

Plein to see

Artists take it outside for new Confluence exhibit

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Saddle up

Bear Creek Equestrian Center offers options

SPORTS page B1

# Methow Valley News

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## INSIDE THIS WEEK

Inside this week's paper you will find two tabloid-size special inserts that you will want to pull out and keep around for a while:

- The Community Foundation of North Central Washington has launched its annual Give Methow campaign, and has produced a detailed guide of to

how the program works and who will benefit. Find it inside of the A section.

- Friends of the Winthrop Library, which is spearheading construction of a new library in Winthrop, has produced an insert packed with information about the project. You'll find it inside of the B section.

## Artist, body-shop owner seek Twisp Council seat

### Hickman challenges incumbent Easton

BY RALPH SCHWARTZ

Mark Easton joined the Twisp Town Council when it seemed that more people wanted to get off the council than get on.

Easton applied around the beginning of 2018 to fill Position 1, most recently held by Josh Thompson. Thompson had been appointed just one year earlier to replace Bob Lloyd, who had resigned. But Thompson didn't want to run in November 2017 to retain his seat.



Mark Easton

The remaining council members didn't choose Easton, who said in an interview last month he was happy with the council's selection of Ashley Thrasher.



Kevin Hickman

On the same night Thrasher was appointed, council member John Fleming resigned — giving another spin to the revolving door that was the Twisp Town Council.

Council member Alan Caswell called Easton the next day, to see if he might still want the job.

What a difference two years makes. Not only do all four council seats in this election cycle have candidates, but two are contested. Kevin Hickman is challenging Easton for his Position 4 seat.

"Nobody showed up for the last election. I'm glad that people are showing up," Easton said.

The race for Twisp mayor is contentious, at least among supporters of Soo Ing-Moody and Vern Nations. None of that sentiment has trickled down to the campaigns of Easton or Hickman.

"No one is running against me. Kevin and I happen to be running for the same position," Easton said, adding he would help Hickman prepare for the office if he were to win.

"I think it takes any new council member quite a bit of time to get up

## CONTRIBUTIONS: EASTON \$500, HICKMAN ZERO

Mark Easton has received \$465.13 in donations, plus graphic design services for campaign bookmarks, according to the candidate.

Easton provided the following list of donors on Monday (Sept. 30): William and Diana Hottell, \$100 Mark and LaShelle Easton, \$90.13 Sharon Cohen, \$50 Maggie Coon and Mark Wolf-Armstrong, \$50 Sandy Moody, \$50 Melanie Rowland, \$50 Dwight Filer, \$25 Paula Mackrow, \$25 Dave and Marilyn Sabold, \$25

The only expense Easton reported was \$41.03 to print bookmarks. He said he has no plans to use yard signs in his campaign.

"It's not the best use of money," Easton said.

Kevin Hickman, who is challenging Easton for his Twisp Council seat, said on Monday he had not received any contributions and was not asking people to donate to his campaign. He did say he is trying to save money to purchase yard signs.

The Methow Valley News is asking candidates in all Town of Twisp races to voluntarily disclose their campaign donations: who is giving and how much. We are also asking them to list all expenses: who is getting paid, how much, and for what.

Candidates in Washington state are required to report all of this information to the Public Disclosure Commission if they receive more than \$5,000 in contributions—a high bar for a jurisdiction as small as Twisp. We felt this same information should be available to Twisp voters.

to speed," Easton said. "The amount of time I spend doing research on anything coming up in front of the council, and spend on different committees, is a lot."

Hickman, 58, is a single father raising his 9-year-old son Joey while operating Kevin's Collision Repair on Lincoln Street. He said he wouldn't enter the council with an agenda — at least not a long agenda.

See **COUNCIL**, A2

## State: Okanogan County needs more oversight of transactions

### Auditors found no sign of misappropriation

BY MARCY STAMPER

Okanogan County needs to make sure that the same person doesn't collect and deposit money at the fairgrounds. The county also must adopt clearer written policies to track small, valuable assets and county contracts.

Those admonitions came in a management letter from an auditor for Washington state in their annual audit of the county for 2018. Auditors use management letters to convey the mid-

dle level of concern. The letter was provided to the county commissioners at the auditor's exit interview on Sept. 16.

The auditor didn't find any sign that funds had been misappropriated or gone missing. Jake Santistevan, audit manager for the Wenatchee branch of the Washington State Auditor, said. But the county needs to sharpen its oversight to be sure that money is not collected, deposited and reconciled by just one individual at facilities like the fairgrounds or landfill.

The auditors dinged the county for not having adequate "segregation of

See **AUDIT**, A3



Photo by Marcy Stamper

"I like the job — it fulfills what I want to do with my life. It has meaning, and I'm helping people and being part of a team," said Heather Priest, who commutes from Twisp to her job at the dispatch center.

## Answering the call

### County dispatch center is the nerve center for first responses

BY MARCY STAMPER

When Heather Priest answers a 911 call at Okanogan County's dispatch center, she listens for a few seconds before saying anything to the caller. Hearing a few seconds of background noise — screaming and fighting, breaking glass, or ordinary workplace sounds like ladders clanging in an orchard — can give Priest essential information about the nature of the emergency or the caller's whereabouts.

In some situations, like an assault in progress, it can be too dangerous for the caller to risk being overheard providing details, so the dis-

patcher listens carefully and crafts "yes" or "no" questions. In fact, some people dial 911 to get an open phone line so that the dispatcher can

witness what's going on and send help.

Priest is one of 11 dis-

See **CALL**, A6

## How the dispatch center works

The county has 12 full-time positions for dispatchers, and 11 of those are currently filled, with two people still in training, said Mike Worden, chief of special operations/communications with the county sheriff's office.

Becoming a dispatcher requires months

of in-depth training in answering calls and gathering the nitty-gritty information. They also have to master location software and radios and understand the geographic areas served by the county's 15 repeater sites.

See **PROCESS**, A6



Photos courtesy of Loup Loup Ski Bowl

The existing Wolf Lodge, far right in the photo above, will be demolished next spring to make way for a new lodge — seen here in an artist's rendering — that will be 50% larger and have more amenities.

## New day lodge planned for Loup Loup Ski Bowl

### Fundraising campaign underway to support project

BY DON NELSON

The Wolf Lodge at Loup Loup Ski Bowl, now more than 50 years old and well past its life expectancy, will be replaced by a new facility in 2020 if the nonprofit organization that operates the ski area can raise the necessary \$1 million in donations for the project.

The Loup Loup Ski Education Foundation is now fully engaged in a fundraising campaign, said Craig Howard, who is acting as a

consultant to the foundation.

If all goes according to schedule, the existing day lodge will serve for one more winter, then be demolished next spring and replaced by an entirely new building that will be 50% larger and offer more amenities — "a lodge for the next 50 years," Howard said.

The existing lodge "was not built to last this long," Howard said in a recent interview. Maintenance alone for the structure — including dealing with dry rot — "is overwhelming," Howard said.

"Time has taken its toll on this much-loved facility, and repairing it was becoming a nearly impossible — and growing — annual burden," Howard said in an email. "The [foundation] board con-

**"The [foundation] board considered all possibilities, but it boiled down to two choices: repair or replace the lodge. It became clear that repairing was just not in the cards. ... They were ending up with new repairs on top of old repairs."**

Craig Howard, consultant

considered all possibilities, but it boiled down to two choices: repair or replace the lodge. It became clear that repairing was just not in the cards.

...They were ending up with new repairs on top of old repairs."

See **LOUP**, A3

## ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
Oct. 10	Oct. 11	Oct. 12	Oct. 13	Oct. 14	Oct. 15
58°	61°	61°	61°	62°	58°
36°	39°	36°	39°	44°	35°
Sun & Rain	Clouds & Sun	Sun & Clouds	Mostly Sunny	Shower Possible	Cloudy, Rain

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

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# Clerical workers or first responders? That could change

Dispatchers are classified as administrative support staff — the same category as secretaries and office clerks — in the comprehensive list of job categories kept by the federal government. But that may be about to change.

Dispatchers were heartened this year when Texas became the first state in the nation to officially classify dispatchers as first responders. Congress is considering a similar change, with what's called the Supporting Accurate Views of Emergency Services Act of 2019 or, more concisely, the 911 SAVES Act.

Rep. Norma Torres (D-California), who worked as a dispatcher before being elected to Congress, and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pennsylvania), a former FBI special agent, co-sponsored the bill in the House of Representatives, which would recognize dispatchers' critical role in emergency response.

The legislation notes that the people who answer 911 calls are the first contact in life-or-death situations. The change would "recognize these professionals for the lifesaving work they perform," according to the legislation.

"They are often communicating with people in great distress, harm, fear, or injury, while employing their experience and training to recognize a critical piece of information.... This work comes with an extreme emotional and physical impact that is compounded by long hours and the around-the-clock nature of the job," according to the bill.

That change would mean a lot to Okanogan County's communications deputies. It also could provide tangible benefits regarding retirement and more access to counseling.

"How many secretaries are listening to people die on the phone — literally?" Priest said. "To be recognized as actual first responders would be phenomenal."

"Just because we don't have blood on our hands.... We have it in our heads," Whitley said.



Photo by Marcy Stamper

Like all dispatchers, Michael Whitley, left, is attuned to callers who don't provide details of an emergency. He asks 'yes' or 'no' questions in case it's not safe for the caller to talk. Mike Worden of the county Sheriff's Office oversees the dispatch center.

**"How many secretaries are listening to people die on the phone — literally? To be recognized as actual first responders would be phenomenal."**

Heather Priest, dispatcher

The bill passed in the House in July, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. It's currently being considered by the Senate.

ating with people in great distress, harm, fear, or injury, while employing their experience and training to recognize a critical piece of information.... This

## CALL

From Page A1

Dispatchers — officially, "communications deputies" — with the Okanogan County Communications Center, part of the county sheriff's office. Working around the clock in teams of two or three, they handle emergency calls for almost 43,000 people, dispatching first responders from 32 law, fire and EMS agencies. Their goal is to dispatch the responders in less than two minutes, said Mike Worden, chief of special operations/communications with the county Sheriff's Office.

While dispatchers are alert to clues to an emergency, sometimes they're on the trail of a

different kind of clue. Identifying the rhythmic bouncing on a trampoline helped dispatcher Beth Paine track a prank caller who made more than 250 calls. Paine's persistence cracked the trampoline case last summer. Using location info Paine had recorded, sheriff's deputies traced the calls to a house with a trampoline. A crowing rooster and the sounds of birds in cages overheard by a dispatcher helped deputies locate another prank caller.

"It's a problem — I spent at least 20 seconds on each call" — seconds that took him away from other calls, dispatcher Michael Whitley said.

### Ferretting out info

Like journalists, dispatchers

are trained to get answers to the "five Ws" (Who? What? When? Where? Why?). But they ask one extra question, which can be crucial: Weapons?

Although dispatchers follow a basic script, including medical questions that guide them through different interventions, they're attuned to situations that don't make sense. "It may not be adding up. I use my intuition and keep asking till I have the information I need," said Pat Stevens, who's been fielding emergency calls for the county for decades.

The script can help dispatchers stay grounded during emotional situations. Still, "it's hard to cram things into a script where every situation's different. You have to think outside the box — someone could walk into the room with a

gun — you can't wait to find that on the script," Whitley said. "It's also important that people in an emergency know they're talking to a real, empathetic person on the other end."

"If a caller isn't answering right — how a 'normal' person would respond — I ask if they're free to talk," said Whitley. "I try for 'yes' or 'no' questions."

Of the almost 3,000 calls to 911 per month, about 180 are "abandonments." Most of those are inadvertent pocket dials, but some are pranks, and some come from lonely people. When there's no one on the other end of the line, the dispatcher has to call back to see if it's a real emergency.

After hours, the dispatchers answer the non-emergency line, helping with welfare checks, noise problems, and stray cows.

### Stimulating but stressful

The job is stressful and not for everyone, but many of the county's dispatchers have remarkable longevity on the job.

Stevens has been answering 911 calls for Okanogan County for 30 years. She can deal with disturbing calls. "You need a healthy home life and hobbies," she said. "But if I feel I could have done it better, that upsets me," she said.

Paine, a 15-year veteran, was working as a bartender when she answered an ad for a dispatcher. "It's stressful. But it's definitely something new every day — you never know what's going to happen," she said. "You've got to have hobbies. I hunt and fish — out of range of a cell signal."

After a stint "on the cherry line" in high school, Whitley knew he didn't want a monotonous job. He started as a dispatcher 11 years ago and appreciates the good benefits and stimulating work. "I've seen a lot, but there are always new things. It's always a dynamic and changing environment," one that requires lots of multi-tasking, Whitley said.

"If somebody wants to study human psychology, be here in the dispatch center for a while," Whitley said. "The only thing that bothers me is uncooperative callers — people who can't give information, so that I can't help."

Priest, who lives in Twisp, is one of the newer dispatchers, although she has a long career working with emergency services. "I like the job — it fulfills what I want to do with my life. It has meaning, and I'm helping people and being part of a team," Priest said.

Priest helps foster camaraderie by posting encouraging words around the small dispatch center, selecting personalized messages for each colleague, such as, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." "You were born with the ability to change someone's life. Don't ever waste it." And, "Challenges are just opportunities!"

Still, some incidents inevitably get to the dispatchers. A fire in early September that badly burned an Okanogan firefighter was especially wrenching, Priest said. "We are human — someone calls and says someone's got a gun to my head ...." Whitley said.

The massive wildfires in 2014 and 2015 were especially hard on dispatchers. "The 2015 fire was more challenging because it was our emergency. We were evacuated, so we couldn't disconnect as much. Plus, we were working every day," Whitley said. Still, with fire threatening his house, being at work was almost comforting.

Calls about fires can be particularly complex, since the dispatchers coordinate orders for multiple firefighting agencies and equipment. "I think it's things like fire that bind us together — there's such a close-knit camaraderie," Priest said.

After a particularly upsetting incident, sheriff's deputies will stop by to see how the dispatchers are faring. And the dispatchers worry about the deputies and firefighters. "You're sending people into dangerous situations. You know them; your kids play with their kids," Whitley said.

While there's stress, there's also boredom. Dispatchers can go hours — particularly on long winter nights — without a single call. One monitor in the center is simply a TV, although the dispatchers are more likely to entertain themselves with their phones today. Some paint or read. Others clean the office.

"As someone told me when I first started the job, 'It's not your emergency.' I try to remember I'm here to help them," Whitley said.

Sometimes callers recognize Priest's voice and say that makes them feel calm. "That helps me know I'm making a difference," she said.



Photo by Marcy Stamper

The dispatchers support each other in a stressful job. Priest fosters camaraderie by posting personalized messages for each colleague in the small dispatch center.

## PROCESS

From Page A1

Dispatchers learn about medical conditions and how to instruct someone — over the phone — to perform first aid or CPR.

For the past year, the dispatchers have been working 12-hour shifts, in a taxing two-week schedule that alternates between two and three days on or off. On top of that, they switch day and night shifts every two months, adjusting to getting to work — instead of leaving — at

6 a.m. Once the two dispatchers complete their training, they hope to go back to eight-hour shifts, Worden said.

The dispatchers work in a dimly lit room in an out-of-the-way alcove near the county jail. They're surrounded by big monitors, keyboards and other electronics. An adjoining room holds what Worden calls the "main brain" of the operation — computers that route 911 calls; mapping technology; the records-management system used by police, fire and EMS; and back-up equipment and batteries.

Within the next 12 months, the sheriff's office hopes to do an upgrade that would enable them to receive 911 calls via text message. Texting would be a benefit to the hearing impaired and could provide coverage in places where a signal isn't strong enough to carry a phone call. Texting could also help when it's too dangerous for someone to be overheard making a call, Worden said.

But older technology is still useful. Any cell phone — as long as it has a battery — can call 911, although it takes dispatchers longer to pinpoint the location of a

call from an old phone.

Smart appliances like ovens and refrigerators that are connected to the internet have increased the number of 911 calls. "We're starting to get calls from Apple watches," Worden said. "The wearer will be lying down and not moving, so the watch calls." The dispatchers have to follow up by tracking the call.

"The internet of things is going to be an explosion of issues and challenges," Worden said. "It's a big topic at the state and national level — we haven't seen the effects yet."

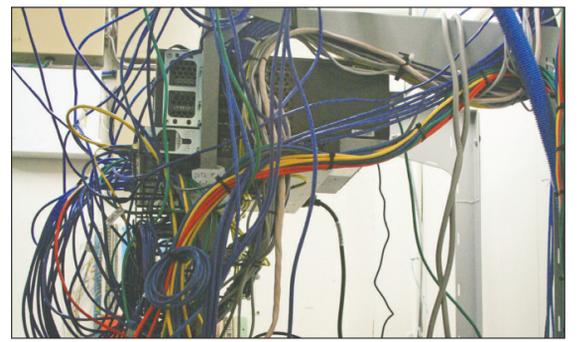


Photo by Marcy Stamper

A high-tech system routes 911 calls, runs location software, and manages records for first responders. Each dispatcher is flanked by several computer monitors.

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