

Woodburn Independent  
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As I sat down to write my state of the county comments recently, I was reminded of all the difficulties we faced in 2009. However, this review also reminded me of the many pieces of good news and encouragement. Let me share a few of the highlights.

The greatest lesson I learned in 2009 is that despite economic hardships, people in Marion County continue to reach out to those less fortunate with generosity, compassion and community pride. How well we know this right here in our own Woodburn community.

How amazing it is that we do what we do when faced with such difficult times. Some of those difficulties include: Local unemployment rates continue to be higher than the state's; Marion County median household income is less than the state's, the country's and neighboring counties; many businesses continue to lay off large portions of their work force; and, numerous others have had no alternative but to shut their doors.

Agriculture, Marion County's top industry, has been hit hard. Officials forecast a 10 to 20% drop in sales for the year 2009. That is on top of a 17% drop in sales in 2008.

Marion County had to lay off several employees, just like many businesses did. We, too, had to make deeper budget cuts to balance our budget, which is required by law. Yes, Marion County government tightened its belt. Once again, we set priorities, focused on our core functions, and looked for efficiencies. Every dollar Marion County spends on services must have an identified revenue source. To help achieve budget goals, I submitted a budget note, which was unanimously adopted, that directs us to monitor trends and assess data. Knowing what the key indicators are, we can realign resources to meet changing community needs, and be held accountable for where tax dollars are spent.

We recovered \$250,000 in costs through our Risk Management Program last year. We lowered our workers' compensation claims and costs. Through our wellness program, employees are improving their diets, exercising and losing weight. The results of these lifestyle changes have reduced health care costs and absenteeism.

Our county employees have taken on a can-do attitude and a commitment to finding innovative ways to do things better and more cost effectively. This has become the hallmark of Marion County.

Public safety has been and will continue to be the county's top priority. It is impossible to separate the issues of public safety from a strong economy and healthy families. When one link breaks, the whole chain fails, and causes a myriad of problems for our communities.

These challenges don't exist in a vacuum. Community input is critical to good decision making. Working together with community groups, whether they are private, non profit or governmental, is the only way we can understand the unique challenges individual communities face and it is the only way we solve those individual problems and find opportunities for a better future.

Through our Public Safety Coordinating Council, which I chair, our year-long series of town hall meetings throughout the county has been successful in learning what the communities' challenges are. Working with other organization, such as the Marion County Children and Families Commission, we have created a set of key actions to respond to these issues which include: jobs for youth; the availability and access to healthy choices and activities for youth; and support for parenting. Please note that the Woodburn Town Hall meeting, the last in this series, is set for February 18. More information will follow shortly.

As we all know, it really is all about the economy! We in government have a responsibility to work with businesses, and our agricultural industry in particular, to help create an economic climate that supports businesses and jobs. I will continue to work arm-in-arm with our local chambers of commerce, other groups such as SEDCOR, and with local governments so that Marion County is a place that encourages businesses to locate here, grow their business and create new jobs. With community pride and a can-do attitude, I am encouraged about our future.

In closing, please plan to attend the Woodburn Chamber of Commerce meeting on Wednesday, April 14, to hear our full state-of-the-county address.

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