

Todd Cunningham is Making a difference

story & photos: RANDY SANDERS

It's difficult keeping up with new facility manager Todd Cunningham, hired less than a year ago. With many balls in the air, there's a particular focus on saving citizens of Columbia County thousands of dollars each year by evaluating County vendor contracts. Todd Cunningham -- or T.C. -- has already managed to save citizens \$58,000 on one particular janitorial contract. At this rate, he could save the County enough money to pay his own salary just by watching the bottom line! A solid accomplishment for anyone regardless of working for the government or the private sector. T.C. is quick to add, all contracts really should be monitored.



“It takes going through them and finding out where we can get great products for the best value. Columbia County has been a good customer, something vendors will consider. This is my job. I’ll work to save our citizens money when I can do so. There won’t be savings in every instance, but from time to time, we’ll find savings.” T.C. is quick to point out that saving the county money isn’t something to thrust a fist into the air over. In fact, he requested that I not reveal the name of the company who agreed to the \$58,000 savings.

“I don’t want to rub this in. They were willing to work with us and that’s what’s important. It would be irresponsible to say, ‘hey, so and so company just gave us a big break!’ They have other contracts out there as well. No, they’ve negotiated with us in good faith and I appreciate that. We’ll take the savings and move on.”

The discipline and style T.C. brings to Columbia County stems from both an honorable military career and prior civilian experience in building management. As an Army Staff Sergeant (E-6) and combat engineer he specialized in: framing, concrete, masonry, asphalt, heavy timber and steel construction projects. Now T.C.’s sons are also answering the country’s call for military duty. The oldest son is a

Purple Heart veteran disabled by an IED (improvised explosive device). The second oldest son is serving in Afghanistan and the third son -- at seventeen-years-old -- has already sworn in for duty. Meanwhile the youngest son is still attending high school.

Besides construction experience in the military, T.C. had a productive, 22-year career in California Building Management (34-years total) with impressive results. Awards include: *CBO (California Building Officials) Building Official of the Year Award 2012, Porcelain Pony Award 2011, Outstanding Contributions Award 2011* and the *Presidents Award 2009*. T.C. served as Vice President of the Sacramento Valley Association of Building Officials in 2009 and President in 2010. Also a graduate of Butte College's Building Inspection Technology Program, he holds 21 licenses, including 18 of the International Code Councils certification credentials in various inspection and code enforcement categories.

Credentials like these might stereo-type a man as a gruff and tough individual with no personality. However, nothing is farther from the truth when describing Todd Cunningham. Friendly, approachable, a keen sense of humor and a quick smile are the right adjectives used to characterize this man. But more importantly, his

stellar communication and people skills are what enables him to get things accomplished. All great managers understand this concept. One example is how he dealt with tenant situations in his previous position.

"The last thing I wanted was a displaced tenant.

I'm a solutions guy; we can always find solutions to problems if we go at it in the right way." Now with employees working under him, T.C. uses that same approach to motivate and get the most from them.

"I want employees to want to work for me. I ask them how they're doing? Do they have the things needed to do the job? It's important for me that when I'm charging up a hill, I don't have to look back. A great relationship with your employees means they tend to enjoy their jobs and want to work for you. That's passed down to the citizens we serve. Our employees are the best and they enjoy serving Columbia County. I love this community, I love this job. I want to make things better."

One of the other projects T.C. has taken on is the preservation of the old clock sitting in the tower on top of the County Courthouse. This old Seth-Thomas Clock Company relic, circa 1911, is in the process of complete refurbishment by a team of brilliant volunteers -- including industrial engineer Steve Topazz -- who will return this great historical time piece to its original order. The funds needed will be gathered



***"I love this
community,***

***I love this job. I want
to make things better***

TODD CUNNINGHAM

through private donations. *Editor's note: We will continue following this story and produce a feature explaining the whole project. Keep reading Conversations.*

A

nother of T.C.'s projects is refurbishing the Courthouse flag pole, complete with a full size Old Glory. On Memorial Day he flew the enormous Old Glory -- the same size of flags flying over the White House, Pentagon and the Capitol Building in Washington - - over the Courthouse. Because of possible wind damage, this flag will only fly on special holidays. Flag Day and the Fourth of July will be the next possible occasions to see this beautiful banner dance in the wind over the Courthouse.

Then there's *Code Corner*. This practical idea should be very popular with professional contractors and weekend warriors alike. Quick building construction and maintenance ideas for code enforcement helps citizens find solutions fast and easy. One of the places you can read *Code Corner* will be on the County's Face book page:

<http://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaCountyOregon>.



“Let’s make it easy for people to get their permits and get answers. I want our inspectors to be licensed in as many fields as possible. We want people to come in here, get what they need and leave having a positive experience.”

The “positive experience” theme resonates in everything T.C. attempts to accomplish. In fact, he even encourages his employees to smile when they walk through the Courthouse.

“Citizens sitting on the second floor may be waiting for court to start or to speak with someone at the County. When they see someone walk by wearing a County employee badge, they know they work for the County. That’s an opportunity to provide a positive image for the County. I always smile or sometimes even ask to them if they need help in locating someone or perhaps find something. At that moment I represent Columbia County government. I want them to walk away knowing we’re here to help them as much as possible. I want citizens to believe in us and have a positive experience each time they must do business with the county. A smile goes a long way when we’re representing the County. It’s all about providing great customer service; that’s what we do here.”