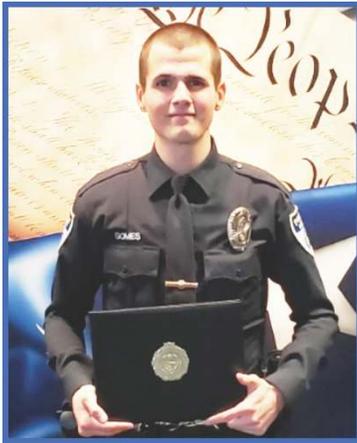


The People Who Make Ashland Special

"Appreciating Every Day" with Officer Riley Gomes, Ashland Police Department Patrolman

By **Jordan Pease** - March 2021 Issue of Locals Guide Magazine- Ashland, Oregon



One of Ashland's finest is also among Ashland's newest, arriving here six years ago as a career-focused college student. At age 24, **Officer Riley Gomes** joined Ashland's Police Force following his two-year stint completing SOU's Criminal Justice Program in 2017. Lately, he's working the night shift, managing an awkwardly odd schedule that baffles his family and friends. It's actually a perk of the job that affords him three- and four-day weekends to spend time with them though. Or on the golf course, or out in nature with his girlfriend, between long shifts in his cruiser out serving our community.

You wonder what calls a person to become a professional community servant. What are the personality traits and values a person has that inclines them? During our enjoyable hour together, Officer Gomes shares a personal side and reveals some clues. And he offers a real privilege for us to get to know another wonderful person here in Ashland. Dedicating his life to being of service, with the majority of his career already devoted to our especially urgent needs during these trying times of pandemic and **Almeda Fire** recovery.

I'm delighted you accepted the invitation to let the community get to know you better, thank you.

First, please tell your "how I got to Ashland" story? "That was 2015. I was attending **Klamath Community College** getting my Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice and looking to go to a four-year program to pursue my Bachelor's Degree. I did some ride-alongs with one of the police officers over in **Klamath Falls**. He had mentioned that his daughter went to **Southern Oregon University** and worked for Campus Public Safety. He said she really enjoyed their Criminal Justice Program, and that CPS offered free housing to student workers. And me, trying to be financially savvy, I thought that was a great opportunity. Also, I'd never been to Ashland before that. And it reminds me of the town I grew up in, **Arcata, California**, so I thought hey, let's give that a go! I loved the town. I loved that I could live on campus and walk anywhere in town. Lithia Park is beautiful. There's Emigrant Lake, Applegate Lake, Grizzly Peak, not to mention Mt. Ashland right nearby? It's kind of an ideal little town, tucked-up against the mountain here."

While you were growing up, were you thinking about becoming a police officer? "I've always enjoyed interacting with people and hearing their stories, and I felt like law enforcement was a good career for interacting. I know it's kind of a cliché, but it's from a sense of wanting to serve. To make a positive effect through your job. I didn't want a job that was the same every day, and when you come into a day as a police officer, you never know what's going to be thrown your way that day. And problem-solving is something I like to do."

Every community has things that stand-out about it, how does Ashland strike you? "I mean the town is beautiful. You can't get past that. During the summertime? I'm missing the summer right now! When that sun is going down? With that warm air at night, and that red sky? I mean- that is a beautiful sight! Lithia Park is amazing, and right here on I-5; you can go anywhere, really quick. Being from **Humboldt County**; Redding was like a 3 ½-hour drive, Medford's the same. Humboldt has its benefits, but there's the **Shakespeare Festival**, right here in our own town for example. And you don't have to go somewhere else to enjoy something like that."

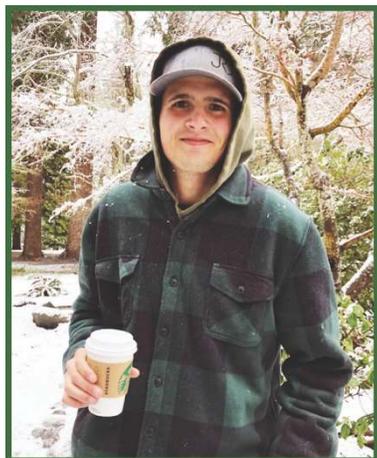
What are the BEST and WORST parts of the job? "Helping people and seeing a positive impact. That's the best. When you're able to see somebody's life at least appear to change for the better, whether that's overcoming substance abuse, or getting out of a bad situation. We interact with people, sometimes regularly, and it's when you can see somebody's life appear to change for the better. Notably, I think seeing somebody overcome substance abuse. It's pretty incredible. Because obviously, that's pretty tough, and when you see it, it's pretty amazing. I recall one gentleman [with a terrible alcohol problem]. And when I saw him again some time later, I had to do a double-take. I asked some other officers about the gentleman, and he had come to a couple of them recently saying; I'm sorry. This is the way we should have met six months ago. All of us as a whole, I can say, we were happy. It was like, wow. An incredible transformation.

And the worst parts? When we get dispatched to a call and go to a scene, usually it's very likely a person's worst day of their life. We don't generally get called to good things. You get to see into a person's life a little bit. When you show up and you see a victim of a crime, or just the situation they're in? We see parts of society that I don't think a lot of people see. Certain situations stick with you, and when you think about them later, you realize, hey- that's a part of our reality. Nobody deserves to be a victim of a crime, and when you see some of the worst crimes, you just stop and you have to say, why? Why does that have to happen to somebody? Just experiencing that, it's, it's not fun. That's the worst part."

Do you have a story about a life-changing incident? "Life-changing for me would be the **Almeda Fire** [when we lost our home.] It made me realize how fortunate I've been in life. I was able to get some of my girlfriend's belongings out of our house, I got our cat out. And I realized that day how quickly everything can be taken away from you. We lost a lot of personal things, but things that can be replaced. You start thinking about your health, and how fortunate I've been with the hand I've been dealt. And you think of the people in the world who haven't been as fortunate. From the **Almeda Fire**, I've taken a sense of enjoy every single day. Because you really don't know what crazy event could change your life forever. So, I'm truly grateful for every day now. We can't go back and stop the fire. We can't change the past, only our future."

What's a thing people would never guess about you? "Hmm. I'm not really sure, I'm kind of an open book. I don't think I have anything that wickedly stands out in my life. I like a pretty basic life! I love golfing. I enjoy playing golf out with my friends, joking around. And I like playing by myself too. It's such a mental game. You can either go out there and think about different things in your life and really focus on them. Or you can go with the mindset; I want to play my best round of golf. And when you do that,

other things don't really come into your mind. I've found it to be very cathartic. Whatever happened that day, you can just put it out of your mind, and all you're doing is golfing. To me, it's one of the best stress-relievers, AND stressors at the same time!"



What advice do you have for the young people in our community?

"Find something you're passionate about and make that work for you in life. Do whatever you can to find something you love doing, and just go after it! Especially in today's world where you can pretty much make a living with anything, with all these new technologies. You may not get super-wealthy, but if you're doing something you love and making a living, you CAN support yourself, and hopefully a family one day if that's what you choose. Just give it a try, have goals, have a fallback plan. And doing this job? I don't feel like I'm working. It's challenging, and we're problem-solving every day. But at the end of the day, I enjoy my job. So, my advice is to just figure-out how to make your dream work for you in the world. Ha-ha! That's what my parents used to say!"

Here's an admittedly silly way to ask this question, but please imagine yourself stranded on a desert island. Which of these four things would you wish to have? In other words, what is your most favorite FOOD, BOOK, MUSIC, and MOVIE, please? "Okay, Food? Wow, that is a really tough one. Are we thinking survival? Or just 'make this good for what it is?!' Favorites then? I really like breakfast burritos! Shout out to **Ruby's**, that place is amazing! Book. Can it be a series? I think I'll go with Harry Potter. Music? Honestly, just about any music. I'm a fan of all music. And Movie? I knew you were going to ask me that and I thought; man, how can I pick just one?! So, hmm. [Six-second pause.] Christmas Vacation. National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation."

Ready for a speed round now? Please answer these ones quickly, without thinking too much: Autumn or Spring? Spring. **Kittens or puppies?** "Puppies!" **Trout or Marlin?** "Trout. I like the ocean, but there's something about just a *creek*." **Emigrant Lake or Lithia Park?** "Lithia Park." **Crater Lake or Gold Beach?** "Crater Lake." **Waikiki or K-2?** "Waikiki. K-2 is kind of a, a *task*. I'd rather lie on a beach than climb to the top of K-2!" **Over easy or Scrambled?** "Over easy." **Okay, and since I know you're a golfer now; Centennial or Oak Knoll?** "I like the Oak Knoll course, but I'll say Centennial." **Laurel or Yanny? Have you heard about that?** "Laurel. I'm trying to think of the last time I heard that, and yes, Laurel. The fact that people hear two different things there is *amazing*! It's always interesting to me how the human brain operates, and that's one of those things. Man, it's just amazing." **Yes! Okay, last one now; five words to describe the rest of your life, please?** "Well, okay if it's six? Appreciating, every, day, given, to, me."

Jordan Pease is a 20-year resident of Ashland, and the founder/director of **Rogue Valley Metaphysical Library & Media Exchange**. www.RVML.org