

2004 Candidates' Forum: county - wide candidates

Election day is Nov. 2 and the Heppner Gazette-Times has opened a forum for county candidates. Each candidate was given a questionnaire as a way to inform readers of their backgrounds, positions and ideas for the county.

All the candidates were asked the same questions including: 1) Why would a voter select you over your opponent? 2) If elected, what is the biggest challenge facing you? 3) What do you feel are the important issues facing the county at this time? and 4) What do you see as the future of the county for the next five years?

Three contested county positions are Justice of the Peace, Sheriff and County Clerk.

The Justice of the Peace race is between incumbent Charlotte Gray and Betty Burns.

Charlotte Gray, 64, and her husband David, who live in Heppner, have two grown children. Gray graduated from Shoreline High School in Seattle and attended Legal Institute-National Judicial College- non-attorney course. She has also participated in 15 hours of legal education each year for the last 26 years.



Charlotte Gray

Gray has worked for Morrow County for 26 years and before that for City of The Dalles for five years.

She is a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and served as a clerk for 20 years. She is a member of the Justice of the Peace Association and has served as secretary for 10 years. She is also a member of the National Judges Association.

Question 1) "I have a total of 31 years of knowledge, experience and education as a judge and court clerk. I can do the job efficiently, professionally and with complete ability on Jan. 3, 2005."

Question 2) "The greatest challenge facing me is the same as it always has been as a judge, I must know and keep current with not only the statutory law, but case law as well. Then the next challenge is to always fairly and impartially apply the case law and statutory law to the specific case being heard."

Questions 3 and 4) "Judicial ethics do not allow me to answer these questions."

Betty Burns, 54, came to Morrow County in 1995 and currently lives in Ione. She has two grown children. She graduated from Bell High School and attended California State College at Los Angeles, CA.



Betty Burns

She is currently employed by CSU Transport, Inc., Arlington Terminal in Arlington as an office clerk.

Burns was president of the United Way of Morrow County from 1999

to 2002 and a present board member. She is also a member of Ione Community Agri-Business Organization and Ione School Foundation. She has also served on the Price School District Board in Albany.

She was an owner-operator of a retail business 12 years as owner-operator and with that gained business experience including budgets, collections, employee relations, and communication. She also has computer skills.

Question 1) "I am a people person. I enjoy working with and for people. I have life experience. For over 20 years I have been out in the private sector, gaining knowledge about different aspects of life."

Question 2) "If elected, one of the major challenges would be the transition of taking over the office of the former Justice of the Peace. I am positive that this can be done with professionalism, efficiency and team work, in a timely manner."

Question 3) "As a resident of Morrow County, I feel that there are two major issues- jobs and drugs. Our county is in need of family wage rate jobs. The drug business however, is booming. Both of these issues bring with them more cases to our Justice Court system."

Question 4) "I see our county, made up of small communities, growing. As they grow, more people are getting involved and are taking pride in their communities and schools. They are rallying together and working with law enforcement to rid their communities of drugs and crime. The communities are working together to encourage new business and better paying jobs for our county. I am optimistic about our future because I have dealt with many of our community volunteers and I can see the hours of time and work they devote to make Morrow County a better place to live."

Running in the race for sheriff is current sheriff, Verlin Denton and his opponent Ken Matlack.

Verlin Denton, 58, and his wife Andrea live in Heppner. They have two grown children and came to Morrow County in 1983. Denton graduated from Wheeler and Brookings-Harbor High School.



Verlin Denton

He also attended Blue Mountain Community College and S.W. Oregon Community College.

Before coming to Morrow County, Denton worked for the Gold Beach Police Department and the Curry County Sheriff's Office. In 1983, he began working at Morrow County Sheriff's Office and has been sheriff since 1998. He has held the ranks of patrol sergeant, detective/sergeant and undersheriff.

He is a member and deacon at First Christian Church in Heppner.

Denton is the chairman of the BENT Task Force Board. He served as secretary/treasurer of the Oregon State Sheriff's

Association, he is a member of the Oregon Judicial Department Citizen Review Board; and he was Local Public Safety Coordinator Council Chair. He has served with the Law Enforcement Administration Council; BMCC Criminal Justice Advisory Board; Governor's Executive Review Panel for CSEPP; Morrow County Multidisciplinary Team; and Community Resource Team.

Denton also has executive level certification by DPSST; 2800 hours of public safety training, 102 college credits in middle management, law enforcement management, applied criminology and criminal justice.

Question 1) "I was born and raised in Eastern Oregon and I bring 31 years of professional law enforcement experience to the position. Twenty-one years of the time is with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office and six years as county sheriff."

Question 2) "The continuing drug abuse problem in the county and finding resources to continue fighting the problem."

Question 3) "From a law enforcement point of view, the influx of illegal drugs into the county. This has a major impact on the economic well being of the citizens in the county. Illegal drugs, specifically methamphetamine, can be tied directly to 80 percent of the property and violent crimes in the county. People already struggling to make a living in our economic climate are being victimized by these drugs time and time again, even if they don't use them. We can't solve the problem in Morrow County because it is a nationwide problem, but we can make them go somewhere else."

Question 4) "The north county has a bright future with the industry coming into the Port. The south county needs to continue to capitalize on our natural resources to bring tourist dollars into the area. The new OHV Park is an excellent example of what can be done. We have a real asset in the Blue Mountains and I think we should continue to build on its economic potential with development of sports like snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, etc."

Ken Matlack, 55, and his wife Donna, of Irrigon, have two grown daughters. He graduated from Umatilla High School and graduated from Eastern Oregon State College with a bachelor of science degree in secondary education.

Matlack has been a high school social science



Ken Matlack

teacher and head football and basketball coach. He served with the Oregon State Police for 25 years and retired in 1999. In that position he served as: Trooper, Senior Trooper, Detective - Hermiston; Detective Sergeant-Coos Bay; Patrol Sergeant-Baker City; Assistant Station Commander, The Dalles; and Outpost Commander-Arlington. He was also a background investigator

with the Oregon Department of Corrections-Two Rivers Correctional Institution. He is currently a private investigator with ICU Investigations, LLC, in Irrigon.

He is a member Irrigon Community Baptist Church and a Lieutenant in Oregon State Police Active Reserve. He has also been active with the Irrigon Watermelon Festival.

He has also served with Arlington Planning Commission; Arlington City Council; Arlington School Board; Gilliam County Budget Committee; Irrigon City Council; Morrow County Health District; and Morrow County School Board.

Matlack is a graduate of Drug Enforcement Administration's School on Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Enforcement and a graduate of Northwest University's School of Police Staff and Command.

Question 1) "It is my philosophy that rural policing is about being involved with people and solving problems. It is my philosophy that you can't solve problems unless you are involved with people. I believe you have to be active in all the communities in the county. You do this by regular and frequent contacts with people and businesses. My phone number is public information and my address is listed. I encourage people to call me. You must be approachable and available and I will be both to the people of Morrow County. I will ensure that whoever serves as the Undersheriff will share that same philosophy. Without being involved with people, it is much more difficult to solve problems and make a difference."

Question 2) "The biggest initial challenge will be transitioning the department to a new leadership style. It will take a little time to get to know all the personnel of the department. Getting to know the strengths and the weaknesses of the department is very important."

Question 3) "1) I believe citizens definitely want to see the Sheriff and Undersheriff much more personally present in the communities. 2) Anhydrous ammonia theft is a big problem in south county. I am currently working with Representative Greg Smith on new legislation for enhanced penalties for criminal possession of anhydrous ammonia. I want to expand the use of reserve officers to be available to assist in anhydrous ammonia theft and other response issues in south county. 3) Livability issues that impact the community neighborhoods especially problems with reported drug houses. I support the drug task force but I also see a definite need for increased investigation on reported "drug houses". Deputies will spend more time in this area. 4) Victims want more contact to be informed as to what is being done regarding each phase of their investigations. They want to be kept more informed. 5) Each area of the county wants to see more presence in their area. This will be accomplished as deputies travel to various assignments by spending more time and

driving through neighborhoods as they patrol and travel to assignments. 6) Gang Activity is an important concern. I support a School Resource Office position in the Morrow County School District to impact gang, drug, violence, theft and other issues involving students. In addition, the Sheriff's office will work closely with the alternative school working to impact at risk students.

Question 4) "I expect to see continued economic growth in the county. I believe the recreational site in south county will see more and more use. I believe the race track will be established and business and population growth will continue on the north end. This will put additional pressures on the Sheriff's Office. My rural policing philosophy keeps people informed and interactive with Sheriff's Office. People support who they know and ideas they believe in. I believe my program is the right choice at the right place at the right time."

Running for County Clerk is current deputy clerk Bobbi Childers and Cyde Marie Estes.

Bobbi Childers, 44, and her husband Harvey, have two grown children and live in Ione. Childers is a lifetime resident of Morrow County and graduated from Heppner High School.



Bobbi Childers

Childers currently works for Morrow County as Chief Deputy Clerk. She has also worked for the Morrow County School District-Ione Schools as a media technician/computer coordinator. She was owner/operator of Beecher's Restaurant for four years.

She is a member of the United Church of Christ, Community Women's Club and Willow Creek Valley Service Club. She has served as a 4-H leader and food superintendent. She has also served with the Ione School Site Council and Morrow County Historical Society.

Childers has a membership in IACREOT (International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers); OACC (Oregon Association of County Clerks); Election Center (an international association of voter registration and election officials.)

She has certifications in elections legislation, systems administration, budgeting, facilitating voter participation, management concepts, information management and technology, vote by mail procedures, recording issues/stands and laws, filing officer training, vital records, election ethics, board of property tax assessment, passport acceptance, communications in voter registration and imaging/microfilm conversation. "All this training goes with the office I seek," stated Childers.

Question 1) "I do the job now. I have the essential training and experience in the County Clerk's office that is required with the

transition of leadership. I can and will identify opportunities for continued improvement in this office. I know how to research and work with the old and new records. I will be there as a working clerk for all Morrow County Citizens. I want the public and specifically the voters- both individually and collectively- to have a good experience in the election process. I organize the elections to be fair and to be an accurate reflection of the public's choice. I know the rules and will continue to implement them."

Question 2) "My biggest challenge will be working with federal, state and local lawmakers to comply with ever-changing election and recording laws. I will accept the challenge to get federal dollars that Morrow County will need for mandated changes caused by HAVA (Help America Vote Act). HAVA requires all states to upgrade voting equipment, make voting more accessible, provide better voter and election official education, and reduce fraud through the implementation of a central voter registration system developed and managed by each state's Chief Election Official. For Oregon that is the Secretary of State. Oregon will be creating a single, centralized, interactive, and official database system with all the names of Oregon's registered voters."

Question 3) "Morrow County has lost and gained a number of resources. I believe that County officials need to keep working on a plan to keep current businesses operating, and develop incentives for new industry. We need to keep people employed and living in this county. We need to listen to what people need and want and try to achieve it. We need to use every tax dollar intelligently to better serve the people."

Question 4) "I see the county growing. I know that we're not as big as other counties in population, but if you take a long hard look at all the communities in Morrow County you see change and growth. With this knowledge I am prepared to meet all the needs of Morrow County citizens. I will continue to seek all funds available through the HAVA Plan, to bring Morrow County to the playing field of all other counties."

Cyde Estes, 48, was born and raised in Heppner and has two adult sons. She and her husband Rusty live in Heppner.



Cyde Estes

She graduated from Heppner High School and attended Blue Mountain Community College. She also has professional appraisal, management and supervisory training exceeding 700 hours

Estes is a board member and chairman for the Morrow County Unified Recreation District for 8 years, (elected office); Pioneer Memorial Hospice Volunteer Coordinator and Trainer; and Vestry Board

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