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Willow Wind LC

OMA Essay contest

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If I Were Mayor

In 2020, The Alameda fire affected all the Rogue Valley. Like so many others, my family was affected by the fire. A month after we bought our first house as a family, it burnt down. But we had the privilege to rebuild, unlike a lot of people who went through the exact same thing. Our community played an extremely important part, helping people who were un-homed by providing meals and resources. For example, my dad, who fed people affected by the fire for over a year. This is a perfect representation of how in a community, strength and camaraderie are the most important things to cultivate. Rebuilding made us stronger, more prepared and created trust. If I were Mayor, I would make Ashland more secure, building trust in our communities, expanding and growing our safety, and contributing to people in need.

In Ashland, Fire prevention is an important aspect I would like to take on to the fullest of my abilities. Summers in rogue valley are long, hot, and dry. The city and its neighboring communities, Talent and Pheonix, are at substantial wildfire risk. The Alameda fire burned down 2,977 acres and destroyed over 2,300 buildings, and we were

unprepared. Ashland was granted 3 million dollars from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2021, to create wildfire defensible spaces around 1,100 homes. If I were mayor, I would make sure that the city would be safe and prepared for any type of disaster with this fund. Controlled fires would be more supervised, dead and dry bush would be discarded of, and I would try and make the city as fire safe as possible. And in case for the worse, I would make sure people affected would have the proper resources and help they need to start over.

Homelessness is a growing crisis in Ashland, visible throughout downtown, even in front of the police station. This issue cannot be ignored. Oregon has allocated over \$700 million to help with homelessness, with \$217.9 million for maintaining shelters, \$188.2 million for rehousing efforts, \$173.2 million for eviction prevention, and \$105.2 million for long-term rental assistance. Yet, even in a town like Ashland, over a hundred people are living on the streets. While funding is important, money alone won't solve the problem. Ashland could benefit from solutions within the community, like expanding local transitional housing programs, increasing mental health and addiction recovery resources, and encouraging partnerships between businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. Addressing homelessness requires both immediate support and long-term investment in affordable housing and rehabilitation services. Ignoring the problem isn't an option, but with the right combination of funding, policy, and community action, real progress is possible.

At the end of the day, making Ashland a safer and stronger community comes down to people looking out for each other. Whether it's wildfire prevention or tackling homelessness, we've already shown that when disaster strikes, we step up. But we can't just wait for emergencies to act, we need to make sure our city is always prepared. If we keep working together, investing in safety, and making sure help goes where it's needed, we can build a future where everyone in Ashland has a chance to rebuild and thrive. If I were mayor, I'd focus on wildfire prevention, emergency preparedness, and helping those in need. That means clearing dry brush, improving fire safety, expanding housing programs, and supporting mental health resources. By working together and making smart investments, we can build a future where everyone in Ashland is safe, supported, and given the opportunity to rebuild and thrive.