

ReMARKable Rider Day

August 3
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Meet Yamhill County Commissioner Rick Olson



View from the Top by Cynthia Thompson, YC Transit Manager

A life of community service is only part of the story for Rick Olson. He has been an integral part of Yamhill County and the City of McMinnville for sixty-two years. Born in Portland Oregon his family moved to McMinnville when he was five years old. His father wanted to move from Portland, a city with a population then of about 160,000. He wanted his children to grow up in a more rural environment where everyone knows their neighbor. A community that was friendly, slower paced, with that small-town feel was the perfect place to call home.

“When I moved to McMinnville, there were about 8700 residents and one flashing yellow traffic light at 3rd Street and Baker.”

Rick’s parents were small business owners who grew their business in McMinnville doing things the McMinnville way. Their business was McMinnville Candy Company. It was a wholesale company that sold candy, tobacco, and fountain drink supplies locally and beyond. He operated many routes and vehicles and the first three locations for the business were in downtown McMinnville.

Rick attended St. James Catholic school and graduated from McMinnville High School. He says he went to the “University of Uncle Sam”, shortly after graduating from high school he joined the Navy during the Vietnam war. He was in the Naval Aviation Branch. Starting out transporting reservists on weekends and flying them to various state side and out of country locations. He spent time on an anti-submarine patrol aircraft including the P2V Neptune and P3 Orion. He then was assigned as part of an A7 Corsair Jet attack squadron based at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California now part of joint base Mugu/Hueneme outside of Oxnard. Rick likes to say, **“I spent eight years in the Navy and never set foot on a ship.”**

When Commissioner Olson returned home, he dedicated himself to a life of service and leadership. He worked for Oregon Mutual Insurance for thirty-two years and spent two years at Head Start in Yamhill County. In addition to a full-time job, he served on numerous McMinnville committees such as the planning commission and budget committee. Rick served for a time on the Airport Commission revamping the Commission to be more responsive to the needs of a growing city and was ex-officio Chair of McMinnville’s city owned Public Utility McMinnville Water and Light. He served two consecutive terms as the President of the Chamber of Commerce. He was one of the founding board members for McMinnville Community Media, a local public access cable channel. Rick spent four years as McMinnville City Council President, eight years as Mayor of McMinnville and as a Councilor and as Mayor was instrumental in the formation of McMinnville Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) and Visit McMinnville. He has been a County Commissioner for four years. Commissioner Olson has served as the Chairman for the Board of Commissioners and is the Board liaison to the transit system and serves on the Yamhill County Transit Advisory Committee representing the Board. While also being heavily involved the development of the

Newberg/Dundee bypass, and as a Board member of the Mid-Willamette Area Commission on Transportation worked on all levels to improve and maintain the Mid Valley’s Transportation Infrastructure which he feels is critical for the economic development and livability of Yamhill County, it’s cities, and the region.

A strong advocate for public transportation, Rick was involved from the very beginning with the Yamhill County Transit Development Plan. Providing a blueprint for the future of YCT was a priority for him.

“I am proud of our work to complete the Transit Plan and I do not want to see it sit on a shelf. If it continues to serve as our guide, YCT will reach its goals. I see the value a quality transit system can provide to a community. There are economic, environmental, and social benefits. I think one of the greatest values is what it offers to our most vulnerable residents, to the under privileged, low income, seniors, and people with disabilities. I want to see more Dial-A-Ride services and enhanced campaigns to reach everyone in our communities who need transportation, mobility, and access to life-sustaining services.”

When I asked Rick what inspires him, I could hear the enthusiasm in his voice.

“Government can move very slow. So, I think nothing is more satisfying than when plans, ideas or projects come to fruition. Seeing it happen on the street, seeing something finished that citizens have wanted or needed become reality. That is satisfying.”

Something you may not know about Commissioner Olson is that he is a passionate collector of PEZ Candy Dispensers. He has been collecting since he was ten years old and has one of the largest collections with over 5000 dispensers including 14 die cast PEZ NASCAR race car dispensers.

In closing I asked what Rick was most proud of and he quickly responded, my children! He has four grand kids and five boys who are on their own paths to success. ***“I am also proud of representing the County as Commissioner and I will miss it when I retire at the end of this year.”***

I expect we will see Rick continuing to serve this community in other capacities for many years to come. It is people like Rick Olson who are ReMARKable and make Yamhill County such a wonderful place to live, work and visit.