

## CASA keeps stepping up for the community amid COVID

Volunteers Moothart, Creighton sworn in

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

More help may soon be available for those affected by COVID-19.

Grant-Harney County CASA Executive Director Hannah Hinman said the court appointed special advocates organization expects a grant from the Oregon Health Authority to provide wrap-around services to people who test positive for the coronavirus and are asked to quarantine or have had close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19. She said the services could include assistance with rent, mortgage, utilities or other basic needs, such as grocery and prescription deliveries.

"It's a big financial impact for a lot of people to stay home for two weeks and not go to work," she said.

Hinman said there is still a long way to go before CASA can offer the services. The organization still needs to hire, onboard and train an employee, and establish a process for handling referrals from both the Grant and Harney county health departments.

She said the funding is through the coronavirus relief fund and other funding streams.

She said the funding opened up in March, and CASA did not apply for the wrap-around service funding.

Still, she said, CASA did commit a couple of hours a week to disseminate accurate COVID-19 information in the community.

She said because CASA accepted the community engagement grant, they began internally discussing offering the services.

Hinman said wrap-around service is not something the organization typically does. Still, Hinman said, OHA and the Grant County Health Department felt like it would be a good idea to have something available for people.

She said the Central Oregon Disability Services network, the organization that covers Grant County, could not keep up when the county saw a 900% increase in infections in the fall.

Since then, she said CODS, along with the People Mover and churches in Grant County,

have been able to keep up, and the county has not seen the uptick in cases like it did in November.

She said the base funding for the wrap-around services will be \$15,710 over six months, and they were also approved for \$4,950 to continue the community engagement and outreach.

Hinman said the outreach and engagement allowed them to partner with the health department, Blue Mountain Hospital District, Community Counseling Solutions, Community Health Improvement Coalition and local businesses.

In recent months, she said, the outreach has consisted of posting flyers around the county and providing personal protective equipment. Hinman said CASA provided colorable bookmarks in the "Healthy and Fit" boxes that the hospital district gave to kids instead of the in-person event it typically hosts.

Hinman said CASA will be coming up with a COVID-19-related activity with prizes and giveaways as part of mental health kits to be sent out to students because the Teen Mental Health Fair hosted by CCS and its partners will not be held in person.

### New CASA volunteers

Earlier this month, two volunteers from Grant and Harney counties were sworn in as Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Grant-Harney County CASA will now have an advocate appointed to 35 of the 67 children eligible to have one, just over half, according to Hinman.

Like other organizations, Hinman said CASA was not immune to COVID-19 and its challenges when it comes to training and recruiting.

She said the 40-hour training for the two new volunteers, Mark Creighton and Stephanie Moothart, was completely virtual.

"This year has created challenges for our organization in recruiting and training new CASA volunteers," she said. "And we have been working hard to adjust our previous approaches."

Hinman said the addition of Creighton and Moothart brings the total number of volunteers up to 19.

"As soon as they're assigned to a case, they will help us serve more children," she said.

## Raschio sells law firm to become judge

Kati Dunn takes over Strawberry Mountain Law

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The new judge sold his old law firm.

Rob Raschio sold Strawberry Mountain Law PC as he transitions to his new position in the community as circuit court judge for the 24th Judicial District.

Raschio sold the firm to Kati Dunn, who moved to Prairie City in November 2019 to work there as an attorney. Prior to working in Grant County, Dunn worked at Metropolitan Public Defender in Portland for 20 years.



Kati Dunn

"I feel very honored and excited to be the new owner of Strawberry Mountain Law PC," Dunn said. "...I would like potential clients to know that our attorneys are very skilled and dedicated, and take our clients' confidentiality and legal problems very seriously. I'd like the community to know that we are committed to being good neighbors and a dependable part of this beautiful community."

Raschio said he is no longer affiliated with the law firm.

"You have to give it all up to take on the public trust," Raschio said. "You



Rob Raschio, left, shakes hands with outgoing Grant and Harney Circuit Judge William D. Cramer Jr. after being sworn in as the new judge.

have to get rid of private relationships with firms."

Raschio also withdrew from cases to which he was assigned as a defense attorney and signed orders to recuse himself from those cases.

He said he is not able to preside over cases including people he has represented in the past unless enough time has passed and neither party has an objection to him presiding over a case.

"Other than that, it's been an interesting experience getting started, and

there's a lot to learn," Raschio said. "I'm doing my best everyday to learn six or seven new things and make sure we're getting started on this new era."

Raschio said he has appreciated the help received from stakeholders involved in the criminal justice system who are working diligently with the court to make the transition smooth.

"It's good to put the election behind us and get the work of the court going," Raschio said. "That's good news for everybody involved."

## Owens, Findley highlight importance of public participation

Landlord relief bill among proposals in Oregon Senate

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Relief for landlords and a push for public participation are among the priorities of Republican lawmakers in Eastern Oregon as the legislative session gets underway.

State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, announced he introduced a bill to provide relief to landlords as he hopes for bipartisan work in the upcoming legislative session.

Findley said the governor's executive order prohibiting evictions, even for those who don't pay rent, because of COVID-19 has caused a crisis. He said landlords still had to cover their bills and operational costs.

"I've introduced legislation that will provide tax credits for the revenue lost to the landlords due to COVID," Findley said. "... We have

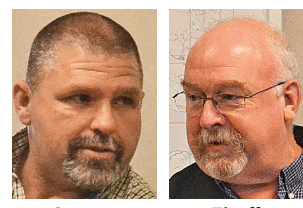
to provide support to the landlords."

Findley said he will not support any bill requiring mandatory vaccinations in Oregon.

"I, like you, have seen the bills that are out there and floating around the legislature that makes mandatory vaccinations," Findley said. "I do not support any of those. I do support anyone that wants a vaccine to get that shot, but I also do not believe it's logical or legal to make mandatory a vaccine that is not FDA approved."

During a virtual town hall meeting Jan. 14, Findley said 900 bills were introduced in the Senate prior to the start of the session with more bills still being introduced.

Until the first of April, the legislative session is going to be virtual, and all of the policy committees will be done online, Findley said in an interview on Jan. 15. Once every couple of weeks, a floor session will be held to move bills between chambers and



Owens

Findley

introduce new legislation.

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said during the virtual town hall that transparency and public participation is important when making public policies.

"You can't make good public policy without public participation," Owens said. "The public participation will be limited to the virtual world, and I have concerns with that, and it is one of my priorities this session, to figure out how we can get back to the Capitol."

Findley said it will be incumbent upon legislators to ensure they receive public input on legislation. He said the public needs to stay informed and provide their opinions.

"People will have to be

actively engaged," Findley said. "They can't just wait for us to tell them everything simply because of the sheer massive amount of bills."

Findley hopes legislators can find ways to reduce the number of bills that divide them and work together.

Findley said he thinks about 95% of the legislation can reach bipartisan agreement.

"I'd like to move that number higher to 97% or 98%," Findley said. "Find ways to work together and seek a good resolution for all."

Owens said he was concerned for the country and the state. He said free speech and the right to protest are great, but when it turns into vandalism, personal attacks or anything beyond a protest, it needs to stop.

"We need to learn from each other, and we need to respect each other," Owens said. "Please support your neighbor, no matter who they are, and let's move forward together."

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