

Former councilor challenges incumbent in mayoral race

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla's candidates for mayor are both familiar faces at city hall.

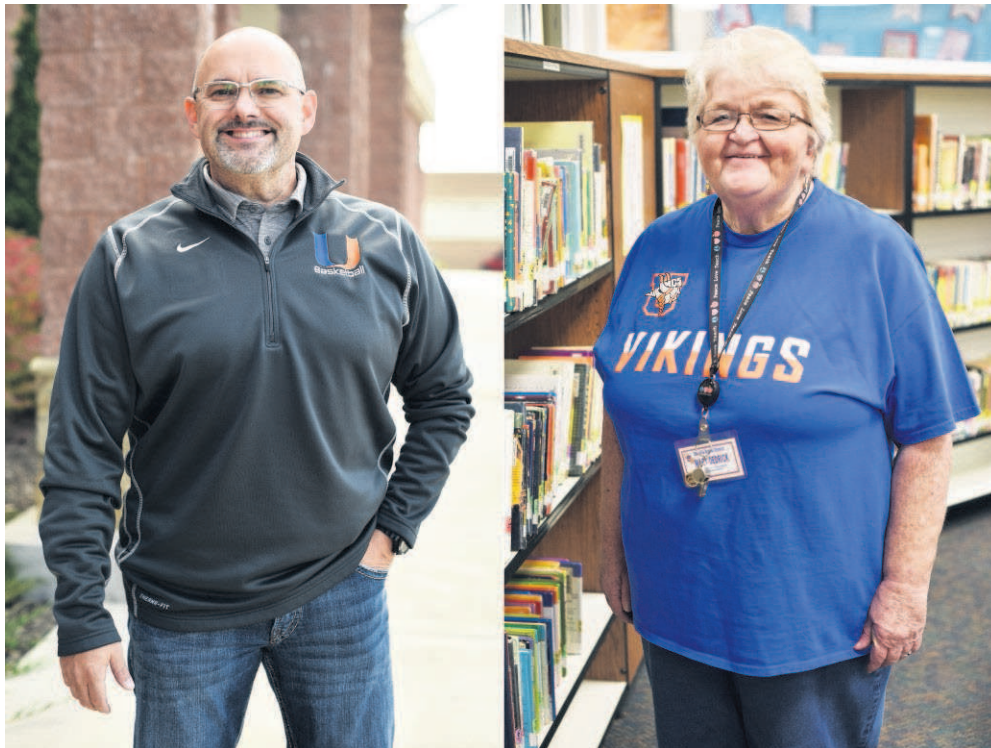
Daren Dufloth is the incumbent, running to keep the seat he was appointed to after David Trott resigned as mayor in March 2017. Mary Dedrick has been on the city council twice, for a total of about 13 years.

For Dufloth, running for mayor is about keeping momentum in the city through a period of growth and transition. He just helped hire a new city manager, David Stockdale, who started Oct. 15. Next on the city council's list is hiring a new public works director. The city is undergoing engineering studies and construction projects as it seeks to move its utilities from a mostly residential system to one that supports data centers and other industrial users. A group of Portland State University graduate students put together a comprehensive plan for Umatilla's downtown that the city is starting to implement, and a parks master plan has already prompted renovation of a city park in McNary Heights.

Dufloth would like to help see those things through.

"We've started a pretty big transition with the city," he said.

Dufloth was also elected to the Oregon Mayors Association Board of Directors last week during the League of Oregon Cities' annual



Umatilla Mayor Daren Dufloth and challenger Mary Dedrick will face off in November.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

conference in Eugene. He said that opportunity will help his efforts to bring Umatilla onto a more prominent stage.

"The big piece for me is for Umatilla to have a bigger voice, to have a seat at the table," he said.

He said he has done a lot of work building stronger partnerships with other cities, the county and various organizations and companies — something he would like to build on if re-elected.

If Dedrick beats Dufloth for mayor in November, she said one of her biggest focuses would be looking at what the city can do to increase its affordable

housing. She has worked for Umatilla School District for 38 years, but this year became a district liaison for homeless families, which inspired her to run for office.

"It was and is a big eye-opener," she said. "People can't afford the rent some people are charging, and there isn't anything. It's all full."

Dedrick also said since she resigned from the city council in April 2017 community members still come to her to discuss city issues, and some of them asked her to consider running for mayor.

When Dedrick resigned, city hall was a divided

place. Then-Mayor Trott had pushed the council to investigate what he felt was dishonesty on then-city manager Russ Pel-leberg's part and the council had taken sides on the issue, ultimately taking no action. Trott resigned in protest, and Dedrick resigned the next month, stating in a letter that "For personal reasons, I feel that it is best for my well-being not (to) be involved with the city council anymore."

When asked about her resignation Wednesday, Dedrick said at the time she had gotten tired of hearing "that's not the way I want it" from other councilors.

"It's not about what they want, it's what's best for the whole community," she said.

Dedrick said she's ready to take another crack at it, and if elected she will help rebuild trust in the city by voting for what is best for the community, regardless of her personal preferences or what will help a small group of people.

Dufloth also spoke of rebuilding trust in the city after some tumultuous years.

He said he has been focused on absolute transparency at city hall, which is why the city held a forum for the community to meet and question the three finalists for city manager the week before the council made a decision. He hopes to encourage city leaders to be more approachable, and to encourage citizens to get involved not only with city-sponsored events but with new things the chamber of commerce and museum are doing as well.

"I'm trying to get people involved," he said.

Dedrick also wants to get people involved, by trying to harness public influence to help bring in new businesses. She said she would love to see a WinCo Foods, Costco or Fred Meyer store come to Umatilla and she thinks it would be more likely to happen if residents are writing the companies to request it.

She also supports the grassroots effort by citizens to work toward getting the Army Corps of Engineers

to return some of Umatilla's riverfront land to the city. She is particularly interested in seeing the old town site along the Columbia River revitalized and opened to the public in partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

"There is so much potential," she said.

Dufloth is also interested in opening up more recreational spaces, from the old town site to a trail the city hopes to build along the Umatilla River to Hermiston.

Both city council candidates have deep roots in Umatilla. Dedrick has lived there for more than 40 years, and has spent 38 of them working for Umatilla School District. She currently works at McNary Heights Elementary School as a volunteer coordinator and homeless liaison. Dedrick served on the city council for an eight-year stint and later came back for five more.

Dufloth has worked for the Department of Corrections for 18 years and has been a small business owner in the community for 21. He owns the Riverside Sports Bar & Lounge, which has drawn criticism from some residents for including a lounge with exotic dancers. Dufloth has also been active in Umatilla's youth sports community, serving in coaching positions in Little League and Umatilla High School and as a past president of the Umatilla Booster Club.

Three positions open on Umatilla City Council

There are three Umatilla city council positions up for election this November.

One incumbent is seeking re-election, and is being challenged for his position. Mark Keith, who currently occupies position #1, will face Corinne Funderbunk for the first spot on the council. The other two

spots are uncontested, and neither incumbent is seeking re-election. For position #3, longtime councilor Mel Ray will step down at the end of the term, and Leslie R. Smith is running unopposed. Josy Chavez is running unopposed for position #5. Selene Torres-Medrano currently

occupies position #5, but is not running again.

The Umatilla Chamber of Commerce will hold a forum for all council and mayoral candidates on Thursday, Oct. 18 at 5 p.m. The public is invited to the forum, which will be at the chamber office, 100 Cline Ave., Umatilla.

RACE

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county management and transitioning the county's Assessment and Taxation Department into the digital age, a move he claimed doubled employee efficiency.

As he took credit for the technological progress, he never mentioned the name of the department, nor the involvement of the county's computer and internet technology personnel. He also skipped the fact the change is ongoing. Assessment and Taxation staff is using digital and paper this year. The department also did not get key software for the transition until February, a couple of months after Pullen quit his job.

Economic development and housing came up a few times. Murdock said the county helps communities in several ways, such as the recent economic development grants to Stanfield or providing technology services to Ukiah. The county also is contributing about \$2 million to help Hermiston with the major housing development on the town's north end.

Pullen said the county should be "shepherding" communities — working with and providing them resources and support they might lack. He said the board of commissioners made a mistake in recent years by taking on economic development itself, only to realize the need to hire someone for the job.

When the position became vacant about four years ago, Commissioner Bill Elfering and then-planning director Tamra Mabbott split much of the economic development role, which led to the creation of a grant process for proj-

ects with tangible benefits, such as job creation. Mabbott left last year, and the county board in February brought on a new economic development and tourism coordinator.

Pullen also stressed the link between water and economic growth, saying Hermiston's construction of a 1-million-gallon water tank isn't enough.

"If we can find a way to recharge the basalt aquifer that's more of a long-term fix than building a water tank," Pullen said.

They also differed on what the state should do to help the county address mental health needs.

Murdock said he is part of the group that meets each week to find a way to fund a \$1.1 million expansion at the county jail to accommodate offenders with mental health problems. He said the group has identified possible matching funds for the project. He reiterated the notion that the state should create a mental health program akin to the Community Justice Reinvestment Act, which allocates funds to the local level to help keep offenders out of prison.

Pullen said getting state money would be an uphill battle. Oregon State Police is building its new crime lab in town, he said, and the state may not want to put more money into to another law enforcement project in the county. He advocated for a mental health crisis center that could distribute medication, but he said that would be expensive.

They found the most common ground on a question about what changes they would like to see to the county charter. The county formed a committee this year to review the charter, and it will present find-

ings in 2019. Pullen said holding primary and general election for the board of commissioners is confusing, and with a county this size one election would suffice.

Murdock said as commissioner he should not comment on the committee's work, but would support its recommendations. However, he questioned why a commissioner candidate who wins outright in the May primary — as John Shafer did this year — should have to wait seven months to take office.

Murdock said the county is complex, and he can implement in his second term all he learned in his first. He also said he can provide stability to the board with Shafer replacing Commissioner Larry Givens in January and Commissioner Bill Elfering not seeking another term in two years. Of note, Givens has a write-in campaign to keep his job.

Pullen said his decade as a county manager gives him the experience to handle the job from day one, while the public has been paying for Murdock's four years of training.

Murdock ignored the dart and said he has been responsible for the management of the county on a daily basis. His predecessor was Bill Hansell of Athena, now state senator, who held the position for 32 years. Murdock, 76, said he does not intend to stay that long, but he would like a second term.

At one point he claimed to have served as chair of the county board for three years, but Givens held that role in 2017.

Ballots for the election will be mailed out Oct. 17 and must be returned by Nov. 6.

BALLOT

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pleted to improve livability, including the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, the downtown festival street and new trails around town. She said the city is working on a management plan for EOTEC now and will be looking next week at the results of a public survey about the venue. She said she would like to see the old Carnegie library on Gladys Avenue turned into a museum, and supports the city's goal of coming up with the funding to build and manage a recreation center with indoor pool.

She also touted the city's financial stability and praised staff for working hard and "watching the bottom dollar."

"Hermiston is in a good financial position and will remain that way," she said.

Gomolski criticized some of the projects Davis listed, stating that the city should have had a plan in place for EOTEC a long time ago. He said the festival street was a "showboat" and the \$1.5 million could



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Challenger Mark Gomolski answers a question during the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce candidate forum as incumbent City Councilor Lori Davis looks on Oct. 10 at BMCC in Hermiston.

have been better spent on updates to Main Street.

He said the city needs to do more to reach out to groups such as the Hispanic community and the disabled, and to repair its relationship with the chamber of commerce.

Hermiston's biggest challenge, he said, was a lack of workforce in fields like electrical and plumbing work, which slows down development of housing and other projects. Gomolski is currently a member of the Herm-

iston School Board, and said the city needed to do what it could to encourage more students to go into the trades and to help the school district build new schools or expand them.

"I would like to see the schools better helped with bond issues," he said.

He has lived in Hermiston for the past five years, and said he loves the city and believes he will provide leadership beyond showing up at meetings to vote on what the city manager wants.

Sen. Ron Wyden will hold a town hall in Hermiston Tuesday.

He plans to hold five town halls at schools in central and Eastern Oregon counties the week of Oct. 22-24, including Tuesday's at **Hermiston High School**, 600 S. First St., at 9:20 a.m.

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Fun Fashions Boutique is hosting a Fall Fashion Show.

The free event is Sunday at 2 p.m. at 165 W. Coe

Ave., Stanfield. Owned and operated by Kathy Baker, the boutique features trendy fashions for women and teens. Refreshments will be served and those who shop will receive a 10 percent discount. For more information, search Facebook or call 541-571-6388.

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Registration for the **Hermiston Youth Basketball Association** is open online at www.hermiston-basketballclub.org,

The program is for boys for boys and girls in grades 3-6. Deadline for registration is Oct. 31. For more information, contact **Lacey Cleveland** at (406) 490-8950 or hyba.lacey@gmail.com.

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The **city of Echo** recently expressed appreciation for generous donations received from several of its citizens.

Those giving to the Echo Public Library included **Jean Johnson** (108 books

and 10 DVDs) and **Frankie Sewell** (four books).

Also, **Pat & Merle Gehrke** gave \$50 each to **Echo Beautification** and **Echo Historical Projects**. And, money was donated to Echo Public Art, including \$50 each in memory of **Penny Spike Shepherd**, **Carol Correa**, **Bea & George Luciani**, **Gene Berry** and **Charlets Berry**; and \$75 in memory of **Velma & Marv Laughlin**, and **Murl & Mildred Berry**.

BTW

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fighting with the insurance company. They have finally reached a settlement, he said, but not one that would pay to rebuild everything the club had before, up to current building codes. And once the club opened it would take months of hard work to try and re-attract customers that have been "absorbed into the market" elsewhere.

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