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Emergency operations center scraps neighborhood watch plan

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Emergency Operations Center has canceled plans for a neighborhood watch program.

Grant County Judge Scott Myers said April 1 the emergency operations center will not follow through with the plan to train 11-15 volunteers to patrol various areas in the county during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

"The EOC decided that there were just too many loose ends," Myers said.

Deputy Dave Dobler, the incident commander of the emergency operations center, could not be reached for comment regarding the cancellation of the program.

"Neighborhood watch was only a concept depending on how this emergency unfolded," said EOC Public Information Officer Sam Palmer. "At this time there is no plans to pursue this."

Originally, Dobler said the goal of the program was to have another set of eyes and ears in the community. Dobler said the volunteers, in unmarked vehicles, would patrol

neighborhoods in the county assigned by the sheriff's office and report to the emergency operations center via county-purchased radios if they saw something.

Dobler said the unmarked vehicles might allow the volunteers to witness potential criminal activity that they would not see in clearly marked vehicles. He said the volunteers would have no authority to apprehend criminals but could report activity to the emergency operations center.

Dobler declined to name the volunteers. He said the volunteers would receive background checks and online

training and be required to sign volunteer agreements.

Dobler said the neighborhood watch volunteers would not want to participate if their names were made public.

"They don't want their names in the paper, they just want to volunteer," Dobler said.

The Eagle requested copies of those agreements and any rules or regulations for the neighborhood watch program March 24.

County counsel Dominic Carollo responded March 27, stating, "At this time, no responsive records exist."



Eagle file photo
Emergency Operations Center Incident Commander Dave Dobler addresses Grant County Court.

Commissioners working with EOC deputized

County coronavirus response center completes move, aims to fill vacancies

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer has deputized two county commissioners who have been working on the county's coronavirus response.

In a Facebook post April 4, the sheriff said he had deputized his brother Sam Palmer, who is serving as the public information officer for the county emergency operations center, and Jim Hamsher, who serves as the county court's liaison to the sheriff's office.

"I believe that Jim is not the type of person looking for a patrol car or a badge or a gun but he has taken his job as a commissioner serious and spends a lot of time within our office," Glenn Palmer said in the post. "Liability wise and when and where Jim comes and goes I believe it is in our best interest to deputize him."

Hamsher said he was deputized so he can understand staffing needs, monitor overtime and other intricacies of law enforcement.

Sam Palmer said "there are no plans or needs for EOC volunteers or workers to be deputized." He said there is no formal relationship between the sheriff's office and the operations center, which is headed by Incident Commander Dave Dobler, a certified officer and sheriff's office deputy who coordinates search and rescue.

Sam Palmer said he is an active member of search and rescue and the medic for a multi-agency tactical team, and a former nurse for the jail and for special operations with the Oregon State Police and Drug Enforcement Agency. He said he was first deputized by Sheriff Fred Reusser in the late 1980s.

Sam Palmer said he has been driving a sheriff's office vehicle to transport medical supplies.

"All medical supplies are carried in a patrol vehicle ... for liability reasons," he said.

As Grant County enters a week that Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, warned Sunday would be the "hardest" week of the global pandemic,

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Grant County schools shift to online education



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

A bus at the Blue Mountain Eagle delivers supplemental educational packets for students in John Day.

Districts loaning devices, trying to ensure internet connectivity

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County schools are transitioning from supplementary education to distance learning.

Distance learning implements online education through Google Classroom, Google Hangout, Zoom or other online programs in which teachers can interact with students. The Oregon Department of Education has directed schools to be ready for the change by April 13.

"The staff here in Monument has been amazing," said Laura Thomas, the superintendent for Monument School. "They worked to meet ODE's initial guidance of supplemental learning and now have worked incredibly hard to make a shift to distance learning for all."

A challenge that schools are facing in providing online learning to students is the lack of devices or connectivity from a household. Each school is handling the situation differently, but they are all dedicated to finding a solution to the problem with connectivity.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Red cups in a fence at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School deliver the message, 'We miss you.'

"We are customizing what each student needs based on grade, class and what the family has in terms of internet access," said Dayville Superintendent Kathryn Hedrick.

Several schools are temporarily providing tablets or laptops for free to students who do not have these devices.

"We have families that don't have access to internet or computers so we are also delivering hard copies and signing out laptops to students that have internet but not the device," said Prairie City Superintendent Casey Hallgarth,

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Resources available for businesses during uncertain time

Economic Development assisting with Small Business Administration programs

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

A record number of people in the United States applied for unemployment the last two weeks as COVID-19 business closures and layoffs continue, but Grant County resources are working together to help businesses and workers.

Allison Field, the Grant County Economic Development director, talked about the unified efforts between Grant County Economic Development, the Grant County Chamber of Commerce, the Grant County Emergency Operations Center and Oregon RAIN.



Eagle file photo

Allison Field, the Grant County Economic Development director.

"This is a scary time for small businesses, as we are unsure how this is all going to unfold during the COVID-19 crisis," Field said. "We have a fragile economy that hasn't fully recovered from the timber industry hit in the '90s, which is why it is so important

"AS WE NAVIGATE THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND CONTINUE MOVING FORWARD IN EVERY WAY WE CAN."

—Stephanie LeQuieu, rural venture catalyst

to put our political views and opinions aside, come together as a community and help one another. We need all our local businesses to get through this and recover if we want the Grant County economy to survive."

Currently, Economic Development is working in the EOC as a part of the finance group. They are in charge of Small Business Administration programs, Field said.

Economic Development has been sharing information regarding SBA programs, and one of the difficulties

has been that it is constantly changing. "The hard thing is that information is changing and evolving daily, and that's one thing we are trying to do working with the EOC is to provide the most current, up-to-date, factual information to business owners," Field said.

Seth Klingbeil, an employee at the EOC, started the Grant County COVID-19 webpage, <https://gc-covid-19.info>, which will help answer many frequently asked questions about

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