

Headlight-Herald

SERVING TILLAMOOK

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'Tommy Tsunami' set emergency readiness bar

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TILLAMOOK — As the tsunami-preparedness drills in Manzanita and Pacific City ran their course this Tuesday, their success, in part, can be credited to the groundwork laid by recently retired director of Tillamook County's Division of Emergency Management Tom

Manning.

They don't call him "Tommy Tsunami" for nothing.

As County Commissioner Mark Labhart explained, "He got this nickname because of all the work Tom did to improve our countywide tsunami warning system. I can say for sure that Tom was the lead person in getting the surplus Trojan Nuclear Plant sirens to Tillamook Coun-

ty."

Manning picked up 62 of the sirens for a total of \$1, and with the help of volunteers and the cities, got the first of the county's sirens installed about five years ago.

These were fine for the time, but it was soon clear the warning system would have to be upgraded. Manning said he applied for a hefty grant for replacements,

and that eventually all of the county's warning sirens will be replaced.

"Tom is the main reason Tillamook County was designated a Tsunami Ready County (three years ago) — one of the first in the nation," Labhart said.

"Hawaii beat us by two weeks," Manning said.

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Still sticking around

Although Manning officially retired the first of last month and is replaced as Emergency Management director by Gordon McCraw, he's still going to be on the job for a while.

Manning's grant-writing prowess that has proved so lucrative in attracting federal and state money to the county's disaster-preparedness efforts also resulted in funding to keep him on the county's emergency preparedness team for a while on a part-time basis to assist McCraw. He'll also be working a few days a week in Clatsop County to assist in disaster planning and preparedness.

"I want to continue to be in the community and support it in any way I can," Manning said.

"This will allow a good transition from Tom to Gordon at no additional cost to the county," Labhart said.

Grant writing expertise

Manning's knack for securing funding has been a huge asset to the county, according to County Commissioner Tim Josi.

As he put it, "Tom came to Tillamook County with an understanding of how the federal government works with emergency matters," he said. "His expertise allowed us to tap into Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resources when they were desperately needed. Because of his expertise, our flood relief work has benefited greatly."

Labhart concurred, noting, "He also had great skill in being able to secure grant funds after flood events to help businesses, homeowners and dairy farmers. He knew how to weave his way through the federal and state permitting process to 'get-er-done.'"

Manning, 55, had already retired from one career in statewide emergency management in Carson City, Nev., when he started his Tillamook County job in November

1998.

Flood leadership

Within a week of being on the job, Tillamook County experienced another of its monumental floods — "and I hit the ground running," he said.

In fact, over the nearly 10 years he's been on the job, the county has experienced five major presidential disaster declarations, he said.

In that time, there has been a lot of effort directed at flood-control projects — pumps, flood gates and, most recently, the new Wilson River flood spillway, a major milestone for the Oregon Solutions Tillamook project.

The county commissioners have frequently expressed

appreciation for Manning's role — both proactive and reactive — in dealing with county flooding issues.

Labhart express the sentiments of many when he said, "Tom provided great leadership in helping the county through our many floods over the years. He would make sure the warnings got out prior to the events. He would help coordinate during the event, and he would assist with the post-disaster cleanup."

He also cited Manning's skill in helping "groups such as the Tillamook Bay Habitat and Estuary Improvement District, the Red Cross and the cities with solving issues around flooding and other emergency issues."

Those sentiments are also shared by Commissioner Charles Hurliman, who observed that Manning "helped through the bureaucracy." He added that Manning came through not just during flooding incidents, but in "preventative action" as well.

It was for all these reason that, upon Manning's formal retirement, his supervisor Sheriff Todd Anderson presented

him with a Meritorious Service Award for, as Anderson put it, "outstanding service to the public for years of working for the community and connecting with the community."

He, too, pointed out Manning's ability to help in "finding our way through the federal system — he was able to cut through the bureaucracy."

Support appreciated

Looking back on the past 10 years, Manning said, "I'd like to have seen some projects for dredging some of our rivers as a demonstration project to show that it will work." But he's grateful for the successes, such as the Oregon Solutions projects under way and the environmental restorations accomplished — and, of course, the tsunami siren system.

He said he has appreciated the support of the county commissioners, working on projects with the help of Nehalem Marine, and the support of the congressional delegation and State Sen. Betsy Johnson and State Rep. Deborah Boone.

As for parting advice for the public, he urged self-reliance and preparation for the worst — stocking up with food and emergency supplies, as well as buying flood and earthquake insurance.

His successor, McCraw, "will do a fine job," Manning said, adding that the key is to "listen to the folks and their concerns — find solutions to the questions and problems."

The county "still has a long way to go in preparedness," Manning said, "but we're making a dent in it."

He and his wife, Karen, who have four grown children and six grandchildren, could ultimately become a husband and wife team working with FEMA, Manning said, noting that his wife has worked as an emergency services volunteer.

It's hard to beat the satisfaction that comes with "helping someone who's in need," Manning said.

As for all those accolades, Manning remains modest about his career accomplishments.

With a chuckle, he said, "I don't walk on water — I wade through it."



TOM MANNING

