OEM employee not slowing down after nearly 30 years of service

Joseph Murray hasn’t skipped a beat as he nears his 30-year anniversary with Oregon’s Office of Emergency Management. Although his tenure is the longest with the agency, he still brings a strong work ethic and a passion for service with him to the office every day. Murray says he endures a long commute from Springfield where his family lives because he believes he is making a difference working for an agency that plays an important role in preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation for emergencies in Oregon.

When you ask other employees at the agency what stands out about Murray, one of the things many of them will tell you is his work ethic.

Murray started as a staff engineer for OEM before becoming the emergency planner, and now works in Mitigation and Recovery as well as serving as OEM’s Human Services and Oregon Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (ORVOAD) lead. He said a high level of curiosity is what drives his work ethic.

“I love this work because the more I learn the more I realize what I don’t know—that is what makes me want to explore and be able to help our customers,” said Murray.

Murray said the agency has changed a lot since he started when there were 12 employees working in the basement of the Capitol building.

“We were a much smaller agency with one computer when I started in the fall of 1984, and one thing that stands out is that technology has tremendously changed how we communicate with email and cell phones,” he explained. “Back then, we were on the road a lot and if you went to a meeting in Baker County you were out of reach until you got there.”

Murray has been a part of Presidential Disaster Declarations and Disaster Recoveries for numerous events
“There are several Federal disaster assistance programs and each has its own criteria for how a federal disaster declaration is triggered—it is my job is to know about those programs to help people know what they qualify for,” he said. “It sure feels good to get help to local people and governments that have been affected by a disaster.”

Murray said that in addition to his duties in Mitigation and Recovery, he takes great pride in his work with Human Services and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

“Many events have no federal assistance, but if it’s your house it’s still a disaster—I feel terrible if I can’t help, or find help,” Murray explained. “Having the lead for human services and working with the VOADs around the state helps me stay fresh and engaged because these are jobs that are directly connected with people.”

Murray is passionate about doing everything he can to help.

“If we do our jobs well, we have a real opportunity to reduce pain and suffering; fewer people will get hurt or killed, there will be less loss of homes and personal possessions, and that is the ultimate reward.”