

John Hartner
Director of Department of Community Correction
May 19th, 2005, 1:30 p.m.

Kirbie Hoyt: The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is John Hartner. The interviewer is Kirbie Hoyt. The interview took place at the Washington County Community Corrections on May 19th, at 1:30 pm.
How long have you been working with the Hillsboro law enforcement?

John Hartner: Well, my title is the Director of the Department of Community Corrections, and I came to Washington County in 1990. So, 15 years I think.

K: What are the most common crimes in Hillsboro, and what is the change over time?

J: Well, there hasn't been a whole lot of change in the most common crimes. Still the most common crimes in Hillsboro, and in the state of Oregon, primarily evolve around theft and drug abuse. And following those two the most prominent crimes would be domestic violence and then DUII offences.

K: Do you think the crimes are connected in any way? Like the drug abuses to the theft?

J: Oh, absolutely. I would venture to say that probably 80% of all theft cases probably have a drug-related issue associated with them. For example, we know that no matter what people who come through our office are placed on supervision, that 86% of them have drug or alcohol problems.

K: Has the drug and alcohol use changed over time since 1990?

J: Well, what we see every few years is more a change in drugs. Like a few years ago, cocaine was a little bit higher abused than it is today. Methamphetamine is the highest used drug today, other than marijuana. But still the most prominent drug that's abused is alcohol.

K: Has there been a change in gang activity?

J: That too, has gone up and down a little bit in Washington County. About ten years ago, gang activity or people joining gangs was on the rise. And then, you had school systems and communities putting more prevention programs in place. And we were also able to work with parents and give parents a lot more information. We then saw gang membership kind of tapering off for a number of years. And now it looks like, unfortunately that it might be growing a little bit again. We right now are in community discussions, all of law enforcement, to talk about ways that we can put things in place that might effectively reduce gang activity again, and the desire of kids to join gangs.

K: What kind of programs, that you had mentioned, do you think have worked with the gangs?

J: Well, years ago, most school had after school programs. For not just athletes, not just the successful athletes in the school, but for all sorts of students. They would have polo clubs, or French clubs, a variety of different things like that. A lot of those programs have been dropped. So, you have more kinds now, I should say more youth now, in our nation, that are unsupervised in the afternoon between the time school lets and between the time when parents come home. As a matter of fact that period of time, from about three o'clock to six o'clock, has become the highest crime time for young people. It used to be that you saw advertisements on TV that said "Parents, it's eleven o'clock, do you know where your children are at?" Now, the big issue is "It's three o'clock in the afternoon. Do you know what your children are doing?" And, so we see a lot more experimentation with crime, drugs, alcohol, and teen sex in the afternoon than we do late at night. So, I'd recommend to communities, you know, to try to get the school systems to get after-school activities in place. Not just athletic activities, but a whole variety of activities. Sponsorship of boys and girls clubs too, they also run wonderful after-school programs. And some churches have an interest in running after-school programs too. So filling that time responsibly, I think, is one of the things we can do.

K: Do you think budget cuts in our school and law enforcement have affected that at all?

J: I think they've affected it dramatically. I think it's a real shame in this state that schools are so under-funded. Kids who are in school, who are at risk now longer have the counselors or the programs available to help them stay on track so that they are successful learners and complete high school. The drop-out rate in Washington County is entirely too high. A few years ago, when funding was much better than it is today, they were actually lowering the high school drop-out rate. Now, it's on the rise again. We have it within our ability to work with kids at risk, and keep them in school, but we're just not applying the resources that are necessary to make that happen right now. I personally think it's selfish, and we should change the way we're operating.

K: What do you think the biggest change in the Hillsboro community has been since you began?

J: Well, the biggest change from my point of view, and for government's overall point of view, has been the increase in population. Since the time I came to Hillsboro, and to Washington County, the population in the county has almost doubled. In 1990, we were right around 220,000, and today we're verging on 500,000 residents. And so, the increase in services that come with the expansion of the population is a big effort.

K: With the increase in population, have you seen or been aware of any racial profiling or change of that in Hillsboro?

J: I myself, no I haven't seen it. But, I know some people in the Hispanic community believe that they might be unfairly targeted. I think we in the criminal justice system have a responsibility to look at that closely and assess our practices and make sure that that's not occurring.

K: How do you feel the media conveys crimes and paroles?

J: The media, for the most part, focuses on one aspect of the criminal justice system. That's the arrest of individuals, conviction of individuals, and seldom do you see the media reporting on programs that are preventive in nature, or doing a good job of letting the community know, for example kids that are in trouble with drugs or alcohol, where they can go for help. There's excitement in just reporting the police crime aspect and I think there's also a responsibility to let citizens know about where they can get help and encourage the communities to make more treatment available to people who need it and that's a role they need to play a little bit more.

K: What kinds of crimes receive parole?

J: Everything. Your question might be "What kind of crimes are people placed on probation?". There's a difference between probation and parole.

K: What is the difference between the two?

J: If you're placed on probation, it means you've been found guilty, or pleaded guilty. And instead of going to prison, you are placed in the community on a period of supervision. That's probation. Parole is where when you're found guilty of a crime or you plead guilty to a crime, you go to the penitentiary first, and serve some time in the penitentiary. Then you're released back into the community for a period of supervision. So that's what parole is. So, even your most serious crimes, where you go to the penitentiary, and are released back into the community, even the most serious, at some point will be on supervision. Unless you're one of the very few that might receive a sentence for life in a penitentiary, people are going to be coming back and living in the community. So, it's the most serious crimes, of course, where people go to the penitentiaries first, and those are usually person-to-person crimes, where someone has hurt someone else during the commission of that crime. Or there's robbery, or assault, or a sex offense, those are the most likely scenarios where someone will end up in the penitentiary. And then the property offences, the lesser drug offenses, where people have smaller amounts of drugs, are where people are placed on probation.

K: What makes the difference in preventing parolees from re-offending?

J: There are four primary reasons why offenders re-offend. The first is a person's own thinking patterns. If a person, for example, believe that drugs are good for them, that's going to affect the way they behave. Or if a person believes "If I take

someone's property, it's not going to make a difference because it's covered by insurance", that's going to affect the way someone behaves. So the first thing that affects criminal behavior is that individual's criminal attitudes and beliefs. Being able to change those attitudes and beliefs is essential for reducing crime. The second thing is who someone hangs around with. Your friends influence your behavior, so if you can have people who have been in trouble with the law hanging around with other people who haven't been involved in the law, the pro-social, constructive people, like church groups, or recovery groups, that will also reduce crime. The third thing is people who are impulsive, who have the personality characteristic of impulsivity, and aren't able to think through issues before, they just react when they're faced with something, those people too, get into more trouble with the law. If you can teach them to control that impulsivity, that reduced crime. The fourth thing is chemical dependency. That contributes to crime too. If we have good treatment programs, that can address impulsivity, and criminal attitudes, and chemical dependency, we reduce crime, and our community corrections department is an example of that. We've seen a lot of people change their lives.

K: What are some common misconceptions about the parole system?

J: That's a good question, I'm not sure I have a good answer. Since I work in the system so much, I don't think that much about what a lay citizen what might always know about. I think few lay people in the community know that probation and parole can be very successful. If people are given the resources to help people make constructive change in their lives, I think that's probably the biggest misconception – people don't think that people can change. Where as from where we sit, we see a lot of people making changes.

K: What about the law enforcement in general? Are there any major misconceptions about it?

J: I think law enforcement is actually fairly straight forward. That people understand if you support law enforcement, and if they're able to intervene successfully and arrest people who are responsible for crimes, that that's the first step, and hopefully changing that life.

K: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

J: Well, I think we have the capacity in the United States to have much lower crime rates than we do. I think the more we invest in prevention programs, the fewer people we're going to have falling into the criminal justice system. One of the big problems we face today is that lack of supervisions. Teens, primarily in the junior high and high school area, where years ago, we as a society used to provide a lot more supervision of our children. We not only provide less supervision, because today there are more families that are divorced, or today there are more families where both parents are working. At the same time we provided less supervision, our kids are exposed to more. When I was in high school, I didn't have people selling drugs on my high

school campus. I didn't have those temptations. I think we need to give the schools a lot more support so more children will not fall prey to things that are currently being offered. We'll have more of an opportunity to complete high school, which is a benchmark, that statistically, will show we can reduce crime rates in our community. Whatever we can do to keep our children on track, have them dealing successfully with their problems, when issues come up, and have all of them, or more of them be successful learners, it's hard, and I just think we need to put the tax resources, make them available so that happens to all of our youth.

K: What kind of parole programs are there for any kind of crime?

J: Well, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of our people have drug and alcohol problems. So, we have a lot of treatment programs that deal with drugs and alcohol, both out-patient programs and some in-patient programs. We also have a lot of people who have some level of mental illness. When we can address the mental illness, that makes it more likely that they'll be able to successfully complete the probation or parole. We also have people who have severe angering issues, who don't know how to control their tempers, and we have some successful programs that help people do that - learn how to manage their anger. We have domestic violence programs. That being a much bigger issue in our community than most people recognize. We also have education programs. These programs, the majority of people pay for them themselves. Or else, they're subsidized by us. There are a few people who are totally indigent and just don't have the resources. We try to make the programs available to those people.

K: Thank you very, very much for your interview.