

Guest Column: Scott is already making a difference

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Sheriff Garrett Scott has been on the job about eight weeks, and I'm happy to report morale and work conditions are slowly and steadily improving. I met with Del Norte's top cop recently and we spoke about priorities, challenges and what the public can expect in the coming months.

Having said that and rendering my unequivocal support for Sheriff Scott's goal to return the DNSD to its former high status, I share my opinion that former Sheriff, Board of Supervisors-appointee, Randy Waltz was a good and very capable Sheriff. I contend the perceived demise of patrol and jail operations existed within both the Department, and by extension, the community, and involved a quiet cadre of non-law enforcement malcontents who wanted the County's sheriff out because he was not a local product.

The squabbling spilled over to an overzealous District Attorney, on a flimsy residency matter discrepancy. This intervention supplanted the election process with voter input as the ultimate voter decision maker. I'm

relieved to know former Sheriff Waltz' felony charges were dismissed and a face-saving single misdemeanor plea was proffered and agreed upon.

Out in the political suburbs away from this drama was appointed and now-elected Sheriff Garrett Scott who's in process of completing Waltz's predecessor, Erik Apperson's, original term before Scott begins his own four year term in 2023. Our conversation follows:

Recruitment of jail staff and patrol deputies remains Sheriff Scott's top priority. A cross-lateral Deputy has been hired and is working at this time. An additional Lake County transfer deputy is in the process of hire. An experienced dispatcher is now hired bringing to three, with an additional three dispatchers needed. A correctional deputy has now been hired. An additional eight deputies are needed to bring patrol up to a full sixteen member complement. Five jail staff are being actively sought to fill custodial staff vacancies.

Until these vital positions can be filled, services will be compromised and may not live up to the high standards we expect, at least not yet.

Money is not the primary obstacle in hiring quality staff. The level of dedication of those who apply to serve in this Department is quite extraordinary and exceptional. We have some very good law men and women in this County.

But now systemic long-term inflation, including record high fuel prices and unaffordable housing is complicating the already challenging hiring process. Candidly, hiring officers and deputies is a huge problem not just in Del Norte but up and down the State. Law enforcement remains under a siege mentality. Sheriff Scott is actively looking at bonus enhancements to mitigate this public safety hiring problem.

The prospect of a new \$50 million jail is also on Sheriff Scott's target list.

The Sheriff has plans to address students at Del Norte High, and other schools, including Smith River, Redwood, Crescent Elk and Margaret Keating in Klamath to talk about career paths in law enforcement. This highly proactive recruitment tool increases personal investment in Del Norte where future deputies and jail staff can remain in the community close to friends and family. Sheriff Scott hopes to begin the process when the new semester begins,

Memoranda of Understanding agreements between Curry, Josephine and Jackson counties (Oregon) and Del Norte have lapsed over time and the Sheriff is revisiting those now obsolete MOUs. Sheriff Scott is also exploring inter-State cross-lateral agreements once utilized in Del Norte. The MOU's would be similar in intent and purpose to the cross-lateral deputy MOU with the Yurok Tribal Police. Del Norte County enjoys a productive mutual aid inter-county relationship with Humboldt as well as productive partnership agreements with the CHP, Crescent City Police Department, State Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Redwood State and National Parks.

The six-member Citizens Advisory Board will soon be re-activated after a long hiatus due to the Covid 19 virus. Sheriff Scott is also receptive to quarterly calendar meetings with citizens who wish to meet with the Sheriff and staff in an effort to have open communications.

Indeed, there's a new Sheriff in town and I'm encouraged by what I observe.

Progress is ongoing and the arrow is clearly pointing in the right direction. The Board of Supervisors needs to provide financial support in funding bonus enhancements. Garrett Scott needs community support and patience as this tedious journey of improving quality law enforcement in Del Norte county continues.

The helmet 's off to you, Sheriff Garrett Scott. Keep up effective leadership. Your efforts are already making a difference.

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