

# NEWS from BENTON COUNTY

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Benton County, Oregon

Volume 4, Issue 1

## A message from the Board of Commissioners



Annabelle Jaramillo

Thank you for picking up the latest installment of The News from Benton County quarterly newsletter. We expect 2012 to bring many changes to Benton County Government and we are excited about the direction of the organization to continue better

serving our residents and visitors.

One significant difference this year is the addition of Chief Operating Officer Dennis Aloia. We, as commissioners, have always been focused on setting the policy direction of the county as well as the organization's strategic direction. To focus more on these important aspects of our jobs we have decided to repurpose the Administrative Services Director position to this expanded role, focusing on broad implementation of our strategies and handling day-to-day management functions. After agreeing to go in this direction, we set out on a national search to fill the position. Dennis



Jay Dixon

comes to us with a wealth of county administrative experience in multiple states. We believe he has the professional background and personality to help us take the next step to improve our organization. He will take the post late in February 2012.

We continue to look for ways to improve efficiency to maximize the return that you, the taxpayer, receive for your investment in your local government. One step we have taken toward that objective is to consolidate the Finance, Tax, Budget and Assessment functions into one department. This is expected to generate improved customer service and greater coordination between those functions.

There have been many successes in the past year as we have worked on these important adjustments. Key among these was the county's second consecutive year of being named Oregon's Healthiest County



Linda Modrell

by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This is a true community victory with many players from Benton County, Samaritan Health Services and other members of the healthcare community and every individual who makes healthy choices in their

day-to-day lives. We hope to maintain that status.

As part of our efforts to promote the health of the community, Benton County has on staff an epidemiologist who focuses on community health indicators and publishes an annual Health Status Report on the county's website. This is an important tool that is used by Benton County and other organizations in completing research, spotting and analyzing health trends and gathering data to use for grants and other forms of funding for health and social programs locally.

This service is paid for with Health

and Public Safety Levy funds, which were approved by Benton County voters in 2007. Those funds go to support 24/7 law enforcement services, school deputy program, mental health transition programs and many other activities that promote health and safety in the community. We are grateful to the voters for their support and the Board of Commissioners has held up its end of the bargain that was made with you by reducing the levy amount based on the level of forest payment received from the federal government. We are continuing to monitor that situation closely and are committed to providing services to Benton County's residents and visitors by getting the best possible bang for every buck that is spent.

This publication will highlight many of these services that are important to the livability of Benton County and we hope that you will find them interesting, informative and inspiring. We know that we certainly do.

Thank you, again, for your interest in Benton County and for taking the time to learn more about how Benton County continues to serve you, every day.

## Meet Benton County's new COO



Dennis Aloia, COO

Late last year Dennis Aloia agreed to become Benton County's first Chief Operating Officer (COO).

The Indiana native will be the executive in charge of implementing strategic and policy direction set by the Board of Commissioners. This is not the first time Benton County has had such a position. Up until 2007 the county employed a County Administrative Officer with similar

responsibilities. In 2012, as the landscape has grown more challenging due to external

economic and other factors, the Board has hired Aloia to oversee day-to-day management activities.

Aloia has a rich history in county government. He holds a bachelor's degree in public administration and Master of Public Administration in public management from Indiana University and has 27 years of government work experience backing him up. An innate desire to help people was what led Aloia into public service.

"I think I wanted to be able to do something that might help people," he said. "The main thing was I didn't want to be in a straight business working for profit, but I wanted to provide more of a service and to be able to serve people."

Aloia started his career in 1977 with Lake County, Ind., as a budget analyst and was promoted to financial director in just one year. He held that position until 1984, when he began a 12-year stint as county

*Continued on page 3*

## Deputies back in school

Building a healthy respect and appreciation for law enforcement helps create well-balanced citizens. Students at several schools in rural Benton County are developing those attitudes through interactions and exposure to Benton County Sheriff's Office deputies, which is made possible by the School Resource Deputy program.

Sheriff's Office deputies Megan Hussey and Christopher Dale volunteered to serve in that capacity for schools in unincorporated parts of the county. The program is in its first year. Dale and Hussey each have taken lead responsibility for four schools. Hussey regularly visits Crescent Valley High School, Kings Valley Charter School, Alesa School District and Mountain View Elementary School. Dale takes the lead with Monroe High School, Monroe Grade School, Muddy Creek Charter School and Blodgett Elementary School.

"Without that contact it may be the only contact kids have with law enforcement is



Benton County Sheriff's Office School Resource Deputies Megan Hussey and Christopher Dale

in the community or at their homes, so they might see us as the people who come and take friends and family away as opposed to people who come there to help and benefit

*Continued on page 3*

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Kathy Dixon left, Michelle Dixon and Benton County Juvenile Department Counselor Karla Robbins

By all accounts Michelle Dixon is a bright, creative and energetic young person with a promising future. She graduated from Crescent Valley High School in 2010 at the age of 16 and currently enjoys a straight-A grade-point average at Linn-Benton Community College.

But, like many teenagers, she needed some help getting back on the path to a promising future. With a lot of time on her hands waiting to attend college, Michelle fell in with the wrong crowd and began using drugs and alcohol. Her life was spiraling out of control when the Benton County Juvenile Department intervened. An altercation with her father drew the attention of law

enforcement, and Michelle was placed on six months of probation.

Michelle is one of 375 youth the Benton County Juvenile Department has seen each year on average. A portion of this service is paid for with funding from the Health and Public Safety Levy passed by voters in 2007. Getting into trouble actually helped Michelle turn her life around, with the help of a supportive family and Juvenile Department Counselor Karla Robbins.

"For all the people who think probation is a bad thing, it was probably the best thing that happened to me," Michelle said. "I am just so glad because I look at where I was and where I was going if I hadn't gotten placed

## Health stats benefit service agencies

United Way of Benton and Lincoln Counties Executive Director Jennifer Moore was quick to express her enthusiasm when asked about the value of Benton County's online Health Status Report.

"I think the true value isn't necessarily something we could put a price tag on," she said.

When the local United Way chapter completed its last Community Needs Assessment in 2010, and as it embarks on that same task in 2012, the county's compilation of data was a big help. It allowed the workers to quickly and easily gather information they needed relative to health, which is not their area of expertise.

The online Health Status Report was created in 2009 with the goals of describing the health of Benton County, providing information for public health programs and services as well as grant writing, monitoring and improving community programs, assessing and better understanding the county's health assets, identifying health disparities, spotting unmet needs and service gaps and determining public health priorities.

Available on the county's website, the document includes information about

demographics, causes of death, environmental health, socioeconomic health, the built environment, chronic disease, risk behaviors and numerous other topics. The research is compiled and the report created by an epidemiologist in the Benton County Health Department. The position is paid for with funds from the Public Health and Safety Levy passed by Benton County voters in 2007.

Many agencies take advantage of this opportunity for information throughout the county. Strengthening Rural Families (SRF) Executive Director Andrea Myhre said her agency uses the data for some purposes, SRF and also gathers data more specific to rural Benton County.

"We use the information in the Status Report to figure out where our county is at versus other places in Oregon," she said, "and also for spotting substance use."

Samaritan Health Services Health Promotions Director JoAnn Miller uses the data in her day-to-day work serving the Benton County area, as well as in working with Benton County and the United Way on the Needs Assessment. Data about obesity rates, child abuse rates and other factors helped Samaritan prioritize efforts.

# The long road back

on probation. I would be much worse off and if this had happened when I was 18, it would have been a lot worse."

Michelle's program – which included counseling, drug and alcohol addiction treatment, a job skills class, positive youth development activities and volunteer work – was created by Robbins. Michelle also participated in Girls Circle, a nationwide evidence-based approach where girls are encouraged through discussions to enhance their mind, body, spirit, sense of self and relationships with peers. Self-awareness, promoting girls' resiliency and connections are key components of the discussions.

Kathy Dixon, Michelle's mother, said the Juvenile Department's intervention was the key to turning her daughter's life around. She had been trying to engage the Juvenile Department's assistance but such services are limited and unenforceable until a youth is cited for a law violation.

"It was something we were looking for," Kathy said. "They really saved the day. I try to talk to as many people as I can. I know there are a lot of people where we were and they don't know where to go for help."

While Kathy gives a wealth of credit to Robbins and the Juvenile Department for helping her daughter, Robbins counters that intervention is most effective when the entire family is involved in a constructive way.

"It makes a significant difference in the outcome of a youth being on probation if the parents are actively on board and working with the Juvenile Department and

not against it," Robbins said. "Kathy and Michelle's father were very involved and active in working with us."

Now, Michelle is back on the path to a lifetime of productivity and the Juvenile Department has helped her find a sense of direction. She has completed 27 college credits and is earning general-education credits to apply toward a degree in psychology that she plans to complete at the University of Oregon. She hopes to earn a master's degree in the field and work as a Juvenile Probation Officer. In fact, she is counting down the months until she can volunteer with the Benton County Juvenile Department helping kids.

"Before probation, my life was going downhill," Michelle said. "Since I got on probation, my life has turned around 180 degrees."

It has been six months since Michelle completed her probation and she is a dedicated student, passionate about writing and art, as well as helping people and pursuing her chosen career. She still attends counseling every other week, even though it's not required. And she is trying to find a job, which is no easy feat for an 18-year-old in today's economy.

Today, Michelle no longer cuts herself – as she was prone to do before her treatment began – and recently had the word "Hope" tattooed on her wrist, surrounded by scars of the past.

"There's always going to be hope in any situation," she said, "even if it's written on my wrist."

### News from Benton County

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Board of Commissioners	766-6800
Chief Operating Officer	766-6800
Public Information Officer	766-6082
Assessment Department	766-6855
Commission on Children and Families	766-6751
Development Department	766-6819
District Attorney	766-6815
Elections	766-6756/766-6277
Fairgrounds	766-6521
Health Department	766-6835
Human Resources	766-6081
Community Health Centers	766-6835
Juvenile Department	766-6810
Natural Areas and Parks	766-6871
OSU Extension Service	766-6750
Public Works	766-6821
County Clerk/Records	766-6831
Sheriff's Office	766-6858
Tax Collection	766-6808



School Resource Deputies Megan Hussey and Christopher Dale

## Back in School *Continued from page 1*

them,” Dale said. “At the grade schools, kids’ faces light up when I walk in the door. There’s always a group that comes up asking what’s on my belt and wanting stickers.”

On one occasion, the students at Muddy Creek Charter School solicited Dale’s professional assistance identifying suspicious animal tracks on school grounds. It turns out they belonged to a dog.

Because this is the first year of the program it’s difficult to measure precise results, but the response so far has been positive.

Both Hussey and Dale were drawn to the work because of an interest in interacting with young people and both have backgrounds that make them ideal candidates for the task. Before patrolling the roads of Benton County, Hussey was a university campus housing administrator.

“I come from an education leadership background so it was a good match with my education and as a patrol deputy to sort of mash this together,” Hussey said.

Dale also has experience from his college days as a resident advisor at Oregon State University.

“That’s probably what also drew me into it,” Dale said. “I was always a resource to other students in my area. It seemed like a good fit.”

Aside from responding to calls at their assigned schools, they make their presence known on campus by developing relationships with students and giving classroom presentations on bullying, Internet safety, making positive choices, drugs and alcohol and numerous other topics. Sometimes the subjects are chosen by the deputies and others are responses to specific school requests based on trends among the student population. They also provide staff safety input that impacts school procedures in preparing for emergencies.

“We handed out a safe schools checklist at the beginning of the year,” Hussey said. “We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback.

It’s nice to see a tool that we’ve provided being implemented.”

The School Resource Deputy program is funded by the Benton County Health and Public Safety Levy, approved by voters in 2007. It covers one full deputy, but Dale and Hussey split their responsibility. Each focuses approximately 20 hours each week on school duties and the other half of the time on patrol responsibilities.

School administrators say the service is helping to change students’ lives through a real-world perspective.

“We don’t know what we did without her,” Crescent Valley High School Principal Cherie Stroud said of Deputy Hussey. “She has really shored up some gaps that education alone can’t provide.”

Monroe High School Principal Bill Crowson said the school had a resource deputy on campus when he started several years ago. Benton County offered the School Resource Deputy service from 2000 to 2004, but the program was discontinued due to budget cuts.

“It’s important for the students to see these are people who help us and they are not here to make us miserable,” he said. “It also helps us complete a loop in terms of us communicating with Benton County Sheriff’s Office and the Juvenile Department. I’m just glad that it’s a proactive approach and I would like to see this continue. I would like people to see this is proactive by putting a plan in place for kids.”

Knowledge of the school facilities and individual students’ circumstances also is a benefit, as well as the deputies’ visibility in the community.

“She’s become very popular in the community of Alsea,” Alsea School District Superintendent Marc Thielman said of Hussey. “It’s worth every dollar that’s being spent here and I would not want to do business without this service, moving forward.”

Students who are interested in careers in law enforcement can find another resource through the program.

“I see the kids who are drawn to (Hussey’s) profession wanting to interact with her,” Crescent Valley High School Vice Principal Melissa Harder said. “She is an amazing resource. I wonder how we got by the last couple years without her.”

The exposure to law enforcement allows them to build relationships and helps students understand the consequences of poor decisions.

“It’s kind of sobering when you have someone come in with a badge and a gun,” Crescent Valley Principal Stroud said. “It really backs up what we say to them and gives it more meaning. I also see for the kids who might have a distrust of authority that Deputy Hussey has got a really nice way about her that deters that.”

Making a difference in the students’ lives is what drives Hussey and Dale and it’s why

## New COO *Continued from page 1*

administrator/controller with Marquette County, Mich. Aloia spent about five years as county manager with Seneca County, NY, and held his last job – as county administrator for Grand Traverse County, Mich. – since 2001.

“We were thrilled to work with an excellent pool of candidates through this process,” Benton County Commissioner Linda Modrell said at the time Aloia’s hiring was announced. “We believe that Dennis Aloia has the skills, personality and experience to help Benton County through the adjustments that will be necessary for most local governments in the future.”

A nationwide search, which began last fall, to fill the position yielded a rich field of more than 50 applicants for the position. There was a screening process, followed by first-round interviews to narrow the field. Three finalists completed two rigorous days of panel interviews, discussions with the Board of Commissioners and community leaders and a public reception. Aloia officially takes the post on Feb. 27.

Drawn to the job for the chance to experience a different kind of lifestyle, Aloia said his greatest motivation is meeting complex challenges.

“I like solving difficult problems,” Aloia said. “I like doing that in an environment where I can bring a bunch of people together and find solutions; the ability to take a problem that is presenting difficulty

they signed up for the job, spending at least two full days each week dealing with student- and school-related issues. They enjoy it and hope to continue working with children in the future to develop positive relationships and a healthy understanding of law enforcement professionals.

“I’ve actually been recognized by kids in the grocery store saying, ‘Aren’t you the Monroe cop?’” Dale said. “It’s really rewarding.”

to people and being able to solve it with the help of others. That’s always really gratifying to me.”

When he’s not on the clock, Aloia is an outdoorsman. He enjoys golf, fishing and hunting and can’t wait to begin exploring Oregon’s forests, rivers and streams. He has moved to Corvallis with his wife of 35 years, Jeanie Aloia, who works as a nurse. He also has two adult children, a daughter living in Brooklyn, NY, and a son in Chicago.

As the COO of Benton County, Aloia will be looking to first learn the organization and then improve the way it functions.

“My vision would be to provide a career organization structure and an organization that’s truly understood by the citizens and understood by the employees,” he said. “I want to improve communication and build a team atmosphere.”

Before applying for the position Aloia researched Benton County carefully and came away with the impression that the county has a strong financial footing. The county-operated Community Health Centers also intrigued him, as well as the opportunity to live in a university town.

“We wanted to do something new and different in a place we’d never been before,” he said. “We had never spent much time on the West Coast but it looked beautiful and like something exciting to us. We thought it would be a great adventure and we are excited to be here.”

## Outreach specialists change lives

If it takes a village to raise a child, it certainly takes a team effort to redirect at-risk youth. With heavy caseloads and many clients, Benton County Juvenile Department counselors are busy creating programming that serves the needs of the kids under their supervision, but someone has to make sure the youth are following through.

That’s where Mark Harryman and Issac Powell get involved. They are Benton County Juvenile Outreach Specialists who manage the details that are vital to helping at-risk kids get the help they need. They attend clients’ school meetings, supervise work crews, transport youth to treatment and appointments and much more. Their services are part of the Health and Public Safety Levy supported by voters in 2007.

When counselors go on leave, the outreach specialists pick up portions of the caseload. A lot of their work is unscheduled and unplanned. With little notice they can be called upon to attend meetings, transport

a client as far away as Eastern Oregon and fulfill numerous other tasks. They also go above and beyond the job description to help their clients.

“We do a lot of things, such as if a kid or family is not known to have resources and there is a need we can take them to get things they need like hygiene products, school supplies or clothes,” said Powell, who has been serving Benton County youth for about 11 years.

They assist with job skills classes, tutor clients, provide parenting classes and lead cognitive behavioral groups that benefit students. Youth learn from these professionals how to write resumes, submit employment applications and follow up with potential employers. Including their own small caseloads Harryman and Powell estimate they come into contact with 20 to 30 clients each week.

“You could argue that every kid that’s

*Continued on page 4*

## Local authorities respond to disaster

When it rained in January in Benton County, it truly poured. Coupled with unusual freezing conditions to topsoil in the Willamette Valley, it added up to an emergency situation.

Benton County Sheriff's Office – together with Public Works departments from the county and city of Corvallis and numerous local fire and police agencies and community organizations – sprang into action responding to landslides, blocked roads, flooding and other incidents connected to the weather.

By the time the rivers began to recede on Saturday, Jan. 21, early estimates showed approximately \$10 million in combined losses to private property, public infrastructure and agricultural crops. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials visited Benton County in early February to conduct assessments and estimate damages. In a case like this, if minimum county- or state-wide thresholds for damages are met residents may be eligible for federal financial assistance. It will take a presidential disaster declaration before a local individual can apply for assistance. The full results of the statewide damage assessment may take several weeks

to complete.

Late on Wednesday, Jan. 18, high waters prompted voluntary evacuations in the area around Lancaster Drive in Northeast Corvallis. Several hours after midnight, a landslide damaged one home in the Rosewood neighborhood near Lewisburg. Continued risk of landslides influenced public safety officials to quickly send an evacuation notice to all 22 homes in that neighborhood.

In the early morning of Thursday, Jan. 19, city and county staff activated their shared emergency operations center to coordinate response efforts. Concurrent declarations of emergency for both the city of Corvallis and Benton County were submitted to the State of Oregon later that day by Benton County Commissioner Jay Dixon and Corvallis City Manager Jim Patterson.

Officials established an evacuation center and shelter at Crescent Valley High School. Buses were available to transport those who wished to leave their homes in the flooded area. Throughout the day, more landslides blocked county roads, a fallen tree destroyed a bridge on Harris Road near Wren and standing water covered many roads, causing even more closures. Public safety

workers monitored conditions, responded to new reports of damage and flooding and established detours for closed roads. The Benton County Fairgrounds opened as a shelter free of charge for livestock that were displaced from local barns and fields due to flooding, housing approximately 20 animals.

"We are working with our partners at the state and federal levels to move this process along as smoothly and quickly as we possibly can," Benton County Sheriff's Office Emergency Program Manager Mary King said. "It is not too late to submit damage claims to our office, and those wishing to do so should call 541-766-6864 as soon as possible."

Residents do not need to wait for assistance before beginning repairs,



The Harris Bridge near Wren

but should be sure to document with photographs the damage they are fixing. For more information or to report damage, those interested can contact Benton County Sheriff's Office Emergency Services at 541-766-6864. For more information about making donations to aid local victims, those interested can contact Kristen Wambach of Benton Flood Relief at [bentoncountyfloodrelief@gmail.com](mailto:bentoncountyfloodrelief@gmail.com).

## County locations to shift this spring



The Sunset Building

Benton County is embarking on a series of moves that will include remodeling at local facilities and service providers switching locations this spring and into the summer.

Late in 2010 Benton County announced it was purchasing the Sunset Building occupied by the United States Forest Service Siuslaw National Forest offices on Research Way in Corvallis. Forest Service employees, as planned, have vacated the building – renamed the Sunset Building – to move to their new digs on the Oregon State University campus.

As county employees shift their operations to the Sunset Building, they will be moving out of several leased offices around Corvallis. The move is anticipated to save Benton County money in the long-term. The mortgage will be paid off in 10 years. This will eliminate lease payments and add an asset that the county could potentially sell when the time comes to build a consolidated local government service facility in downtown.

The Sunset Building is being paid for with savings from moving into owned space and rent from other agencies that will be leasing space from Benton County in the facility.

The facility includes 33,000 square feet of office space, a 6,000-square-foot warehouse and 250 parking spaces.

The building will house the consolidated Taxation, Finance, Assessment and Budget functions, as well as Human Resources, Oregon State University Extension Service, the Juvenile Department and Dial-A-Bus. All county departments currently in the Health Department building, Avery Complex, Law Enforcement Center in downtown Corvallis and the Benton County Courthouse will remain in their current locations. The Board of Commissioners Office will move out of the Benton Plaza building to the county-owned office space on Fifth Street currently housing Benton County Assessment.

The timeline for moving is as follows:

- March 30 through April 3: Assessor, Human Resources and Tax/Finance move to Sunset Building;
- May 18 through 22: Board of Commissioners moves to location on Fifth Street in Corvallis;
- June 29 through July 3: Juvenile Department and OSU Extension Service of Benton County relocate to Sunset Building; and
- July 9: Dial-A-Bus and other agencies begin moving into Sunset Building.

The project timeline includes work to meet departmental needs as county offices shift to new spaces.

"We will be working to minimize the impacts of all of these moves on our constituents," Benton County Board of Commissioners Chair Jay Dixon said. "It is critical to us that quality of service remain as high as possible even during these moves."

## Outreach *Continued from page 3*

a client, we're working with all of them," said Harryman, who has about 6 years of experience serving Benton County youth.

Harryman studied Human Services at Oregon State University and earned an internship with Benton County as a student. The internship turned into a job and he's spent most of his career with the county. Powell has known he wanted to be a juvenile probation officer since his teenage years, growing up in North Portland. He saw a lot of drug activity and gang violence in his neighborhood and wanted to make a difference. So he went to Western Oregon University and got a degree in criminal justice.

"I think for anyone who gets into human service, the ultimate reward is you see some impact on these kids' lives and their families," Harryman said. "It's not gratifying every day, because you do have rough days."

Unfortunately sometimes youth still fall through the cracks. Typical clients range between 12 and 17 years old.

"You can't save them all, but we do have many successes," Powell said. "A lot of kids come by after their probation is over and check in to let us know they are doing OK."

As difficult as it is to see youth in the program flounder, the majority go on to lead productive lives, going to college, holding down jobs and starting families. In many cases Powell and Harryman



Mark Harryman and Issac Powell, Juvenile Department Outreach Specialists

have more exposure to clients than even the caseworkers do, which can lead to influential relationships.

"Ultimately you're trying to be a support system and not just hold the punitive accountability," Harryman said. "I'm doing this in part to keep the community safe, but by working with these kids we can actually be influential. In many cases we are kind of mentors, so we really like taking on that role."

The hardest part of the job is when they have to take a client into custody who hasn't met the terms of probation or who has relapsed into risky behaviors.

"I think for the most part the kids know we are not in their lives to ruin them," Powell said. "We are here because we want to help them make their lives better."