

Search and Rescue requests additional funding

County plans to let voters decide on pool

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Search and Rescue coordinator Dave Dobler requested the court allocate an additional \$5,000 to the organization for a total of \$10,000 to reimburse volunteers for ongoing training, materials and travel costs at the Grant County Court meeting Feb. 12.

Dobler said the missions SAR has conducted require specialized training and equipment that his volunteers pay for out of pocket.

Dobler, who was flanked by SAR president Cindy Lemcke, secretary Kim Kell and software and communications specialist Steve Fletcher, said each of them have spent upwards of \$10,000 out of their own pockets for training, travel, lodging and resources this year.

Lemcke, who owns two search and rescue dogs, pays expensive trainers, all of whom are located out of the area. Kell also has a SAR dog in training and pays out of pocket for training and travel.

Dobler said Fletcher paid out of his pocket to update SAR's communication infrastructure to extend the range of communication for the team's missions. Additionally, Fletcher paid to refurbish an old ambulance bus that works as a command post for the team on missions.

Dobler walked the county through the team's progress and 40 missions over the past 16 months since he took the helm.

He said after each mission comes a debriefing, and for the tough missions that result in a fatality, trauma counselors are available to them as SAR teams are at a higher risk of being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress.

Dobler said he has raised standards on both existing and incoming volunteers. The organization now requires a minimum of 60 volunteer hours a year in order to be an active member.

Incoming volunteers are required to go through 40-hour SAR Training Academy, which begins next month, and pass a written exam in order to join the team.

"I need to know what somebody can do before they go out on a rescue," Dobler said.

He said potential volunteers must go through a background check as well.

Commissioner Sam Palmer said he takes the requests of SAR seriously and the work they do is indispensable to the community.

"This is the difference between life or death," Palmer said. "Time matters, training matters."

Palmer said the training on maps, correspondence and the related technology are much needed in rural areas like Grant County.

Commissioner Jim Hamsher said Dobler should reach out to incoming county Title III coordinator Beth Simonson.

Dobler said he has been looking for other funding sources, including Title III. He said he met with Simonson earlier in the week.

Dobler said a grant through Title III could bring roughly \$20,000.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Dave Dobler, the county's Search and Rescue coordinator, walks the court through the team's 40 missions during his tenure. Dobler requested additional funding to reimburse his volunteers.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Bob Pereira addresses the county court regarding his concerns surrounding the new aquatics taxing district that may be put before voters in November.

The court approved SAR's request to use the Road Department's yard lot during Cycle Oregon in September. SAR will sell parking lot spaces as a fundraiser that could bring nearly \$1,000, said Lemcke.

Court addresses concerns regarding new taxing district

A county citizen addressed the court with wide-ranging concerns about the new aquatic taxing district that may be put before voters in November.

Bob Pereira told the court the measure for the proposed aquatics district is not in line with the needs of other communities outside of John Day.

Pereira said the proposed taxing district is another "eye-candy" project that is fiscally irresponsible and aimed to line the pockets of the John Day City Council.

"If you have opinions about John Day's city council, than you should take them directly to the council, not county court," Judge Scott Myers said.

Pereira said the proposed taxing district and aquatics center would not benefit citizens outside of city limits and that other communities

have not had a voice in the process. "No hearings have taken place in outlying communities that I am aware of," Pereira said.

Myers said the county plans to send the proposal to the voters.

Pereira said the city should take the measure to John Day voters and the county should not be involved.

"You think you speak for the majority, (but) I don't necessarily think you do," Myers said. "You look at the need for a pool and what the people say about the need and want for a pool, and only a ballot will bear that out."

Hamsher said other communities need to have all of the information in front of them before they make a decision. Mary Ellen Brooks, a citizen of Mt. Vernon, said the biggest taxpayers in the district are from areas outside of John Day.

"I am not opposed to the swimming pool," Brooks said. "The thing that bothers me is that we have neglected to take care of the things that we have, from the swimming pool to the court house, the schools. We don't take care of those things as we go."

Brooks also pointed out the school district's need for \$20 mil-

lion in repairs and said the community should focus on school needs rather than a pool. She also pointed out that enrollment is down at the schools and that the population overall in Grant County is projected to decrease over the next couple of decades.

Myers said the county needs to make it attractive for people to come to the area.

"In my opinion things like a new pool, potentially a new park and better school buildings will make the community attractive for people to come here," Myers said.

Brooks said people from other areas will not be able to afford to travel from the surrounding areas to use the pool but at the same time will be on the hook to pay for it.

"The county line does not end at John Day," Brooks said.

Francis Preston asked how the county even got involved.

County Commissioner Sam Palmer explained that the county is the body that would put the measure on the ballot.

"The only way to get public opinion is to put this out on the ballot to the voters," Myers said.

In other county court news:

- The court approved to pay death investigator Richard Tirico a wage of \$30 per hour on a case-by-case basis.

- The court appointed Beth Simonson as the county's new Title III coordinator.

- The court discussed updating the county's cyber security and will reach out to the county's insurance provider for guidance.

- The court approved moving forward with replacing its 25-year-old alarm system. The cost will be \$4,000, and the company that will install it is Alpine Alarm Systems. The system will include alarms for both smoke and fire.

- The memorandum of understanding between the county and Old West Bank for the possible purchase of the Strawberry Beef building is being amended by Jim Carpenter, the county's district attorney, at the request of Old West.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Mindy Winegar, Grant County Fairgrounds manager, updated the court on the timeline of the construction project at Trowbridge Pavilion on Feb. 12.

Trowbridge Pavilion construction project pushed out until after fair

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Fairgrounds Manager Mindy Winegar told the Grant County Court Feb. 12 that the construction project on the Trowbridge Pavilion will not be completed until September or October.

She said the delay in completing the project will impact one event, but that event was unconfirmed and she would rather not share the name or give any other additional details.

Winegar said the project was necessary because roots on the north side of the pavilion had lifted the concrete floor, causing it to crack and creating a safety hazard.

The 10-week project was set to begin and end between March 9 and May 11.

"We were hoping to get it done before fair, but it just was not in the cards," Winegar said.

Winegar also said the Malheur County Fair booked a carnival company and that she might be able to get the company to come to Grant County.

She said she also plans to bring in two concert acts that could bring name recognition to the fair. She said one of the acts was confirmed while the other is undecided.

Winegar said the ticket prices, which in previous years have been between \$70 and \$35, have been changed to \$45.

Winegar asked the court for approval to purchase barriers to the stage for the concert. The total cost is \$4,900 for the barriers that she had in mind. The court approved the request.

Winegar said she will come back to court to make a request for extra security for the concerts. The cost, she said, would be roughly \$2,500.

She said the events she has lined up are comparable to those in Bend.

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