

# NEWS from BENTON COUNTY

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Benton County, Oregon

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## Commissioner Modrell to finish career as Chair

The Benton County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously at its first regularly scheduled meeting of 2014 – on Jan. 7 – to name Commissioner Linda Modrell as the Board Chair and Commissioner Jay Dixon as Vice Chair.

Modrell recently announced that she will not seek a fifth term as commissioner and plans to retire at the conclusion of the current term. Her last year will be serving as chair, a position where she will set the agenda for Board of Commissioners meetings and preside over those meetings, as well as take on other additional duties.

Modrell and Dixon – who have served

on the Board since 1999 and 2001, respectively – took their posts effective immediately for 2014. Commissioner Annabelle Jaramillo – who has served on

the Board since 2001 – held the gavel as Board Chair for the 2013 calendar year.

The custom of the Board of Commis-



Linda Modrell,  
Board Chair



Jay Dixon,  
Vice Chair



Annabelle Jaramillo,  
Commissioner

sioners is to rotate the chair position every year. This gives each commissioner the opportunity to serve in that capacity once ev-

ery three years.

In the coming year Benton County will continue seeking opportunities to im-

prove efficiency and share services.

“The coming year will be challenging as Benton County and other counties around the state continue to face a changing relationship with state government and how the changes will impact the shared services that we all deliver on behalf of the state,” Modrell said. “We are fortunate to have a talented group of department directors as we deal with multiple system changes. It also is important to note that my colleagues and other county elected leadership are seasoned and dedicated to making Benton County a better place to live.”

## Benton County responds to multiple weather events

The weather in Benton County has been uncharacteristically snowy and icy this winter and, though sometimes inclement weather caused office closures, county crews were out working around the clock to keep the community safe.

December and early February brought substantial amounts of snow and ice. In both cases, Benton County received some of the heaviest snowfall in the state, disrupting people’s daily lives. Roads were rendered slick and difficult to navigate. The county, city of Corvallis, Oregon State University and other local and state government agencies were forced to close.

While administrative services were closed, Benton County Public Works road crews worked around the clock plowing and sanding county-maintained roads, utilizing a snow and ice plan. The plan was created in 2004, but still is effective today in prioritizing which roads get first attention based on traffic levels, emergency response needs and connections to primary roads. That snow and ice plan is available online at [http://www.co.benton.or.us/pw/documents/snow\\_04.pdf](http://www.co.benton.or.us/pw/documents/snow_04.pdf).

With a total staff of 12, Benton

County crews worked around the clock to clear county roads. Chris Baillie, Steve Blanton, Don Boyd, Gary Champion, BJ Haley, Pete Neuman, Erik Remington and Lonnie Wheeler worked the day shift and Mark Nasby, Fred Taylor, Kirk Morgan and Alan Neer made up the night crew. Crews also assisted city of Corvallis staff in clearing streets. On at least three different occasions, county plows passed ambulances to clear the path for them to respond to emergencies.

Benton County Sheriff’s Office deputies braved the weather to continue patrolling and assisting with emergency services needs around the clock. Snow slowed response for all agencies in some cases, but they worked diligently to keep the community safe.

During the December winter weather event, as well as the one in February, Benton County Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue volunteers were on hand to provide emergency transport for individuals who hold critical positions at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center in Corvallis as well as patients with critical needs who otherwise could not make the trip up the hill to the hospital. In December, those included approximately

four trips for patients to get dialysis treatment and about eight trips for nurses to get to work.

Over the five days of the February snow event, volunteer drivers conducted 46 trips, covering 1,050 miles throughout all residential parts of Benton County. They transported nurses, 911 dispatchers, dialysis patients, mental health professionals and others to work or to access critical health services.

“I am grateful that our Search and Rescue volunteers keep themselves and their families prepared, and then work tirelessly to assist others in the community,” Sheriff Scott Jackson said. “Our deputies were slammed with busier-than-usual calls for service and responding to critical incidents, so our volunteers filled a valuable need by assisting medical providers in getting to work and patients with accessing vital health care services.”

In these situations, the county urges everyone to stay home and not drive



unless it is absolutely necessary. When it is necessary to drive, people are urged to practice extreme caution by driving at reduced speeds, allowing plenty of room for stopping and taking other precautions. The December event featured dry snow, which packed into a sheet of ice quickly and made plowing difficult. The February storm brought snow that was a little damper and did not pack down into ice as quickly.

During both snow and ice events, Benton County posted information on its website and social media pages on Facebook and Twitter about office hours, closures and emergency information.

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# Preventive efforts keep youth out of trouble

A little bit of prevention now goes a long way toward preventing problem behaviors among youth as they grow into adults.

In collaborative effort with several other Benton County agencies, the Juvenile Department is expanding its preventive efforts in local high schools.

Last year the department piloted a program at Philomath High School known as Boys' Council (or just The Council). The Council is an evidence-based program aimed at promoting boys' natural strengths and increasing their options about being male in today's world. The Council challenges myths about being a "real boy" or "real man." It engages adolescent males in activities, dialogue and self-expression to question

stereotypical concepts and increase their emotional, social and cultural literacy by promoting valuable relationships with peers and adult facilitators.

The group at Philomath High School was such a success that the program is being expanded and will be offered this year at College Hill, Corvallis and Crescent Valley high schools. A group already has started at College Hill High School. Corvallis High School and Crescent Valley High School will have groups starting this month.

Facilitators for those groups are Andy Ablitt, Mark Harryman, Issac Powell, Jason Lewis, Luis Maciel and Scott Starha from the Juvenile Department; Kevin Shultz from Jackson Street Youth Shelter; and Chris Clark from the Boys and Girls

Club of Corvallis. Training for some of the facilitators was provided by Strengthening Rural Families and Clackamas County.

In addition, Strengthening Rural Families has been helpful in providing some of the logistics, including snacks for the groups, and serving as an ongoing resource.

The youths involved in the group are selected by the Juvenile Department and the schools. Most are not Juvenile Department clients. Although some students express resistance to the group initially, almost all are fully invested by the end of the group. Many students receive school credit for their attendance.

In addition to The Council, the Juvenile Department is piloting an effort where department staff hold regular

office hours at two of the local schools. Andy Ablitt is available at College Hill on Wednesdays and Mark Harryman is present at Crescent Valley on Thursdays. Along with seeing Juvenile Department clients, they are available for anyone to stop in and talk. It is anticipated that this will spread to other high schools.

Department staff members continue to meet on a regularly scheduled basis at the high schools and middle schools. These meetings allow an exchange of information regarding school attendance, academic performance and behavioral concerns for those youths currently under the supervision of the Juvenile Department.

## County employee garners statewide public health award

Chris Gray didn't get into public service for the accolades and recognition. He did it to make a difference. For more than 10 years he has worked for Benton County as its HIV and Hepatitis Outreach Specialist.

"I coordinate the needle exchange program and provide HIV and Hepatitis C testing for high-risk populations," he described. "I work with people who are at risk of Hepatitis C and HIV in Benton County."

Gray's quiet and diligent work garnered attention around the state, as he recently earned the Ann Thomas Hepatitis Leadership Award. The award, presented annually by the Oregon City-based Caring Ambassadors Program, is bestowed upon individuals who provide outstanding service to the hepatitis community.

It was announced that Gray received the award in December at the Caring Ambassadors Conference on Hepatitis in Portland. He was not present at the conference, and Gray wasn't notified he would be winning the award.

"It was a surprise to me," Gray said. "The state hepatitis prevention coordinator from Oregon Health Authority called me to let me know that the award was given."

The Caring Ambassadors Program mission is to help improve the lives of those affected by long-term diseases through advocacy, information and support. It believes that people with long-term disease are empowered to make personally appropriate choices to optimize their overall wellness every day. Its values reflect that:



- Information empowers people;
- Patient engagement is necessary for optimum wellness;
- Health is holistic;
- Patient-centered care is optimal care;
- Evidence-based information is necessary for good decision making; and
- Collaboration and integration benefits all patients.

Gray indicated that he is honored to receive the award, but gave much of the credit to the Benton County Health Department for implementing and supporting programs that allow his work to occur.

"Money is running out from the state, and the county chose to keep this program funded, so that's really unique in itself," Gray said. "I was just the person doing the work, but I think the county has always been at the forefront of providing support for those at risk of contracting Hepatitis C."

## Sheriff's Office and partners plan Drug Take Back Event

The Benton County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with the Philomath Police Department and the Benton County Fairgrounds, will sponsor a Drug Take Back Event on Saturday, April 26.

This free, drive-through event will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the fairgrounds. Expired prescription medications, medicine from deceased family members, pet medications and unknown tablets and capsules are all acceptable.

Intra-venous solutions, injectibles such as EpiPens and syringes or medical waste will not be accepted. Participants should not bring those items, as they will be turned away. This event is for household use only, and materials from businesses such as doctor's offices,

nursing homes or other health clinics will not be accepted.

As part of the Drug Enforcement Administration's National Take Back Initiative, this event helps keep our community safe. It ensures that unwanted medications are kept away from kids or others who may misuse them and it disposes of these medications in a way that keeps them out of our water supply.



### News from Benton County

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Board of Commissioners	766-6800	Human Resources	766-6081
Chief Operating Officer	766-6800	Community Health Centers	766-6835
Public Information Officer	766-6082	Juvenile Department	766-6810
Assessment Department	766-6855	Natural Areas and Parks	766-6871
Development Department	766-6819	OSU Extension Service	766-6750
District Attorney	766-6815	Public Works	766-6821
Elections	766-6756	County Clerk/Records	766-6831
Fairgrounds	766-6521	Sheriff's Office	766-6858
Health Department	766-6835	Tax Collection	766-6808

# County recognized for employee health initiative

Benton County was recognized by PacificSource Health Plans for its focus on workplace wellness initiatives at the Civil War men's basketball game in January at Gill Coliseum on the Oregon State University campus.

At halftime of the game, Benny Beaver presented a signed game ball to Johanna Peerenboom, representing the Benton County Wellness Program. PacificSource provides Benton County's traditional health insurance plans for employees.

"Employee wellness is an important priority at PacificSource, and we wanted to recognize Benton County's Wellness Program for its continued commitment to improving the health of employees," Director of PacificSource Healthy Life Alexa Shook said. "We are excited to be able to present Benton County with the game ball at the Civil War men's



basketball game in Corvallis."

Recognizing that a healthy workforce equates to lower health insurance benefit costs and a more productive workplace, a few years ago Benton County implemented an employee wellness program designed

to encourage healthy lifestyles and habits. The program includes a rewards platform incentive for those who earn points for walking, bicycling, participating in sports activities and other healthy activities. Employees can earn "Wellness Bucks"

## Small staff makes huge difference for local families

A small but mighty team of Health Department employees is responsible for Benton County's status as one of the counties with the state's best Women, Infants and Children Program enrollment rates.

WIC is a federally funded program designed to promote healthy child development through good nutrition. It follows the clients from pregnancy through birth and the critical formative years of the child's life. Nutritional assistance is available for pregnant women, infants and children up to 5 years of age. The WIC program focuses on nutritional education and includes vouchers for parents to purchase healthy and nutritious foods that promote healthy child development.

Benton County is supportive of the WIC program, and each county has an

anticipated caseload it is expected to help in terms of identifying those eligible for the program and educating them. The anticipated caseload is based on county size and Oregon Health Plan enrollment stats for the county. All WIC programs strive to serve 100 percent of their anticipated caseload, but only seven of Oregon's 36 counties are meeting their targets. Nationally, WIC has seen similar drops in caseload. Benton County, on the other hand, typically trends at 103 to 106 percent of anticipated caseload.

That means that there are many young families who are benefiting from nutritional assistance and education that can prevent developmental and health

problems now and in the future.

"The economy's not getting any better and the WIC program provides nutritional support for low-income families," Benton County WIC Coordinator Kelly Volkmann said. "We feel that one of the reasons we've had such success with maintaining our caseload is that we serve OSU students. Many students are at or below poverty level and student families struggle to make ends meet."

The team responsible for this work includes WIC Certifiers Maryam Hourmanesh-Jones and Mercedes Magana; Registered Dietician and WIC Certifier Deborah Pyke; and WIC Receptionist Annie Boatner-Brambila.

In a typical day they work with current

and potential WIC clients to determine eligibility for the program. They also provide nutritional and breastfeeding education and support, monitor growth changes for infants and children in the program and distribute food and nutrition packages, based on status. Having a dedicated staff with well-established relationships with existing clients and the community makes a huge difference when it comes to making families aware of services available to them and helping them make the choice to develop nutritious eating habits while children are young.

"WIC is a very good source of nutrition for moms, infants and children," Volkmann said. "We are fortunate to have four very compassionate women whose skills and dedication to their participants makes a real difference."

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## Dreaming of summer? Schedule your event at a county park

Even though the weather is definitely wintery right now, it's not too early to plan for summertime fun. The Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department has begun accepting reservations for the 2014 picnic season.

Several county parks' group picnic areas can be reserved for the season - which lasts from May through October - including Bellfountain, North Albany, Adair A, Adair B and Fort Hoskins Historic Park picnic shelters. All parks are open from dawn to dusk. Park fees for each of those individual group picnic

areas are \$50 per day on Mondays through Thursdays and \$90 per day on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, as well as holidays.

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department picnic areas each have unique features, with some including electric outlets, food preparation and serving areas, barbecues, sports fields and facilities, playgrounds and horseshoe pits. Equipment bags containing sports equipment also are available to use at the parks for a \$15 fee. Special use permits can be obtained for overnight use, sound

systems, animals, children's rides and other structures. The base processing fee for special use permits is \$50, with an additional fee for overnight use.

Year-round facility reservations are available at Beazell Forest Education Center, located at Beazell Memorial Forest in Kings Valley. The center includes a large open assembly room, small indoor classroom and catering set-up room complete with a commercial refrigerator, work counters and storage shelves.

For more information or to make reservations, those interested can contact the Benton County Natural Areas and

Parks Department, 360 SW Avery Ave., in Corvallis by calling 541-766-6871. Voicemail messages are accepted and reservations are made in the order in which they are received.

Additional information and photographs also can be located online at the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks website at <http://www.co.benton.or.us/parks>.



# Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities promotes healthy living

In 2009, people living in South Corvallis often rode a bus at least 10 miles to reach the nearest discount grocery store, in North Corvallis.

Residents in the surrounding rural areas traveled much farther. Even the twice-weekly Corvallis Farmers' Market wasn't easily reached by foot or bicycle by many residents in this part of the county.

Such distances and scant options are at the top of the list of challenges that the Benton County Health Department tackles through its "Creciendo en Salud" (Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities) initiative. Its goal is to narrow disparities by improving access to affordable healthy foods for at-risk families, who include the migrant and seasonal farm workers sustaining the thriving agricultural base of Oregon's Willamette Valley.

"We're sitting right here in farmland, but so many people don't have access to the locally grown, healthy produce," Project Director Tatiana Dierwechter said.

The department works with its community partners to change the food landscape by increasing access to farmers' markets and new community gardens, working with existing farmers' markets to be more welcoming to immigrants, ensuring healthier options at small convenience stores and working toward stimulating supermarket development in South Corvallis, which has a population of 5,400 people.

In addition, the Health Department wants to make regular physical activity easier for people. Despite the county's



miles of bike lanes, being active is hardly a ride or walk in the park in rural areas. Commercial activity has developed along state Highway 99W, often without attention to enhancing main streets or pedestrian and bicyclist safety. When the initiative began, some local parks were in disrepair, lacked playground equipment and picnic areas to attract children and families or had limited-use restrictions.

*Creciendo en Salud* has involved elementary and middle school students in assessing barriers to walking and biking in the community. These findings are used to inform local transportation plans.

The partnership has many collaborators, from Corvallis Parks and Recreation and Casa Latinos Unidos de Benton County to the Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services and Strengthening Rural Families. All of these organizations now work closely with residents, especially the local Latino population - which is expected to nearly triple over the next decade - making certain its needs are being addressed.

Children in South Benton County face

serious health problems. In 2009, one in every five eighth-graders was overweight or obese. But *Creciendo en Salud* partners have begun making a difference.

"Being a relatively small community, we can actually get all of our partners around the table at the same time," Dierwechter explained. "That's so important as we continue to build relationships and move forward in action."

Some of the group's accomplishments include:

- Corvallis Parks and Recreation significantly streamlined and expanded its Family Assistance Program, which provides low- and no-cost recreation opportunities for low-income residents. This approach significantly boosts participation in athletic programs for the kids who need it most.
- A successful community engagement process in South Corvallis led to significant renovations at Tunison Park, including upgraded playground equipment, a new walking track and improved landscaping.
- The Tunison Neighborhood Association and the grassroots group "Safe Paths to South Corvallis" have led the way in planning for a multi-use pathway to provide residents with safer and more direct access to the downtown business district. The pathway, which will connect Tunison and Avery parks, is now an approved project of the city's multi-year Capital

Improvement Plan.

- The city of Corvallis approved the Community Garden Master Plan, which describes the process to establish community gardens in city parks. It also created a financial mechanism to support the creation and maintenance of new gardens.
- Two Health Impact Assessments occurred, studying food systems and urban agriculture in Corvallis and the impact of speed limits and traffic calming on state Highway 99.
- *Creciendo en Salud*'s inclusive multi-cultural approach led to HKHC staff being appointed to the Corvallis City Council's emerging Public Participation Task Force. This group is revising the city's current processes and structures into a more effective, inclusive and efficient community engagement program.

*Creciendo En Salud*'s purpose is to engage neighborhoods and communities that are most impacted by the obesity epidemic in Benton County. They do this by developing leadership and involvement of low-income, Latino and rural residents in health advocacy and community-building efforts. The initiative continuing to create positive changes in public policy, systems and built environments that promote active living; improve access to affordable, nutritious foods; and reduce health disparities among children and families living in South Corvallis and rural Benton County.

## Gearing Up for Gardening Talk Series

Noon to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays, Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, 645 NW Monroe, Corvallis. Handicap accessible. Co-sponsored by: Benton County Extension Master Gardeners, LBCC Benton Center and Corvallis-Benton County Public Library.

**Tuesday, Feb. 18 – Is It Really True That...? Garden Myths and Realities.** Rich Little, Ph.D., Entomology, Deputy Agriculture Commissioner (ret), Certified Master Gardener

**Tuesday, Feb. 25 – Slug Hunting: Know Your Enemy.** Claudia Groth, Horticulture Consultant, Instructor, Oregon Master Gardener Program

## Oregon Small Farms Conference

Oregon State University Campus in Corvallis at the LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumni Center, Saturday, Feb. 22. Register online at <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc>

This daylong event is geared toward farmers, agriculture professionals, food policy advocates, students and managers of farmers' markets. Twenty-four sessions will be offered on a variety of topics relevant to the Oregon small farmers. This year there will be a session track in Spanish. Speakers will include farmers, OSU Extension faculty, agribusiness and more.

## Upcoming Family and Community Health Learning Opportunities:

**Wednesday, Feb. 26 — Is there a vaccine to cure rudeness?** An honest conversation about civility. Examine making a habit out of kindness, nurturing social relationships and promoting decency. Can we teach civility to the upcoming generations?



**Tuesday, March 25 — Spices of India.** How many spices in your cupboard originate from India? Explore the array of spices and herbs of India and how they are used in family meals around the world. Discover new flavors and health-related claims made about many of these spices. Cost is \$1.

**Tuesday, April 29 — Go Green: Growing and Enjoying Leafy Greens.** Leafy greens like kale, chard and collards can expand the variety in our meals and they all pack a wallop of nutritional value! Do greens seem too pricy in the store? It is very simple to grow your own in a garden or in containers (winter gardens,

too). Growing instructions and easy recipes will be included in the lesson. Cost is \$1.

To register for classes, those interested can contact the OSU Extension Service, Benton County, at 541-766-6750

## OSU Extension Master Food Preserver Program

The Master Food Preserver program trains and certifies volunteers in food safety, food preservation and food security. In return for more than 42 hours of training volunteers "pay back" hours by assisting others in learning correct food handling and preservation procedures. Cost of the training, including materials, is \$75. Reduced fees are available on a needs basis. This year's course will start in late spring. For those interested in applying to become a Master Food Preserver, contact Janice Gregg at 541-967-3871.