

Challenge

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"I saw the bus at probably around 9:30 p.m., and the game was long over by then," Blood said.

The bus was parked beside the minimart, and Blood didn't think anything of it at first. "I thought it was a Prairie City bus coming back into town dropping kids off."

But after seeing it was a Union bus, he realized it was likely having mechanical trouble. He turned around and talked to the occupants to find out what type of problems they were having.

He learned it would be 2½ hours before their replacement bus would be arriving from Union. The Union girls team had played the Grant Union Lady Prospectors early that night and had gotten dinner at the Dairy Queen in John Day during the boys' game. The boys, however, hadn't had anything to eat yet. It was this information that pushed Trooper Blood into action and sent him to the Outpost.

Shirley Taylor was one of the people working at the Outpost that night. She said she and another employee were cleaning the restaurant after closing when Blood knocked on the door and asked if there was anything they could do for the bus full of hungry kids in Prairie City. "He explained what the dilemma was and that these kids were going to be there for a while," Taylor said.

Taylor and her co-worker swung into action, firing up



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Shirley Taylor at The Outpost in John Day on Friday, April 1, 2022. Taylor and a coworker were cleaning up when Trooper William Blood came knocking on Feb. 11, but they restarted the ovens to make pizza for some stranded teenagers.

the ovens and making five large pizzas for the stranded kids — even though Blood's request was unique.

"We've helped out a lot of different people over the years," Taylor said, "but nothing like this."

Fortunately, Taylor added, Blood's timing was just right — if he'd shown up much later, nobody would've been at the restaurant to help the kids. "It was probably 15, 20 minutes before he missed us," she said.

Blood said it didn't take much convincing to get the Outpost crew to make the pizzas. "They were happy to do this, and I give them all the thanks in the world for doing that because they cer-

tainly didn't have to," Blood said. "They had everything cleaned up and they got it all dirty again."

Union High School Athletic Director Chris Dunlap wasn't at the event, but he was notified that the bus was having issues. As an athletic director, he said, he was thinking of the kids and their safety.

"When I hear that, the first thought is are the kids going to be OK? Is the bus running and does it have heat?"

The team had planned to stop in Baker City to get a bite to eat on their way home, but the bus breakdown derailed those plans. Dunlap called Trooper Blood's actions a "lifesaver" and said what he

did "goes a long ways showing small town community and support. It reassured me that people do care about each other and take care of each other, especially in Eastern Oregon."

Like Taylor, Dunlap said he's never heard of anything like this happening.

"I've heard of maybe checking on somebody or running to make a phone call for somebody," he said. "Never somebody to turn around and say, 'Hey, those kids are hungry,' and then find a business that is open, get enough pizzas to feed everybody and then pay for that themselves. I've never heard of it, and I've been around athletics for a while."

Dunlap said the students finally made it back to Union sometime around 1 a.m. Trooper Blood's actions were met with relief and gratitude from the coaches and went a long way toward making the mechanical issues the teams were suffering through manageable.

Dunlap said he never got to speak with Blood personally, but the trooper's actions speak to the nature of people in Eastern Oregon.

"We have rivalries and we want our teams to win, but we still take care of each other when the time comes," Dunlap said. "We separate those rivalries for the sake of humanity."

Blood said he felt like a

"rock star" when the kids saw him pull the pizzas from the passenger seat of his patrol vehicle. "I stepped onto the bus and I honestly couldn't tell you (how but) the pizzas were gone," he said.

Following the pizza delivery, Blood said, one of the Union basketball players told his teammates to get out of his way because he was "going to give that man a hug," adding "that started the long line of hugs from the kids."

Blood said his own experiences as a high school athlete aroused his sympathies for the stranded basketball team.

"I played sports in high school," he said, "and I know what it is like to be in a small town where nothing is open and you're hungry."

Blood's act of kindness did not go unnoticed by his supervisors with the Oregon State Police.

For his deeds that night, he was awarded a certificate of recognition and two challenge coins, one from OSP's John Day outpost and the other from the agency's Ontario, Burns and John Day area command.

Lt. Mark Duncan presented Blood with the challenge coins and certificate in a brief ceremony at the John Day OSP outpost on Wednesday, March 30, noting that the challenge coins are not handed out often and should be held in high regard.

Duncan said Blood "went above and beyond, showing compassion, and that Trooper Blood represents the Oregon State Police and their core values well."

Budget

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The agreement, he said, allowed Prairie City to pay for law enforcement coverage by the hour. Hamscher, who is also Prairie City's mayor, said the Sheriff's Office invoiced the community monthly for patrols and said the cost was around \$90 an hour.

Hamscher added the hourly



Quinton

rate would likely have to go up because of inflation and rising fuel costs. He said he asked Sheriff Todd McKinley to calculate a rate that factors in current conditions to bring to the budget committee.

Last month, Hamscher said

Prairie City had not been able to fund the law enforcement contract since the start of this fiscal year on July 1 due to budget constraints. However, he said he hopes the community can start paying for policing again in the future.

Currently, he added, none of the cities in Grant County pay for policing.

John Day and Grant County officials have been at loggerheads since October, when the

John Day City Council voted unanimously to suspend operations of the city's police force and offered to pay the county \$300,000 a year to hire three sheriff's deputies to provide law enforcement services in the city limits.

During a heated session of Grant County Court, John Day City Manager Nick Green laid out a proposal for the county to give the city \$300,000 a year from its road fund to pay for street improvements to serve new housing developments in John Day, on the theory that housing starts in the city would broaden the tax base for the entire county.

Although the Grant County Court has not formally deliberated on the city's proposal, court members have been steadfast in their opposition to the idea of linking county road fund money to police services.

In a recent phone interview, citizen budget committee member Bob Quinton said commingling road fund dollars and police services was a nonstarter for him as well, but he added that it was frustrating the county had not reached an agreement with the city ahead of the budget sessions.

Contract negotiations, Quinton said, are the responsibility of the County Court and not the budget committee.

The budget committee, he said, is there to discuss the financial implications of the agreement. For that reason, he said, if a contract is not signed by the close of the budget sessions, then the budget would not get his vote.

"I can't in good faith," he

said, "vote for that type of a budget, if there's no contract signed."

Quinton added that his role on the committee is to look out for the citizens of the county, and voting for an expenditure with no contract in place would be irresponsible.

Amy Kreger, another citizen member, said Monday that the absence of a law enforcement contract between John Day and the county would make the budget process difficult.

Overall budget outlook

Still, it's worth noting that any law enforcement services agreement represents a relatively small portion of the county's overall budget. All in all, the county's fiscal outlook is considerably brighter now than it was a year ago.

The county faced a looming financial crisis heading into last year's budgeting process. In order to present a balanced budget to the committee, the county's reserve funds had to be reduced substantially to offset a major shortfall from reduced federal funding combined with the cost of major projects, repairs and spending increases in nearly all of the county's funds.

Quinton, Kreger and the committee's third citizen member, Rob Stewart, pulled no punches in budget committee meetings, saying the county might have to cut jobs instead of simply reducing hours and furloughing certain positions as the committee had discussed in earlier sessions.

In the end, however, the

committee scrapped that idea and opted for backfilling budget holes with COVID-19 relief funds and money from prospective legislation in Congress that could potentially increase the county's payment in lieu of taxes funding to upwards of \$900,000.

In addition to reducing the hours of two library employees, Angie Uptmor, the county's senior coordinator, agreed to cut her hours from 40 to 32 per week as she gets ready to retire at the end of September.

Cash on hand at the start of the 2021-22 fiscal year on July 1 was \$1,509,816. This year, according to the county's budget message, with grant funding and carryover from federal COVID-19 relief funding that has not been spent, the county is relatively flush, with \$3,072,697.

Ellison's budget proposal includes \$9.2 million in the general fund, which makes up the bulk of the county's unrestricted spending capacity. She said the general fund fluctuates between \$8 million and \$9 million from year to year.

Asked if she thought the county has enough revenue to sustain the budget going forward, however, Ellison said if the county and John Day cannot come to an agreement on a policing contract, she does not know how the county can fund the additional law enforcement positions in the long term, regardless of the \$700,000 in ARPA funding.

Another challenge the county faces is finding candidates to fill those deputy patrol positions.

GRANT COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES FAIR

TUESDAY | APRIL 12, 2022

AGENDA

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 10:00 - 10:30 | Grant SWCD and Weed Dept. Kyle Sullivan and Matt Wenick |
| 10:30 - 11:00 | Oregon Trail Electric Co-Op Susan Snyder |
| 11:00 - 11:30 | OSU Grazing Plans and Monitoring Chris Schachtschneider |
| 11:30 - 12:00 | ODFW Big Game Ryan Platte |
| 11:00 - 2:00 | Curbside Cravings Food Truck Tri-Tip/Brisket & Sides \$9-\$13. Please RSVP by April 5th |
| 1:00 - 2:00 | Oregon Water Resources Dept. Erik Julsrud |
| 2:00 - 2:30 | OSU Forestry/Fire History John Rizza |
| 2:30 - 3:00 | Firewise - Home Ignition Sources Irene Jerome |

Free ATV/UTV Weed Spray Calibration & Booths Available from 9-3 pm

Location
Pavilion - 411 NW Bridge St. John Day, OR 97845

2022

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