

Detective: Grants Pass is 'wasteland of criminals'

*Longtime officer quits force
amid frustration about the
city's criminal justice system*

By **SHAUN HALL**
Grants Pass Daily Courier

Grants Pass police Detective Mike Vorberg has called it quits, saying he is disappointed with the state of the local criminal justice system.

"Evil is winning here," Vorberg said in a resignation letter. "There is a profound amount of heartbreak that comes with watching your hometown become a wasteland of criminals. For the first time in my life, I no longer want to be a resident here."

Vorberg has gone to work for the police department in Tualatin. He was born and raised locally, graduated from Grants Pass High School and went to work for the Josephine County Sheriff's Office at age 21. He worked eight years there and worked the past seven years with the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety. His resignation letter is dated Jan. 21.



Vorberg

"Evil is
winning here."

Wasteland

from Page 1A

"In my 15 years of being a cop, I have investigated thousands of drug crimes, hundreds of deaths and dozens of murders," Vorberg wrote. "I have been in over 200 meth labs and have fought for my life on a few occasions. I have seen murdered children, and unspeakable things that people should never have to see. I have been shot at, punched, kicked, spit on, bled on, and called every name in the book. And still, I would proudly die for the people we serve."

But then came last May's defeat of a Josephine County public safety levy.

"The people we serve shocked me," he continued. "In our most desperate hour of need for help and support, they told us they did not support us. They voted no to justice, an idea as basic a necessity as shelter. They voted no to a functioning jail and prosecutor's office. They effectively made the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety an engine with no car."

Justice system services have been slashed in the wake of cuts in federal subsidies to the county and last spring's failure of a property tax proposal to fill the resulting gap. Now, the Josephine County Jail holds 100 inmates, down from 150 a year ago and a total potential capacity of 262; and sheriff's patrols have been cut to 40 hours per week, with Oregon State Police filling some of the gap. Last fall, prosecutions dropped by about half of previous levels, although staffing has increased slightly. Also, the county's juve-

nile detention center and shelter closed, with rented detention beds in Medford now being used to fill that gap.

Vorberg said the jail could not take people arrested for burglary, assault, robbery and drug dealing.

"We have had hundreds of cases of legitimate criminal charges rejected by the District Attorney's Office due to budget cuts and staffing cuts," he said.

"It is troubling how passionately certain members of the voting majority could fight so hard against us, the 'good guys,'" he continued. "For most citizens, crime is out of sight and out of mind."

"For us with our thumbs on the pulse of crime at home, it is ever in our sight and doubly on our mind."

District Attorney Stephen Campbell praised Vorberg.

"He was one of the best detectives I've worked with," he said. "To lose him is not good."

Vorberg said he regretted leaving a department he loves, but that he has "another family I must think of first." He estimated it would take generations for the county to recover.

Vorberg will be replaced on the department's five-person detective division by former Detective Pete Jenista.

"Mike's loss was difficult," division supervisor Sgt. Dan Evans said. "We lost a lot of experience. A lot of what we do back here is about connections. You lose that."

Reach Daily Courier reporter
Shaun Hall at 541-474-3813 or
shall@thedailycourier.com.