

# Cityscope



## Water Works

Approaching retirement, Royal DeVaney reflects on how a dry bathroom tap led to nearly three decades of public service as Waterville's mayor.

INTERVIEW BY KIRSTEN DOBROTH

Waterville Mayor  
Royal DeVaney

**You've lived in Waterville for over 30 years. What first brought you to the area?**

I was born in Oregon, and in 1959 I went to Alaska for what I thought would be three years—26 years later, I left. My wife was born and raised right outside of Waterville. I had just retired from my job in Alaska managing seafood processing plants, and we already owned a home in Waterville, so we decided to move here full time in 1985, and from there it just kind of blossomed into other things.

**Like serving on Waterville's Park Board and Zoning and Planning Commission, and eventually as its mayor. What led to your interest in local government?**

I was the first mayor in Unalaska [Alaska] out in the Aleutians. Out there, I got kind of pushed into it—a bunch of people said, "Have you thought about doing this?" When I came to Waterville, the mayor at the time approached me about joining the Park Board or the Zoning and Planning Commission, and I thought I might be interested in one of them. **CONTINUED ON P.12** ▶



Mayor DeVaney at Pioneer Park Deli in downtown Waterville

Well, the paper came out a few days later, and there was an article that said he had appointed me to both those boards, so I did that for a couple of years.

**Why did you run for mayor?**

I got up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water one time, and no water came out of the faucet. I went to town hall wanting to find out what was happening, and they said, “Oh, this is just a common thing. Sometimes we run out of water.” So I talked to my wife, and I said, “I think I might get involved and that I have something to offer to them,” and she agreed. In 1991 I ran for mayor, and my term started in 1992.

**And did you get to the bottom of Waterville’s water problem?**

When I first took office, I’d go to Olympia, and nobody knew where Waterville was. Within two years, almost everyone

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in the state knew where Waterville was, because I went to meetings and was pretty pushy about funding and getting things done for the town. A major part of that was that I got some wells drilled and two more reservoirs to add to our water supply.

**What makes the Waterville economy tick, and is it difficult to attract workers to a rural community of 1,200?**

Waterville is on the Waterville Plateau: we’ve got wheat for miles all the way around town, and if you go eight miles away you start running into fruit orchards. Since I took office, the farms have gotten bigger and there’s fewer of them, and

with the equipment now they can do so much of the work in a day with fewer people. The kids that grew up on the farms here didn’t see much of a future and moved away, but in the past eight years they’ve started coming back to the area looking for work.

**What kind of jobs are they finding?**

Some of them are coming back to the farms and helping family who are still here. There’s a clinic in town, and we have people coming back with medical degrees working there. Some young people who left to get their education have come back to teach at the school. The county seat is Wa-

terville, so we’ve got positions that people are filling with the county to help with things that the county takes care of, like road maintenance.

**At the end of December, you’re retiring as mayor after 28 years. Any advice for first-term mayors who want to succeed at the job?**

Listen to the people. I’ve had my mind made up and thought I had it all figured out, and a lot of times I’ve had my mind changed because people in town would see it a little differently—and most of the time it saved us money and expedited things. I listen to anyone who will talk to me. I do more business in the post office or the store or one of the restaurants than I do at my desk, because people don’t want to bother me there—they think I’m busy—but they’ll bother me anywhere else, and I take the time to sit and listen and see what they’ve got to say. ☺



BY THE NUMBERS

# Waterville

Cityvision looks at how Waterville strives to keep its agricultural region flush with H<sub>2</sub>O.

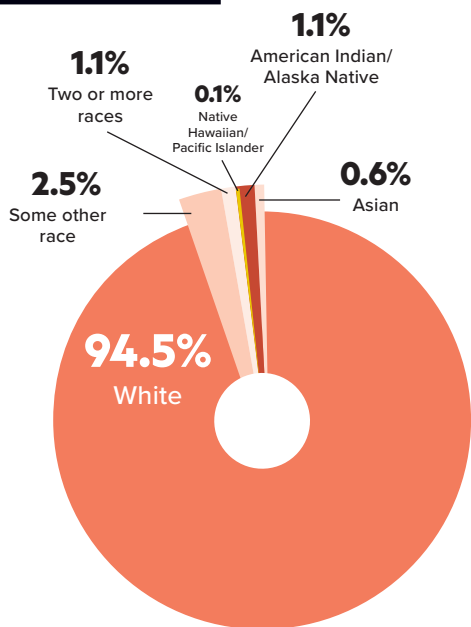
## POPULATION

POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2010 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED



2018 SOURCE: WA OFM

## DEMOGRAPHICS



SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

## WATER WORKERS



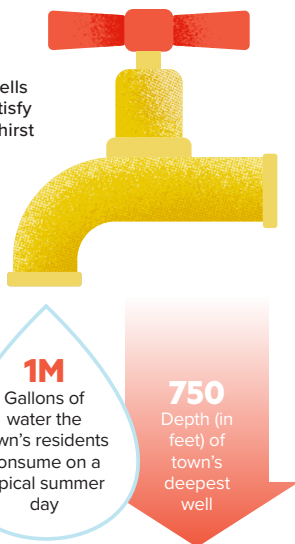
SOURCES: TOWN OF WATERVILLE/WATERVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT, HIGHLINE GRAIN GROWERS

## SEVEN SEAS

**7** Number of wells it takes to satisfy Waterville's thirst today

**2009** Year the town's last well was drilled

**\$300k** Cost to drill that well in 2009



SOURCE: WENATCHEE WORLD

## OVER A BARREL

Year Waterville's first well was drilled



Year Waterville replaced Okanogan as Douglas County seat



SOURCE: DOUGLAS COUNTY PUD