

LocalElections

Julie Ellison seeks a second term to ‘ensure county’s financial health’

Incumbent was a bookkeeper for 30 years before joining county as deputy clerk in 2014

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

In 2016, Julie Ellison won more than half of the votes in a four-way primary race for treasurer and moved onto the ballot as the lone candidate in November’s general election.

In 2020, while the one-term incumbent will again be the sole candidate on the ballot in November, she faces a write-in challenger, John Day police officer Sam Stinnett.

“I want to continue to use my experience and knowledge for the citizens of our wonderful County,” she said.

From working with the commissioners on the budget committee to increase the county’s contingency fund — cash the county keeps on hand in case of emergencies — and setting up direct deposit for the county’s employees, Ellison said her first term has been busy.

The pandemic has made her office even busier.

She said her office has been tracking COVID-19-related expenditures from county departments that have requested coronavirus relief funds and ensuring those purchases include corresponding documentation.

Like any other request for funds, she said, they must go before the court for approval. Ellison said, if her office cannot verify documentation, she will not disperse the money.

According to Oregon statutes, she said the county treasurer is responsible for receiving, dispersing and investing all monies belonging to the county.

She said her office operates within the law and the policy the county commissioners set.

“That’s all I can do,” she said. “I can’t go outside of that.”

She said she welcomes anyone in the community to drop by the office if they have



Julie Ellison

questions.

“I try to be as transparent as possible,” she said. “My door is open if you want to come and look at something. I’ll show you anything I have.”

Ellison, who grew up in Grant County, was a bookkeeper for Jackson Oil for 26 years and then Ed Staub & Sons for four years.

Her career with the county began in 2014 as deputy clerk in the County Clerk’s Office. Ellison said her duties in the clerk’s office often overlapped with her predecessor, longtime treasurer Kathy Smith.

Ellison said, when Smith announced her retirement, she decided to throw her hat in the ring.

“I knew all the claims process, which half of it is done by the treasurer,” she said. “I knew a lot of information coming in, the accounts, the account numbers, all the departments.”

Ellison said, after her primary win in May, she spent her lunch breaks with Smith to prepare for her first day in office at the start of 2017.

“I learned a lot of stuff in those hours every day,” she said

She said the tasks on her first day included calculating complicated tax turnovers, a multi-step process that one must know coming in the door.

“If you don’t know how to do that, I’m sorry,” she said. “It’s about 100 steps.”

She said roughly half of her job is preparing for the budget, which she works on from January to June.

Ellison said she will continue to work with the court and budget committee to increase the county’s contingency fund.

She said she wants the

county to have a cushion if it does not receive its federal “Payment in lieu of Taxes,” an annual payment local governments receive to help offset losses in property tax revenue because of federal lands.

“I don’t know that I can get it that way,” she said. “But I would love for it to be as big as what they think PILT will be, so that if we didn’t get it would be OK.”

The federal government cuts PILT checks in June, just as she’s completed the budget.

“The budget is basically done, and I’ve put PILT into the budget because I’m assured we’re going to get it,” she said. “But if we didn’t get it one year, it would be devastating.”

Ellison said, with so much to learn and do, its hard to say what her biggest accomplishment has been in her first term.

“It’s hard to say you get

a c c o m - p l i s h - m e n t s in one term,” she said. “There is so much.”

H o w - e v e r, she said, the county, up until a month ago, was not in the “digital age,” but now with direct deposit for half of the employees, the county and employees are saving time and money.

“Everybody loves it,” she said. “They’re so thrilled with it.”

She said that is roughly 60 checks the county does not have to write and sign.

“We don’t have to print a physical check so that’s saving money,” she said. “That’s a time saver too besides money.”

Ellison said she wants to “continue to do what I’ve been doing and continue to make it better.”

“My focus,” she said, “is on protecting and keeping our principle balanced and prioritizing the services that the county’s citizens value the most and ensure the county’s financial health.”

Write-in challenger Sam Stinnett wants to serve his community

John Day police officer wants to see more transparency from treasurer’s office

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day Police Officer Sam Stinnett, a write-in challenger for Grant County treasurer, said he jumped into the race for the same reasons he became a cop.

He wants to help his community.

“It seemed like a good opportunity to help people in my community on a grander scale,” Stinnett said.

Stinnett, who grew up in Grant County, said he always enjoyed m a t h a n d that it “always

stays the same.”

“Math doesn’t lie; it can always explain it,” he said.

For the last eight months, he said he had been the president of his police union, and before that, he served as the secretary and treasurer.

“That gave me a lot of training and more experience,” he said.

As treasurer and secretary of the union, he said, he saw that the role entailed more paperwork and balancing the books than he had initially expected, but he enjoyed the job.

He said it is hard for him to pinpoint his goals as treasurer if he were to win the race, but he would like to see more transparency out of the office.

“That seems like a big word,” he said. “It’s all of our money and so we would



Sam Stinnett

all like to see exactly what is being done with it.”

Stinnett said, if someone wants to inquire about the county’s finances or anything else, they have to talk to somebody.

“I don’t know all the forms behind it, or how you have to get it or the protocol,” he said.

He said it seems like the county could offer an online form that makes the process more accessible for people. Currently, according to county officials, all records requests must go to the county court members for approval.

Stinnett, who worked at the Grant County Jail before joining the John Day Police Department in 2018, said the records request process is simple.

“At the (John Day Police Department), if we have a record and someone wants something, you call, come in, fill a little paperwork out, boom, you’re done,” he said.

He said he has heard the county needs an upgrade when it comes to technology.

“I’m technologically savvy, so I can do my best, within my power, to upgrade the county,” he said.

Stinnett said he wanted to be careful not to “stretch too far.”

“Every place I’ve ever worked, I have loved to

make things efficient and to have a streamlined process for everything,” he said.

At the jail, he said he helped implement a new computer program.

“I worked with a lot of the IT guys there,” Stinnett said. “And it was it was fun because I like technology, and I like efficiency.”

He said he has found there is always something “extra” to bring more structure, protocol and productivity at every job.

Stinnett, 34, said people in his generation need to get more involved in their communities and the political process.

“This is a great time for me to get involved in the county that I’m going to stay at,” he said. “I don’t see myself leaving anytime soon.”

Stinnett said he had moved away to Boise and Bend, but something always drew him back.

He said, if he were to win the race, he would stay on as a reserve officer.

“It is just too fun of a job, and too different of a job to let go,” he said.

He said long shifts on patrol and police work’s unexpected nature has made it difficult to get back to people and campaign.

For now, Stinnett said, people could reach out to him on his Facebook page. He said he does not always get back in the most timely fashion, but that is still the best way to get in touch with him.



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Hello Grant County, With everything going on this year, I thought it might be a good idea to remind everyone what we do here at the Chamber. Here are the facts:

The Grant County Chamber Commerce is located at 301 West Main Street at the corner of West Main Street and Bridge Street in the heart of John Day.

The Chamber is the DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) for Grant County as recognized by Travel Oregon and the Eastern Oregon Visitor Association. We are also a recognized Visitors Center.

The Chamber has a great website: www.gcorgonline.com with tons of information about Grant County. We have a Business Guide listing all our Chamber members. Each business has a page with contact information, and a link to their website if they have one. Our Facebook page is also very popular and a great way to communicate with the people of Grant County.

There is a list of hiking trails in Grant County with information about each trail including the distance, range of difficulty, which Ranger District they are in, what type of activity (hiking, horseback, mt. biking or ATV) is allowed on them and when they are open.

Dining and lodging options are listed with contact information as well as bike-friendly options and various maps. We have information on Grant County Communities and Museums and a link to the County Website.

We keep an Events Calendar and encourage everyone to send us their events to make it easier to schedule things to avoid conflicts.

The Chamber has an advertising budget and we advertise Grant County in several tourism/trade publications each year providing reduced rates to member businesses for advertising. We will soon be releasing our new logo and branding strategy. We are so excited to share this with all of you!

We have a line item in our budget for community sponsorships. We contribute to all city sanctioned events and we are proud to say that we invest in the Grant County Fair.

This year, we included funds for a Business Enhancement Grant Program. This is for Chamber members to be used specifically for building enhancement to improve “curb appeal”. A 50% match is required and grants are limited to \$2,500. The grant is open and eligible as long as there are allocated funds available for the respective fiscal year. This nicely compliments the Transient Room Tax Grant Program that we have had for many years to support local projects and events that attract tourism to Grant County. This program has provided over \$200,000 in grants since 2012!

Our Grant County Greenbacks program has been a huge success! You can purchase Greenbacks at the Chamber office in denominations of \$5, \$15, and \$25. They can be used at businesses that are Chamber members like cash. Business owners redeem them dollar for dollar. This helps keep our money in Grant County. Since its inception, 5 years ago, we have redeemed nearly \$50,000 from business members!

Just prior to the 2017 Eclipse, we installed the first TESLA charging station in John Day. It is located at the Chamber office and is used frequently by visitors and folks traveling through Grant County.

The newly remodeled Conestoga Wagon located at the Dixie Mountain Wayside just east of Prairie City with information about Grant County and some of our businesses is now being maintained by the Chamber. A recent Traffic count by ODOT indicates that there is an average of 150 vehicles visiting there daily!

So, now you have the facts. If you have any questions please contact us!

The Chamber board will meet Thursday, October 15th at 10:30 AM at the Chamber office. Masks are required and social distancing guidelines will be followed.

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