

EOC

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Since then, the former EOC incident commander and interim emergency manager Dave Dobler resigned, and the EOC staff went from a team of 12 to two.

Grant County Commissioner and EOC liaison Jim Hamsher said in July the remaining EOC staffers worked remotely and on an on-call basis and that the court would be leaving decisions regarding the EOC’s future to the new emergency management coordinator. At the time, the staff consisted of Deputy Incident Commander Chris Rushing and Logistics Manager Seth Klingbeil.

Gray, who helped Dobler write the county’s pandemic plan in March, said he recognizes part of his job will be to earn the community’s trust when it comes to emergency management.

“I know how incident command should work, and I know that it’s not been necessarily working the right way there in Grant County, and that’s one reason they have me here,” he said.

Gray, a state-certified Incident Command System instructor, said he has 20 years of Federal Emergency Management Administration experience.

Gray, a veteran, said he was Harney County’s Community Emergency Response Team instructor, and after COVID-19, he plans to bring emergency response classes to the county’s first responders and citizens.

“I’m going to be building up a team, not just of our first responders but of some volunteers like residents who want to help, and bringing them, bringing the residents into emergency management so that they are there helping us,” he said. “This is not something that we just shut the door and keep behind closed doors and nobody sees what we’re doing.”

Gray said he will be working with public health immediately.

“They’re going to be my main people to deal with because this is a medical issue,” Gray said. “They’re the public health officials. We need to work with them so that we protect as many people as we



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

A helicopter takes off from the Grant County Regional Airport Thursday to respond to one of several fires in the county.



Eagle file photo

Alcohol and cleaning supplies sit on the shelf at the Grant County Emergency Operations Center in May. New Emergency Management Coordinator Paul Gray plans to move the EOC back to the Emergency Management office.

can.”

Gray said he bases his approach to emergency management and public safety on protecting lives, property and the environment — in that order.

“Number one is always going to be life so I need to protect as many people as possible,” he said. “Now COVID is not necessarily affecting the environment or anything else so I’m not too worried about that, but I am worried about

people and their jobs and everything else.”

He said he recognizes closing businesses hurts the community as a whole, and there needs to be “give on both sides” in how the local officials approach responding to the pandemic.

He said there are parallels to the 1918 Spanish flu and the coronavirus pandemic. Both COVID-19 and the Spanish flu, Gray said, started with low mortality rates, but the number

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—Paul Gray, Grant County emergency management coordinator

of cases and deaths ticked up.

“I’m not saying this is the Spanish flu”, he said. “It could be something that is not as bad, but it’s still moving forward.”

He said it is a disease researchers are still learning about, and until they know more, he has to take it seriously and let public health take the lead.

As the county saw the start of fire season in the area, Grant County Regional Airport Manager Haley Walker said aviation — not just fire crews, but aviation as a whole — has picked up considerably and that the day-to-day operations of the airport would be difficult alongside the EOC.

She said the EOC, with staff working remote and rarely, if at all, coming into the airport ter-

minal does not conflict with the aviation activity.

Walker said the lightning storms are not just igniting fires, they have also prompted pilots to land at the airport and rest in the terminal until the storms blow over.

She said there is more going on at the airport than just fire crews responding to fires.

Meanwhile, Gray said he has been going through the county’s emergency plan and said ultimately his plan is to shorten, simplify and condense the emergency plan to a 50-page book that fits in an officer or first responder’s back pocket.

“During a flood, they can open it up, and they know what their responsibilities are, instead of having a 555-page-book that nobody ever opens

up,” he said.

Gray said he has other plans that include researching grants for the county. In less than year, he said, he wrote roughly \$450,000 in grants for Harney County.

“That’s another aspect of me coming up there,” he said. “I know how to write grants.”

Gray said writing plans, grants and working with anything that has to do with public safety is what he “eats, sleeps and breathes.”

“I got in this to help the public, to make sure that everyone is on the same board, so that we could protect as many of the residents as possible,” he said. “I personally treat it like family. Everybody in the community is part of my family, and I want to bring that to Grant County.”

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He said working with the work crews was a rewarding experience.

Aasness, who moved to Grant County with Diane, his wife of 60-plus years, from South Dakota in 1957, said that John Day was a great place to raise their four kids.

Aasness said he is grateful for his wife.

“Diane was an excellent wife, mother, and homemaker,” he said.

Together, the two raised two boys and two girls.

Aasness joked they had a “good breeding program.”

He said they also took in two teenagers from a family friend and put them through high school.

“A good friend of mine, a

cowboy, dropped off his kids that turned teenagers, and we raised his two kids on top of ours,” Aasness said.

Aasness said he helped lay the groundwork for the Ranch and Rodeo Museum in John Day and is proud the museum honors the dedication and work ethic of the western lifestyle.

He said he likes to spend time in the tack room on his property.

“Anybody that is married to what used to be a red-haired woman needs a tack room to go to,” he said.

Aasness said his tack room, with saddles he’s put hundreds of miles on, stirrups and horseshoes, doubles as his “man cave.”

He said he is thankful to the people he has worked with over the years and the friendships he has built.

“Grant County has been very good to us,” he said.



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Hello Grant County,  
Can you believe it is August already? With everything going on, I am finding it difficult to keep track of time.  
I have to say, I am so thankful to live in Grant County, especially during this time. I am so proud of how well we are doing as a county during this pandemic.  
We are very grateful to all of our member businesses who continue to show their support through the payment of their membership dues. Thank you for your continued support and remember, we are here for you.  
At our meeting last month, the board approved our 2020-21 operating budget. It is posted on our website: [www.gcoregonlive.com](http://www.gcoregonlive.com). In the budget this year, we included a line item for Business Enhancement. This is a matching grant available to member businesses to use for repairs and improvements to their businesses. A committee has just finished writing the procedure for applying for this grant. After the board approves it, the grant will be available.  
As you probably already know, the Chamber has taken over the maintenance of the Conestoga wagon at the Dixie View Point. Last month, someone set fire to one of the wagon wheels and thankfully Ingo Wedde discovered the fire before it had gotten too bad. We are so appreciative of his quick action in getting the fire put out! Repairs have been made, and the wagon is almost as good as new. We are working on new ads for the advertisement/information section. If you would like to advertise there please contact the Chamber as space is filling up fast.  
We are still not able to hold our luncheon, but the board will have their monthly business meeting on Thursday, August 20th at 10:30 at the Chamber office. Space is limited due to social distancing requirements. Take care and stay well!  
Tammy Bremner  
Manager, Grant County Chamber of Commerce



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