

# Sheriff obtains stimulus funds

More than \$450,000 in Recovery Act funding is headed to the Columbia County Sheriff's Office to provide mental health services to inmates for the first time.

Sheriff Jeff Dickerson explained that the grant is designed to provide needed mental health professional services for 20 hours per week in the jail, and to add additional security for mental health patients receiving services while incarcerated in the jail. The grant is scheduled to run for two years beginning October 1.

"A sizable amount of the people brought in to our jail have at least some degree of need for mental health services," Dickerson said. "I made the case to the Justice Department that even a modest amount of mental health service could make a huge difference over what we've had — something is better than nothing. Thankfully, help will be on its way, soon."

The grant calls for a competitive process to identify a correctional mental health provider to provide the equivalent of a half-time, professional mental health position in the jail. The grant will also fund two extra correctional deputies to focus on mental health security issues.

The sheriff's office learned last month that the grant had been approved, but the effort also required the consent of the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, which agreed last week to accept the grant award. County Chair Rita Bernhard welcomed the grant award, saying it was an opportunity for the county to provide services in the jail that have been needed for a very long time.

Now the process begins to identify the mental health services provider and to get two new corrections deputies on board. Sheriff Dickerson said that, although the grant period has already begun, the competitive process required by the grant, and the hiring and training process at the sheriff's office means that it will be after the first of the year before the program becomes fully operational.

"We will work as hard as we can to get this up and running as quickly as possible," Dickerson said.

## Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer, General Manager,  
West Oregon Electric Cooperative



### Theft Costs All of Us

We recently discovered one of our members had been stealing power from us. With the economy in such a negative state, it may be tempting for others to try the same thing. There are a lot of reasons for this being a very bad idea, but I will address just a few of them in this article.

The first is from a safety standpoint. Unless you know what you are doing it is extremely dangerous and life threatening to tamper with electricity. It is certainly not worth losing someone's life or limb. The voltage involved with a meter or line is enough to seriously harm or kill a person, so we strongly warn everyone to refrain from tampering with any part of our electrical system or equipment.

The second is that all of the members of the Co-op will pay for the stolen power as West Oregon will still be billed for the power used by the member. This bill for power used must then be paid by the rest of the Co-ops members. It would behoove any member who knows of someone else on our system who is stealing power from us to report them, since it is adding to all of our bills to pay for stolen power.

Third is the simple fact that at some point we will find out about the power theft and we will make every effort to recover the cost of the stolen power and any other costs we incur. It is a Class C Felony to steal power from a utility and we will turn it over to the authorities for prosecution. These steps will help keep the rest of the members from paying for any theft costs.

We fully realize that economic times are making it very difficult on our membership. We are willing to make every reasonable effort to work with our members on paying their bills. We can make payment arrangements in certain situations; we assist with identifying and working with agencies that have energy assistance pro-

grams to help pay bills; we have increased our donations to local energy assistance programs, and we help identify ways to cut down on the amount of usage by our members through our energy efficiency program. We give away showerheads and gave away CFL lights to help our members save on their lighting and water heater costs.

While we do want to assist and work with our members every way that we possibly can, there are limitations as we are responsible to all of our members in making sure everyone pays their fair share, pays for the power they use, and keep costs down as much as possible in doing so. It costs all of us when people steal or walk away without paying their bills. We still have to pay for the power used either way.

It costs us thousands of dollars every month to send our Serviceman out to disconnect and reconnect members. We have fees established to try and recover as much of those costs as we can, but it doesn't cover it all. The fees we charge can greatly be reduced and/or eliminated if our members contact us and make payment arrangements before they are disconnected. So please contact us before the day of disconnect so that we both can avoid additional expenses and frustrations.



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