justice Court clerk from 32 to 40 hours to address the rise in new cases filed per year. Over the last 11 years, the amount of new cases have been on the rise with 854 cases filed in 2009 and 1,404 cases filed for 2019 as of Dec. 17.

Stinnett said, if additional help is not provided in the office, services will be cut back. Traffic violations could become a lower priority, she said.

"It would be up to the district attorney to decide whether the case can be filed in circuit court or not," said Stinnett. "I would simply have to make a request for him to please not file cases in my court. That's not a threat; that's a reality."

The Justice Court also handles cases that are based on small claims, landlord and tenant issues, traffic, probable cause affidavits and search warrants and some misdemeanors such as criminal trespass and certain cases of second- and third-degree theft. Another problem that would arise from cutbacks would be cases taking longer to address.

"With Circuit Court judge time split between Grant and Harney Counties, these cases would not get on the docket as quickly as they do in Justice Court," said W.D. Cramer, the Circuit Court Judge, in a support letter given to the court. "Moreover, the litigants would not get to see a 'judge' as often as those cases would be directed to the alternative dispute procedures such as mediation. All of these things require staff to process. Without good support, I know Justice Stinnett cannot continue to maintain her current caseload."

The amount of cases have also impacted fines and the overall balance owed from claims. In



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

**John Day Police Chief Mike Durr spoke in support of Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett at the Grant County Court meeting Dec. 18.**



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

**Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett requested the Grant County Court increase the hours for the court clerk Dec. 18.**

2019, the total fines imposed for cases was \$181,361, and \$163,214 is still owed. In 2018, the total fines imposed for cases was \$161,995, and \$125,666 is still owed.

"Collections is a whole other beast in itself," said Trista Collins, the Justice Court clerk. "The process for our office to get cases to collections requires so many letters sent to each person in a timely manner. We have to get court dates set, talk to attorney offices, talk to the District Attorney's office, and then pull out drawers and drawers of old cases that I have to get all those letters sent to before they get sent to a

collection agency."

Collins said, if a person has 15 fines, a general letter covering every fine cannot be sent. Each fine must have its own docket number and its own letter before it's sent to collections. There is so much work involved that Collins worked 27 hours of compensation time in the last pay period, she said.

Multiple people spoke in support of Stinnett including Roger and Meredith Ediger, Collins and John Day Police Chief Mike Durr. Letters of support came from Cramer, Len's Drug and Chester's Thriftway.

"Without proper consequences, shoplifting will continue to escalate as they will feel they can get by with it," said Marla Armstrong, president of Len's Drug. "We spend a lot of time following people because we need to catch them because they continually steal and if we cannot catch and have them prosecuted for theft, we have no reason to follow but will have to raise prices to cover the theft that occurs."

The county court approved an increase in time for the court clerk from 32 to 40 hours per week and for the assistant clerk from 19 to 20 hours. There are future plans to continue discussions between the Justice Court and county court on improving the situation.

*Thank You*

Canyon City would like to thank everyone who aided in the completion of the Inland Bridge project. We would also like to thank everyone for their patience and cooperation.

Grant School District  
Grant County Court  
Grant County Road Department  
IMI Industrial Services Group  
Sisul Engineering  
Imperial Concrete LLC  
High Desert Aggregate  
Canyon City Public Works  
Citizens of Canyon City

*Merry Christmas  
& Happy New  
Year*

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### Prescription Drug Program Available to Grant County Residents

Because of a partnership between Blue Mountain Hospital District and Len's Drug, Grant County residents have access to lower prescription drug costs through the 340B Program. This program has been available locally since 2017 and has been a huge help for patients that are uninsured and have a hard time affording their prescriptions. The 340B program is a nationwide program that requires pharmaceutical drug manufacturers to offer discounted prices to health care organizations that care for uninsured and low-income patients.

The savings on these costs for both Blue Mountain Hospital District and Len's Drug have helped expand services and increase access to care for patients. In the past, patients have had to make vulnerable choices between their budget and their prescription care/treatment plan. With access to this program, we have seen much healthier outcomes for patients. Another great benefit of this program is there is no cost to taxpayers or local businesses.

To find out if you qualify, talk to your Doctor or their Medical Assistant at your next appointment at Strawberry Wilderness Community Clinic. If you are 340B eligible, you can fill your prescriptions at Len's Drug to receive the lower prices. Prescriptions filled at other pharmacies will not be eligible due to program requirements and the partnership between Len's Drug & BMHD.

**Blue Mountain Hospital District**

**LEN'S DRUG**

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