

Marina volunteers boast of its value

Coming improvements include new docks, according to marina board members

BY ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The Irrigon Marina Park is one of the area's special places, according to locals and out-of-towners alike. Located on the Columbia River, it showcases the area's beauty and provides recreation.

"I love the marina," Neila Coffman, Irrigon Community Park & Recreation District secretary/treasurer, said.

In recent weeks, people have been able to enjoy the park, at 430 Eighth St. N.E., Irrigon. Events, such as the Irrigon Watermelon Festival and Music in the Park, have brought visitors to realize what this area's residents already know; the Irrigon Marina is a treasure.

For Coffman, though, the value of the marina is not a passing realization. It is part of her regular life. She sought employment there after years of enjoyment.

"I've lived in Irrigon my whole life, and my family has used the marina frequently," she said.

Coffman, a boater, has a pontoon. She and her family, including her grandchildren, often take it to the marina.

"We really enjoy the river," she said. "We kayak. We fish. My personal experience is that we use it, and we love our marina. We love our river, and we love our city."

Coffman said that she is glad to see that many other people are likewise relishing time spent at the marina. And she called the area near the marina a "desired" spot, particularly for walleye fishing.

"It's one of the hottest walleye areas in the entire Columbia Basin," she said.

Because of the success fishermen find there, the marina has



Boats dock July 25, 2022, at Irrigon Marina Park, Irrigon.

Yasser Marte/Hermiston Herald

become a popular site for fishing tournaments, she said.

Also, she said, many local fishing enthusiasts pay to moor their boats at the marina. The demand for mooring is so great, Coffman said, the marina soon will have to

add more lots.

"We're currently looking to upgrade the marina," she said.

The addition of new docks, with more space for mooring, is one of the expected upgrades, she added. There should be more

renovations, she stated, but she wasn't ready to reveal all of what is planned.

A study is underway on the docks, and Coffman said she will have details on the improvements, including dates



Yasser Marte/Hermiston Herald

A bench view of the Columbia River on July 25, 2022, underneath the shade of a birch tree at Irrigon Marina Park, Irrigon.



Yasser Marte/Hermiston Herald

A pelican floats July 25, 2022, down the Columbia River at Irrigon Marina Park, Irrigon.

for renovations, soon.

She said she enjoys volunteering at the marina, and she is not alone in expressing her love for it.

Burrel Cooley, Irrigon Community Park & Recreation District board chairman, said he also likes working at the marina. "It's where I spend about half

my time working down there," he said.

In addition to working on the board, he volunteers at the marina, he said. As such, he assists with maintenance there.

He added he used to be a boater. Some time ago, he enjoyed fishing at the marina, he added. Nowadays, however, he doesn't go out on the river. Still, he said, he likes to be close to the water to work, not to fish.

"It's peaceful," he said of his recent experiences. "It's just a nice place to go."

He recommended volunteering at the marina, and he said people can email the district at irrigonparkdistrict@gmail.com for details.

Police department saga continues with trip to Washington County

BY ANTONIO ARREDONDO
Hermiston Herald

The city of Irrigon's policing situation has been up in the air for months — and one determined resident is focused on changing that.

The Irrigon City Council on March 15 voted to shift to a one-person police department rather than renew their contract with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office. Initially scheduled for 2022, the plan was pushed back to July 1, 2023, and switched to a two-man station. This change came after years of feuding between the city and sheriff's office.

City Councilor Darren Strong said the proposed station is a good way for the city to gain police officers in the area, quicken response time and crack down on local code enforcement.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist, one of the driving forces behind the idea, presented a memo to the council at the

March meeting detailing needs for the city.

"This may be an opportunity for Irrigon as we continue to grow and become more resilient," Palmquist told council members in the memo. Shortly after, Irrigon City Council unanimously voted not to renew its contract.

Gary David, a former police chief in Milton-Freewater who now resides just outside of the Irrigon city limits, is one of the outspoken critics of the plan, calling for more cooperation between the city and the county.

"It seems like they have the cart before the horse," David said. "They want to scale back service and have one or two men care for a city."

The former police chief said he is one of many Irrigon citizens against this change. He claimed the council isn't listening to the wants of citizens and there are other ways to solve the problem.

This all came to a head in June, when David led a group west to Washington County to visit the community of North Plains to examine their sheriff-city relationship.

Strong, Irrigon Mayor Margaret Anderson and Morrow County Undersheriff John Bowles were among the "stakeholders" — or other town members — on the trip west of Portland.

David was impressed by the relationship between the small community of just more than 3,000 people and law enforcement in the area.

"It's a unique partnership," David said. "There's no agenda, it's just what's best for the community no matter the direction."

In the North Plains system, the county sheriff collaborates extensively with the city. While the city has a police chief and department, that department consists entirely of county law enforcement. Many county officers wear different hats

in the police department to reach out to the community.

It's a system David said he sees carrying over to Irrigon, and he wanted both town leaders and community members to come and learn about the system. He said many of the stakeholders on the trip reacted positively to the idea. With a little more than 10 months until the contract is up for renewal again, David said he wants to get the community talking about the department.

Not every member on the trip saw the system carrying over, though. Councilor Strong said while the trip and the North Plains model were impressive, he wasn't sure how feasible the plan was and how it would translate to Irrigon.

"There's been some bad blood and disputes between the sheriff's department and the city," he said. "In order to even think about doing what Washington County is doing, we need

to be in a better place."

As of now, the councilor said the city is moving forward with the plan to have a two-man department in 2022. Still, he said the trip to Washington County was "very informative."

For David, there's still hope for the sheriff and city to mend their relationship. Above all else, he said he wants the needs of the Irrigon citizens to be met. An online petition calling for the city to keep its contract has recorded 162 signatures, which David said is proof enough for the city to look deeper into the issue.

"Why don't we just work together?" David said. "Why don't we just find out what our issues are and develop relationships together in the law enforcement community and inspire confidence in the citizens?"

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office did not respond to requests for comments by press time.

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