



**SADDLE UP FOR FUN!**

Bailey McCracken races in the Cinnabar Mountain Playdays Rodeo.

— PAGE A10

Contributed photo

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2015 • No. 22 • 18 PAGES • \$1.00

www.MyEagleNews.com

# Gas emerges as likely cause of fumes

## EPA team using drill rig to map the path, extent

By **Scotta Callister**  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The Environmental Protection Agency says gasoline — possibly mixed with other solvent chemicals — is the most likely cause of vapors that have been rising into southwest John Day buildings.

However, the source of the contamination — where it enters the ground — remained a mystery early this week.

At a community meeting Sunday in John Day, EPA on-scene coordinator Mike Boykin said an emergency response

team is continuing to test air and take water samples in the area near Canyon Boulevard, an effort that began May 21.

So far the EPA crew and contractors have checked about 70 buildings, finding 30 that had vapors coming from basements and crawl spaces into living and working areas. The monitoring is continuing on a daily basis — twice-daily in some cases — and residents are urged to continue ventilating their homes.

He said while responders have “a hunch” about a source, they need to continue investi-



Contributed photo/EPA

Contractors use a small drilling rig to collect groundwater samples near Canyon Boulevard in southwest John Day.

gating and determine the chemical “fingerprint” of the contamination to match it to possible sources.

“Because of the complex nature of this investigation, it could take weeks to figure out the source,” he said. “We do science. We’re not going to point a finger at any particular source until we know it’s them.”

Boykin said once the agency finds the source, they advise the responsible party to get in touch with their insurer and start helping with the resolution of the problem.

He noted the investigation is a multi-agency effort, and the public’s health is the top priority.

About 20 residents attended the session, held at the Forest Supervisor’s Office. Joining the EPA at the meeting were John Combs, Grant County public health officer; David Anderson, a state Department of Environ-

mental Quality manager; and Kattaryna Stiles, liaison with the Oregon Health Authority.

Stiles said anyone in an affected home who experiences headaches, tremors or other physical effects should talk to their doctor or care provider. She noted children and the elderly can be more susceptible to the effects of vapors.

She said the OHA will have more specific health recommendations for residents once more is known about the contamination, likely in a few days.

Boykin said residents who are ventilating their homes but still sense persistent vapors should call John Day Dispatch, and the EPA team will check it out.

See EPA, Page A9

# Focus on teen health

By **Angel Carpenter**  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — From bike-powered green smoothies to stretching muscles to prevent sports injuries, Grant County students learned a variety of health tips at the May 29 Teen Health Fair held at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School.

Students from Grant Union, Prairie City and Long Creek in grades 7-12 participated in the event.

The Grant County Health Department sponsored the event with partners from Blue Mountain Hospital, Strawberry Wilderness Community Clinic, Advantage Dental, Grant County District Attorney’s Office, Heart of Grant County and others.

Nurse Lindsay Maghan, coordinator of the new school-based health center located at the school, organized the event.

She said students learned about healthy eating and exercises and the dangers of drinking too many energy drinks as well as good dental hygiene and the risks associated with chewing tobacco.

The DA’s office and Heart staff spoke with older students in grades 9-12 about the importance of showing respect in dating and warned of the consequences of sexting.

Maghan said she and the staff at the health center realized there was a health fair for adults and a health and safety fair for elementary students, but nothing for teens.

“We wanted to give them (teens) an opportunity to explore health in their community,” Maghan said.

## Grant County students learn wellness tips



Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter

Seventh-grader Mason Gerry rides the bike-powered smoothie machine at the OSU Extension office’s booth during the May 29 Teen Health Fair. He is assisted by OSU extension agent Shanna Northway. To her side are office coordinator Carol Waggoner, far left, and 4-H-SNAP-ED program assistant Christal Culley, middle.



Grant Union students get busy at the booths during last week’s Teen Health Fair.



OSU Extension agent Shanna Northway holds down the blender lid as Grant Union seventh-grader Austin Catron tries the smoothie bike at the Teen Health Fair.



Contributed photo

Fields near Kimberly and Monument are growing crops with the water-saving technology of subsurface drip irrigation.

# Farming from the roots up

## Producer touts water savings with SDI system

By **Scotta Callister**  
Blue Mountain Eagle

When Jim Bahrenburg looks across the land he’s worked in the Monument and Kimberly areas, he sees buried treasure.

That treasure isn’t gold, but water.

Drawn from the North Fork John Day River, this water flows through small underground tubes to gradually irrigate blocks of land for crops. Starting on the North Fork Ranch in the Kimberly area, Bahrenburg said he first planted rye to choke out the thistles on what was just a neglected pasture, and then continued the transformation by planting row crops.

Today the land produces corn, onions, beets, peppers, squash and dill.

The key to that abundance

is a subsurface irrigation system he first tried four years ago, with a grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board through the Monument Soil and Water Conservation District.

He got a second grant in 2012, from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, through the Natural Resources Conservation Service to replace old pumps, install main lines and set up an underground system on 20 acres of land leased from Bansen Farm LLC near Monument, which also grows crops today.

In a region preoccupied with drought and water supply woes, he says, subsurface drip irrigation is a path to more efficient water use, better crop yields, and a more self-sufficient farming economy.

### The beginnings

Bahrenburg, who has been farming in Grant County for 44 years, is certified as an organic grower, meaning he can’t use herbicides, pesticides or conventional fertilizers. He said he started looking into the subsurface approach after becoming frustrated by weeds.

See FARM, Page A9



Jim Bahrenburg

# Rodent ranks boom in Fossil Beds area

## Prehistoric finds include early beaver, mice

Blue Mountain Eagle

KIMBERLY — Paleontologists are celebrating a bonanza of prehistoric rodent finds at the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and nearby Bureau of Land Management land.

The discovery of 10 new prehistoric species in the area was reported in a study published in the current “Annals of Carnegie Museum.”

The study, by scientists Joshua Samuels of the Fossil Beds and William Korth of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, looked at 21 species in all — new and previously undocumented.

The new ones include:

- *Microtheriomys brevirostris*, an early

beaver that may be the distant ancestor of today’s beavers.

- *Miosciurus covensis*, a dwarf tree squirrel, smaller than any living in North America today.

- *Bursagnathus atrosseus*, a primitive pocket mouse, possibly an ancestor of today’s desert mice.

- *Plesiosminthus fremdi*, a birch mouse, named for retired John Day Fossil Beds paleontologist Ted Fremd.

“This study fills some substantial gaps in our knowledge of past faunas, specifically smaller mammals. Some of the new species are really interesting in their own right, and will ultimately help improve our understanding of the evolution of beavers and pocket mice,” said Samuels. “These

finds show that despite this area being studied for well over 100 years, new discoveries continue to be made.

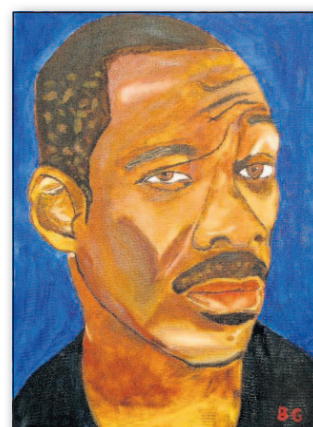
“Each new discovery helps to give us a fuller picture of Oregon’s past.”

The John Day Basin contains one of the most complete fossil records on Earth, spanning nearly 50 million years of time. The beds reveal the history of ancient ecosystems, climate change and plant and animal evolution during what is known as the Age of Mammals.

Officials say the John Day formation has a diversity of fauna, including more than 100 species — saber-toothed nimravids, early dogs, three-toed horses and giant “hell pigs.”

The new rodents were collected through decades of collaborative work throughout the John Day Basin by paleontologists from the Fossil Beds, BLM, University of California at Berkeley, and University of Washington.

## STUDENT ART



Brandon Gillihan  
Grade 11  
Prairie City School  
Teacher: Raymond Field

