

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25, 2024

Jefferson County Sheriff Joe Nole has resigned early from his post, ending a 34-year career with Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. There wasn't any one thing that spelled retirement for Nole; he simply realized it was finally time. Nole said, "I've been with the sheriff's office 31 years, been sheriff for the last six, and I got this feeling that is it. It's time to retire and spend some time not working."

One reason Nole gave for it being time is that he feels like the sheriff's office is in a good place, where his leadership isn't as necessary. Nole said, "When I first ran for sheriff, it was, you know, building the morale of the department back to where it should be and making it a place where people want to work and want to come to work." Andy Pernsteiner, the current undersheriff, will temporarily assume the role of interim sheriff, effective January 3, 2025. Pernsteiner will serve until the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners (BoCC) appoints a replacement. According to state law, the county commissioners have up to 60 days to appoint a successor, putting the deadline to select an appointee in March.

Since Nole is a Democrat, the Central Committee of the Jefferson County Democrats will provide the BoCC with a list of three nominees. The county commissioners will then select the new sheriff from those nominees. The appointed sheriff will serve out the rest of Nole's term, which ends in 2026. Nole is no stranger to this process. The BoCC appointed him interim sheriff when Sheriff Tony Hernandez took a job as police chief of Milton, Washington. At that time, Nole wasn't interested in running for sheriff, and Dave Stanko took over the role when he was elected in 2014. Nole then ran against Stanko in 2018, winning 62% of the vote. He was elected sheriff for a second term in 2022, defeating a fellow Democrat, Detective Art Frank, who was Stanko's undersheriff.

If you are interested in the role of sheriff, you can apply by emailing a letter of intent and resume to the Jefferson County Democrats at info@jeffcodemocrats.com and by completing an applicant questionnaire. Letters of recommendation are welcomed. The deadline to submit is Jan. 13, 2025.

As temperatures begin to bottom out, the annual Point in Time count of the local homeless population is a top priority. Viola Ware, director of Housing and Community Development for the Olympic Community Action Program, better known as OlyCAP, has already been spearheading this year's Point in Time count for months. Ware said, "I know that in Jefferson County, one of the concerns is making sure to take a very comprehensive picture." Ware has taken part in the count in other cities in Washington since 2012. She now brings that wealth of experience here for her first count in Jefferson County. She's already ahead of the game, too, as she began reaching out to the local network of housing providers and service organizations in November before the Department of Commerce had even begun providing guidance.

Communities that receive federal funding for homelessness are required to conduct an annual count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night. Because of the spread-out nature of rural living, however, Jefferson County allows a week to find out where people slept on January 30. This year, Ware's team includes people from Bayside Housing & Services, Dove House, Discovery Behavioral Health, Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates, the LEAD Team, and more. Ware said, "We already have commitments from the Brinnon and Quilcene Fire Departments to consider hosting magnet events." Magnet events are stationary locations where people experiencing homelessness can come and be counted and receive services. Ware said,

“Just a place to come and get warm and see a friendly face and participate and the count but also maybe receive some services while you’re there too.”

To ensure as many people as possible are counted, Ware is gathering additional volunteers to help staff the various outreach and magnet events. For the last four years, the numbers of homeless have fluctuated slightly but stayed around 130 or so with 132 persons counted as homeless in 2024. Before the pandemic, however, numbers changed dramatically. In 2019, there were 102 people counted in Jefferson County, but in 2018 there were only 59. Yet in 2017, 187 people were included in the count.

Ware hopes the decrease from 2017 to today shows that despite the ups and downs, the numbers indicate that more people are in housing. Ware pointed to one project in particular as an explanation. Ware said, “We had 7th Haven and threw 43 households into housing.” Of course, one apartment building doesn’t solve the housing crisis. Ware said, “The housing market is really troubling and the wait lists, or the wait times, or the times people stay in shelters have grown.” Those interested in volunteering to help capture the most complete picture of homelessness in Jefferson County can email Ware and her team at jeffcopit@olycap.org

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the *Jefferson County Beacon*. This is Nigel O’Shea. Happy Holidays. Thanks for listening.