

Meet the Executive Director

By Kathleen Codinha

AFTER AN EIGHT MONTH absence of an Executive Director, OCWCOG is pleased to welcome Ryan Vogt, who has been with us since mid-July. Raising your hand to take the helm of an agency that provides essential services to the most vulnerable in our local population – during a global pandemic - is not for everyone. Even with all the challenges, he has proven his resilience and determination to make lemonade out of lemons.



Ryan spent the last two decades preparing for this work. He worked at the Department of Human Services, with an emphasis in the child welfare department, as well as working in Labor Relations at the Department of Administrative Services. He also spent over two years as the Chief Operations Officer with Oregon Housing and Community Services.

His main interest is helping people by using skills and contacts that he has cultivated over the years. In an interview by the Albany Democrat Herald, Ryan was quoted as saying,

“I want to provide our member communities with the most bang for their buck,” Vogt said. “Our goal should be helping our member governments accomplish their goals. I want to do everything I can over the next eight or 10 years to move this

agency in the right direction. I would love for this to be my last hurrah, career-wise.”

*“I’m a social worker at heart.
I like working directly with families
and seeing how state and local services can benefit families”, says Vogt.*

2020 has brought more challenges than most sci-fi flicks: a global pandemic, local wild fires, and riots throughout our nation. As the captain of the ship, he’s had to be able to pivot and change course with the next OSHA ruling or Governors Executive Order. As part of the interview process, Ryan promised to meet our members, listen to both their concerns and accolades, and move us in the direction of our company mission of helping the Region’s communities collaborate to solve problems and connect member governments, businesses, and individuals with a wide array of resources.

Ryan is here to stay the course.

Diversity, Equity, and inclusion

DURING A SEPTEMBER ZOOM lunchtime meeting with members represented by Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties, much of the discussion centered on Social and Racial Justice and the efforts communities in our region are engaged in or would like to engage in. Part of that discussion was exploring what, if any role should OCWCOG play in coordinating, leading, or facilitation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.

Since then, a survey was created and sent to our members to determine what key areas were sought in the way of information and training. Executive Director, Ryan Vogt and Human Resources Manager, Ryan Schulze met with Mark Shepard, City Councilor of Corvallis to further collaborate on a path forward. The discussion is ongoing with no conclusion drawn at this point, although all information on training is being shared between communities.

Election results: saying good bye to Board and Committee Members

By Kathleen Codinha

THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS have left seven vacancies on our Board of Directors, and one vacancy on our Executive Committee. The Chairman of the Board is putting together a nominating committee so elections can be held at our January Board meeting on the 21st.

We are sincerely grateful for each and every member that serves on any of our boards. During our last Board of Director meeting, we acknowledged Albany Mayor Sharon Konopa for her service and commitment to the OCWCOG by presenting her with our first ever Rock Star Award. She has served on our Board of Directors for over 22 years, and as an officer on our Executive Board for 20. Sharon will always be a ROCK STAR to us!



Program Updates – Year End Review

Finance, by Sue Forty

In the beginning of this pandemic we had concerns about the financial stability of the agency and funding streams critical to providing services to our consumers and members but I'm happy to report the COG is financially sound. Revenue and Expenses are very close to what they were in the prior year at this time. While we have some areas where expenses might seem to be high, this is due to purchasing needed supplies to keep our work place clean and safe. Grants and donations are actually up a bit from the prior year, due to the outpouring of community support.

Contracts successfully managed over 200 contracts in the past year. We recently lost one of our Contracts Coordinators, Christine Kennedy, to a promotion with the State; we wish her well in her new position. With the unit vacancy, our part time Contract Coordinator, Pamela Fields, has stepped in and is covering the needs of the department. This team, in coordination with Randi Moore, Senior and Disability Service Director (SDS), reviews and bills for the CARES funding available through the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the State. To date, the SDS program has been able to use the CARES funds and reserve some of the OAA contract funds for future expenses. COG was also awarded with additional COVID funds in the amounts of:

- \$213,362 in Family First - supporting Meals on Wheels, we bought shelf stable meals, frozen meals, an extra freezer etc. We also purchased PPE for meal site volunteers to protect drivers.
- \$168,707 in Title III-B Support Service - We used this to provide meals for food insecure older adults, to support workers teleworking, and provided contracts to community partners to support programs in the communities that reduce isolation and loneliness.
- \$425,531 in Nutrition and Meals Services - Used to pay for the higher demand on meals.
- \$85,396 in Title III –E Family - Used to provide stipend money to family caregivers for respite, technology and other supports as well as contracts with Lumina and Grace Center Adult Day Services, and North End Senior Solutions Adult Day Services to adapt their classes that support family caregivers such as Powerful Tools for Caregivers and Family Caregiver Support Groups to a virtual platform.

After losing our Finance Manager, former Finance Manager Janet Cline has stepped in. Janet has picked up the FEMA and CARES work needed to recover as much funding as we possibly can. To date we have recovered \$76,037.00 in FEMA funds for the expanded FMLA time used by staff to self-quarantine, or take care of vulnerable family members and children. We continue to monitor the opportunity to recover additional funds when they are made available. Janet is meeting with our FEMA representative twice a month.

Sandra Easdale, COG's Senior Loan Officer, applied for and received \$750,000.00 in COVID funds from the USDA; with an additional \$75,000 administrative grant to support her efforts in lending out these funds. Since the pandemic started, we have been able to offer loan payment deferments to our borrowers who were financially harmed due to closure, restrictions and less customer traffic. We had seven COG loan recipients take advantage of the deferments. Currently there are only two deferring. Additionally, seven other borrowers have paid off their loans during this time, and Sandra is working with several businesses to process new loans using COVID, SBA, and local loan funds.

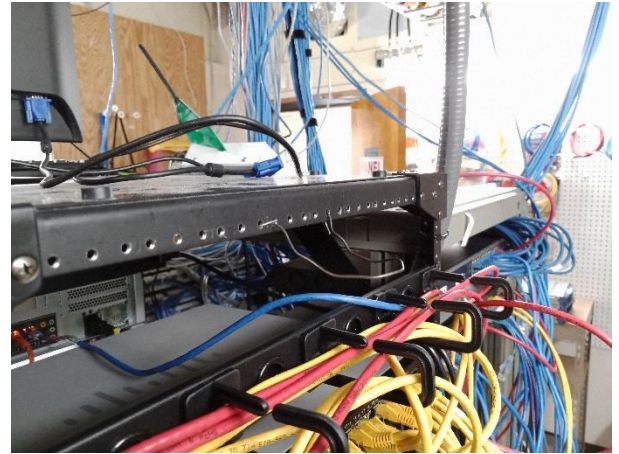
Technology, By John Haytas

2020 has been an extraordinary year on many levels, and OCWCOG has experienced extraordinary change with technology and technical services operations. Early in 2020, along with the rest of the world, OCWCOG rapidly responded to the global pandemic by transitioning nearly all of its workforce to telework by leveraging an aging technology infrastructure originally designed to support only a handful of remote connections. The OCWCOG Technical Services (TS) team adeptly scaled network services to accommodate the demand for remote work, adapted local onsite support processes, and deployed mobile workstations to better enable agency staff to deliver critical social services to our community.

Into the spring and summer, early successes started to combust as multiple, and venerable, agency information systems began to fail while team capacity was at an all-time low. Later in the summer, amidst the unprecedented wildfire crisis, TS arose from the ashes by accomplishing the following work:



- Rebuilt and bolstered TS team capacity
- Established an initiative to revitalize agency technology and information systems
- Removed and recycled nearly a ton of legacy analog phone cabling
- Renovated General Administration offices including network infrastructure improvements



- Replaced agency legacy firewalls at all three OCWCOG offices (Albany, Corvallis and Toledo) effectively increasing network security, reliability and capacity
- Replaced agency legacy virtual private networking (VPN) greatly enhancing and enabling telework while reducing complexity, simplifying administration, and improving both security and reliability of remote network connections.

Currently, OCWCOG is investing in modern hardware and software solutions to enable staff and contractors to securely leverage new tools and capabilities to accomplish daily tasks, evaluate and implement new work flow processes, and realize increases in efficiency, capacity and productivity. All of the investments to revitalize operations enable OCWCOG to target and support Senior and Disability Services, Community and Economic Development partnerships, and support our member local governments.

Human Resources, By Ryan Schulze

Recruitment

This year has seen a decrease in total number of recruitments as we stopped all recruitments for several weeks in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. In total we have had 35 recruitments as of November 20, 2019; 30 of those due to employee turnover. Of the 35 recruitments, three have been higher profile recruitments including the Executive Director, CED Director,

and Technology Services and Operations Director.

In the last year we have been able to successfully move all recruitments into Suti HR, reducing paper and providing a more modernized way for candidates to apply for positions at OCWCOG. This step has further streamlined the process of setting up interviews and data entry for new hires into our personnel database.

FMLA/OFLA

2020 has seen a significant increase in the use of FMLA as a result of COVID-19. In all of 2019 we approved 19 staff for use of FMLA leave for a total of 2,960 hours. Between January 1, 2020 and February 29, 2020 we approved 9 employees for a total of 539 hours; since that time, through October 31, 2020 we have approved an additional 58 em-

employees for FMLA leave primarily under the FFCRA for a total of 5,227 hours.

Other Accomplishments

A new state Background Check Unit, ORCHARDS system was recently rolled out. Although it increased data entry for HR staff, they adapted quickly and worked directly with BCU staff to work through challenges as they have come up.

Our Employee Handbook received a major overhaul this last year. This change brought some outdated policies up to current standards and added detail to others for increased clarity. This is the first step in making sure all of our policies are reviewed and updated periodically.

Other work efforts worth mentioning include HR support provided to Yachats to create new Position Descriptions for many of their employees and conduct a salary study to ensure they are able to assess how competitive their wages are in the market. We continue to engage with CSC as we look at the possibility of merging our organizations and are assisting with some HR services.

Perhaps most notable is our response and resiliency to the ongoing changes created by COVID-19 has been nothing short of amazing. We have had to adjust policy and procedure, stay on top of continually changing regulations and guidance and communicate throughout the

agency so employees are able to understand and adapt to these changes. In a matter of days we went from having only a handful of staff working remotely to approximately 80% of staff working remotely at least part of the time. We've worked closely with our Union Officers to evaluate staff safety and be as adaptable as possible offering leave benefits, flexible schedules and providing PPE before it became a mandate. The fact that we have not had an outbreak in our workforce I think can be attributed to these efforts and the teamwork of all our employees.

Community Economic Development, By Nick Meltzer

The Community and Economic Development Department has three new planning staff, which brings the department total for planning, transportation and lending team to ten people. Over the calendar year we have continued to build relationships with our members, who have in turn sought us out for new project opportunities. We end the year with nine long range projects underway. The Rideline team saw an initial steep decline in their trips during the shelter at home order; however, their brokerage trips have since rebounded to between 60 and 70% of normal. Rideline has been able to meet this fluctuation with a stable amount of current staffing and holding off on filling vacancies.

Some of our more exciting accomplishments and projects for Calendar Year 2020 are listed below:

- At the start of COVID-19 precautions in March, the entire transportation and planning team transitioned to remote work overnight.
- Amongst COVID, completed a transit feasibility study covering four counties and five transit agencies. Significant in-person engagement efforts were redirected to account for public health concerns and the draft report was subsequently used to apply for a pilot service between Junction City and McMinnville.
- Applied for and received \$382,000 in economic recovery planning monies from the Economic Development Administration.
- Completed an update to the 2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in less than four months.
- Drafted five letters from our advisory boards (CWACTION, CAMPO, AAMPO) related to state and federal funding. These letters provided a local voice to the conversation that otherwise wouldn't have been included.
- Initiated six transportation planning projects with local members using a combination of MPO and grant funds; projects they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford, including Philomath School Safety Circulation Plan, Adair Village Trails Plan, Jefferson Transportation System Plan, Albany Transit Service Implementation Plan, Corvallis Public Transit Agency Safety Plan, and Albany Public Transit Agency Safety Plan.
- Collaborated with partners in the Corvallis region to oversee the closure and shutdown of bikeshare operations and subsequently begin a new study to design a better functioning and more efficient bikeshare system.
- Secured a \$250,000 planning grant for Sweet Home.
- Provided planning and/or mapping support to six communities.
- On track to complete integration of transit information for all seven agencies across Lincoln, Benton and Linn Counties, including schedules, location of buses in real time, and mobile ticketing in January 2021. This type of integration is unique not just among Oregon, but across the country (i.e. neither the San Francisco nor the Seattle region has this level of integration).
- During the wild fires IHN approved Rideline to provide transport for members that were displaced to transport them to and from. We only received about half dozen different clients.

Departmental Updates

Shared Planning and Mapping Services

Staff planner Justin Peterson helped the City of Toledo apply for \$5,000 for an abbreviated version of a Buildable Lands Inventory (BLI). The study will help the city understand the amount of residential land available for development and prepare them for a full Housing Needs Analysis, which is required by state land use laws.

Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)

CAMPO kicked off the update to their 2043 Regional Transportation Plan, which we anticipate doing primarily in-house. The plan will identify how the region will grow over the next 20 years and the subsequent transportation improvements needed to accommodate growth.

Albany Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO)

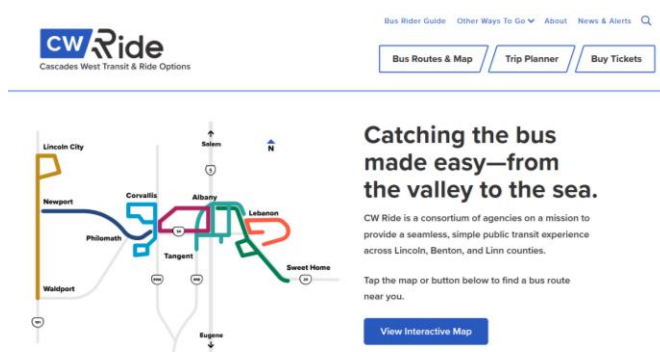
AAMPO is currently working on four transportation studies, including a Salem to Albany transit feasibility study, a transportation system plan update in Jefferson, a transit service implementation plan in Albany, and a regional bicycle/pedestrian plan.

Corvallis Bikeshare Study

A bi-lingual survey is available for community members interested in sharing their views about the future of bikeshare in Corvallis. The survey will be open through the holidays and more focused outreach will begin in 2021.

Seamless Transit Experience

This project explores how to coordinate traveler information, bus arrival times and mobile ticketing across the seven transit agencies in OCWCOG's region. The centralized website will be launched this month, and the automatic vehicle location (AVL) vendor has begun their work. Final negotiations with the mobile ticketing vendor are underway, with a contract expected in December. We anticipate launching the suite of new services in January 2021



Rideline

When the pandemic started, Rideline had the majority of our staff teleworking within a couple of weeks. Currently only 1 out of 12 Ride Line staff are working in the office. Our most common COVID-19 related ride are the preemptive test before major medical procedures that was given to approximately 200 riders given at a drive through.

Senior, Disability, and Community Services, By Randi Moore

SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING A PANDEMIC

- Within weeks of the Governor's Stay at Home order in March, 85% of Senior and Disability Services (SDS) and Community Services Programs (CSP) staff were working from home.
- Guidance from the State changed several times per day in order to adapt and meet consumer and programmatic needs including: accepting self-attestation of consumer information regarding resources, ceasing adverse actions on cases, and completing service assessments over the phone.
- Funding packages that provided for things such as emergency SNAP benefits and COVID funds through the Older Americans Act allowed us to expand benefits and services helping countless numbers of consumers.
- Alternatively, other programs faced cuts in funding based on concerns about decreases in State revenue. These included Veteran Services (10% reduction), ADRC mental health funding – PEARLS (cut), and workload reduction provided last legislative session (rolled back to 50% of increase).
- Care facilities closed to visitors which caused worry for both those in the facilities and those who have loved ones in facilities that they were now unable to visit.
- Meal sites were closed to congregate diners with those consumers transitioning to receiving home delivered meals, resulting in more meals served to those that felt unsafe/unable to go into the community to purchase food.
- The number of calls to the Aging and Disability Resource Connection call center increased significantly

with support for getting medical and food benefits being the most requested resource.

- OCWCOG Teams engaged in creative new partnerships to meet the needs of our communities. For example, working with Salvation Army to deliver weekly food boxes to homebound seniors identified

as food insecure. Volunteers were organized to load cars with fresh produce, frozen meat, dairy, bread, and canned goods for Linn, Benton, and Lincoln neighbors in need. A total of seventy-two unduplicated consumers received 497 front porch deliveries.

RECOGNIZING OUR VOLUNTEERS

AmeriCorps Seniors staff typically hold summer and fall recognition events for its 100 volunteers, but had to be creative this year. In August and October recognition parades were held drive-through style in the OCWCOG parking lot to celebrate National Service in a safe way. It was a fantastic time to greet each other, gift lunches and other goodies, and meet our new Executive Director!



Despite being in the middle of a Pandemic, OCWCOG Meals on Wheels volunteers work every day to make sure the most vulnerable of their neighbors have nutritious food. This year 350 Meals on Wheels volunteers delivered over 255,000 meals across our region, an increase of 20% over last year. As a small token of our appreciation OCWCOG provided all MOW volunteers with an “Essential Worker – Meals on Wheels Volunteer” t-shirt.



ELIGIBILITY TRANSFORMATION IS HERE

The ONE Integrated Eligibility system launched in our region November 1st. This new way of doing business provides consumers a “no wrong door” entry to access medical, food, and cash benefits. OCWCOG believes that ONE will be good for many Oregonians, and is working to track and assess that none of our more vulnerable aging adult consumers fall through the cracks in this large statewide transition.

WILDFIRE RESPONSE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Two large wildfires devastated communities in our region in September. Staff immediately mobilized to connect with consumers to assist with providing information about resources. Within a few days workers had called more than 670 service consumers and connected with them to assure their well-being. Staff also worked closely with Lincoln County long term care communities displaced by the fire to make sure their residents were safe and as comfortable as possible. Sadly, 25 consumers, including one limited license AFH, lost their homes to the wildfires. Countless others were displaced in shelters and hotels until they could return home. SDS staff worked closely with evacuation shelters to provide evacuees with special needs with the resources and supplies required. Volunteers from the Senior Companion Program reached out to over 150 non-service consumers in the affected areas to see if they needed resources or support. We are still trying to support those who lost their homes from the wildfires, and continue to touch base with them.

VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS WORKING ON ACCREDITATION

Molly Murphy passed her state accreditation test and is a fully accredited Veteran Service Officer. Curtis Nelson passed the “mile stone test”, the half way point for state accreditation. Curtis also attended the National Association of Veteran Service Officers annual training conference virtually and is now nationally accredited.

STAND BY ME OREGON COACHES STARTING TO WORK WITH FAMILIES

It's been a busy year for the financial empowerment program, Stand By Me (\$BM) Oregon. A lot of work has been accomplished in just a few months including: entering into contracts with partner agencies, getting coaches hired and trained, and now starting to have coaches work their first clients. Thank you to the community partners where coaches are embedded - Kidco Headstart and Strengthening Rural Families. OCWCOG also has an embedded coach working to support the staff of long term care communities, and the idea of a Veteran specific coach is still a priority.

Additionally, the Cascades West Community Development Corporation (CWCDC), a non-profit Board that can be used to support the rollout of future programs that bring economic strength to our region, but now is focused on stabilizing and moving \$BM forward, is fully up and running with six new dedicated Board members.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Supporting community partners and leveraging resources is a major component of the Older Americans Act. The Senior and Disability Services Advisory Councils are pleased to announce the disbursement of \$73,000 in grants funds to seven local agencies who are working to improve the quality of life of seniors and people with disabilities. These funds were directed to agencies that were providing programs to promote healthy aging, reduce isolation and loneliness, and increase the overall health and wellbeing of the people they serve. The agencies that received grant funds are: The Mid Valley YMCA, Grace Center Adult Day Services, The Samaritan Health Education Department, The Albany Senior Center, the Newport Community Center, Lumina Hospice, and North End Senior Solutions Adult Day Services.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

We will be submitting our four year Area Plan to the State Community Services and Supports Unit. Goals and objectives were developed around the focus areas of Elder Justice, Nutrition, Transportation, Family Caregivers, Native Elders, Information and Referral and Housing. The Plan will be our "playbook" for the next four years.

Joint Council members from the Senior and Disability Services Advisory Committees are once again excited about providing advocacy around issues that affect seniors and people with disabilities in the 2021 Legislative session. Though this session will no doubt look different than in years past, we appreciate their diligence in supporting our programs and the consumers we serve.

Current Job Openings

- Assistant Loan Officer, Albany
- Case Manager, Toledo
- Contracts Coordinator, Albany
- Community & Economic Dev Director, Albany
- Senior Accountant, Albany

To learn more, or apply, please visit:

<http://www.ocwcog.org/careers>

Contact Information

Seniors & Disabilities Service
(541) 967-8630

Rideline
(541) 924-8738

Economic Development
(541) 924-8465

General Administration
(541) 967-8720



ADRC
(800) 638-0510

Resources

Free COVID testing for Linn County Residents

Linn County residents can get free COVID-19 tests every Friday in December at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center from 1 to 7 p.m. at the fairgrounds, 3700 Knox Butte Road E. in Albany. To register for an appointment, go to at www.doineed-acovid19gtest.com. One person is allowed per appointment, and each person must register individually.

The tests are drive-through and are self-administered, with results available in two to three days.