

2015: A Year in Retrospect

January

January 2

The Baker County Press begins its second year!

A new team begins at the Courthouse. On Tuesday, December 30 at 10 a.m., friends, family, and co-workers gathered in the Commissioners Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse to attend the swearing-in ceremony for Bill Harvey, County Commission Chair; Mark Bennett, County Commissioner; Cindy Carpenter, County Clerk; and Alice Durrflinger, County Treasurer, all elected to their positions this November.

Murder for hire plot. Emily Munsell, age 24 and a resident at 1356 Dewey Avenue in Baker City, was arrested last Friday and charged with one count of solicitation to commit murder.

Huntington gets grant. The City of Huntington has been awarded and has accepted a \$3 million grant from the Infrastructure Finance Authority, or IFA, to totally replace the City's existing sewer system.

January 9



Photo courtesy of The Depot Inn

L-R: Members of the 'Gold Rush' cast Jim Thurber, Jack Hoffman, Kathy Reedy (The Depot Inn), and Todd Hoffman.

'Gold Rush' cast hits the snow. Sumpter hosted some famous visitors last weekend when part of the crew from TV's "Gold Rush" drove in for a snowmobiling trip.

Brooklyn School alarm system suspended. After three false alarms in just over four months, Brooklyn School's panic button system will be temporarily suspended until some upgrades can be made to the plastic around the trigger apparatus.

Cascade Natural Gas moves into new center. The new center sits on a lot near the intersection of Broadway Street and 13th Street and includes a 5,400 square-foot shop complete with welding bay, inventory room, and space to store equipment and park vehicles.

January 16

New City Council sworn in. The first order of business conducted at Tuesday night's City Council meeting was administering the Oath of Office to new councilors Ben Merrill, Mack Augenfeld, James Thomas and Rosemary Abell.

Emily Munsell indicted on four counts. According to the District Attorney's office, Munsell was indicted on two counts of solicitation to commit murder, one count of conspiracy to commit murder, and one count of attempted aggravated murder.

Locals attend Forest Plan meeting. Thirty-five people representing a broad range of forest interests, including some from Baker County, attended a meeting January 8 in Pendleton, facilitated by the United States Forest Service to discuss the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision.

B2H meetings come to county. On Thursday, January 8, 2014, around 50 people attended an open house for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project

January 23

Unsung heroes and miracles. Last weekend was marked by a huge pileup on I-84 involving dozens of vehicles, and a series of additional accidents on secondary high-ways across the county. Though the freeway was shut in both directions from Ontario to Pendleton most of Saturday, not a single fatality was reported.



Photo courtesy of OSP

While several were injured in the pileup near Pleasant Valley Saturday morning, there were no fatalities.

A behind-the-scenes look at the Oregon House. Most voters don't give a passing thought to the two months nestled between November Election Day and the January swearing-in ceremony.

But for the winning candidates, those months right after the election are life-changing—particularly if you're a first-time elected official, a newbie to Salem.

Chamber of Commerce hands out awards. Around 100 attendees gathered at the Baker Elks Lodge on 2nd Street last Saturday for the Baker County Chamber of Commerce's 88th Annual Awards Banquet, honoring individuals for their dedication and volunteerism in the community.

January 30

MOU still unsigned by counties. United States Forest Service (USFS) Region 6 Forester Jim Peña has a goal of finalizing the revised Blue Mountain Forest Plan within one year. On Monday, January 26, the USFS met with commissioners from several Oregon and Washington counties with hopes to obtain signatures from those commissioners on a Memo of Understanding (MOU) defining county vs. USFS roles in the process.

Mining summit exposes issues. The perception outside the state goes that Oregon is closed for business when it comes to mining and mineral exploration. That was the opinion stated by several expert panelists during the Eastern Oregon Mining and Aggregate Development Summit 2015, held Tuesday, January 27.

More meth arrests. On January 22, 2015 at about 9:52 a.m. Baker City Police arrested Carmon Deon Hendrikson, 2036 Grove Street on one count of Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine), one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine); and Anthony Allan Myers, 2036 Grove Street, one count of Violation of Release Agreement.

Hospice workers let grief soar away. On Wednesday morning, Heart 'n Home Hospice released biodegradable balloons, shaped like white doves, to represent the 26 patients who have passed away in the last month or so.

February

February 6

Tracking the meth trend. With the string of methamphetamine-related arrests in Baker County over the last month, the topic of this particular drug is steadily rising to the top of many conversations. Meth is no stranger to Baker County, according to those acquainted with the substance's history, dating at least as far back as the 1950s locally.

County gives strong 'no' to MOU. "After review of the new MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) that the Forest Service has presented to all the counties within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, we have decided to no longer participate in this MOU for the following reasons..."

Potato predicament. Baker Valley potato producers received a potentially devastating blow last month when the H.J. Heinz Company (Heinz) announced that the company would not be renewing its contract with them for 2015.

February 13

Council calls special session to talk about pot. Ordinance #3336 Regulating Commercial Marijuana Operations was the topic that filled Council Chamber at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Cop killer remains in prison. A gathering of police chiefs from around Oregon traveled to Salem to sit in the audience January 27 and witness the parole hearing of convicted John Day cop killer Sidney Dean Porter, age 55. Their goal? To prevent Porter's pending release, which had been scheduled. Among that eastern Oregon group were Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner, Chief Brian Harvey of La Grande who initiated the movement, and Chief Richard Gray of John Day.

Ace Hardware to move. The not-so-tightly held secret is out: Thatcher's Ace Hardware is moving to Resort Street.

Candidate for ORP chair comes to Baker City. Bill Currier, the current vice chair for the Oregon Republican Party (ORP), visited Baker City Wednesday afternoon for a quick visit with county-level party leaders.

February 20

Kitz calls it quits. On Friday the 13th, just a day before Oregon State's birthday, embattled fourth-term democratic Governor John Kitzhaber submitted his letter of resignation.

Local woman receives medal posthumously. On Monday, the family of Dean Jones of Baker City was presented with a bronze replica of a Congressional Gold Medal for her World War II service in the Civil Air Patrol (CAP).



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Gilbert and Dean Jones outside their fence at the home in which they lived for decades in Baker City.

Cattle rustler gets six months. On February 12, 2015, a 12-person jury convicted Lynette Bullington, 64, of 39554 Cemetery Road, Sumpter, Oregon, of two counts of Theft in the First Degree, and four counts of Unauthorized Use of a Livestock Animal

February 27

Bark beetles, dead trees and the politics of forest management. Arvid Andersen drives the Dooley Mountain highway to the Burnt River Valley giving an interview as a professional forestry consultant, accurately predicting the areas that would go up in flame later in the summer of 2015.

Protesters come out. Last week, a group in favor of marijuana dispensaries protested in front of City Hall the day of a special City Council Session to discuss the issue.

Sheriff resigns. On Wednesday morning, Sheriff Mitch Southwick announced his resignation to the Baker County Board of Commissioners during a special work session.

5J superintendent finalists gather at BHS. The three contenders are Betty Palmer, currently holding the position of Principal at South Baker Intermediate; Mark Witty, currently Superintendent of Schools Grant School District #3; and Robert Vian, Superintendent of Schools in Orofino, Idaho.

March

March 6

Mark Witty becomes new 5J superintendent. Mark Witty, 51, becomes the Baker School District's new superintendent after agreeing to a two-year contract that pays him \$124,500 per year. The school board gave Witty the unanimous nod during a special meeting Thursday, Feb. 26.

BHS mock trial team competes. Last Saturday Baker High School's Mock Trial team traveled to Vale to compete in regional competitions. The team finished with a respectable second place win, closely behind Vale.

Hoopes submits letter of interest. On Monday morning, Deputy John Hoopes tossed his hat into the ring for the interim Baker County Sheriff position.

County Commissioners' March 4th meeting. The Brownfields project at lime and appointment of a new sheriff were key topics.

March 13

Choosing an interim sheriff: Travis Ash (left) and John Hoopes fielded public questions Wednesday morning, both competing for the interim sheriff's position.

Council takes an unexpected turn. City Council meeting, the Council chose to hear a first and second reading of a previously dismissed ordinance, ordinance #3336, which would ban marijuana dispensaries in Baker City limits.

Transfer of public lands. House Bill 3444 in Oregon, a statewide and local push is steadily growing toward the effort of taking those lands back into State control.

Cooperative law enforcement agreement. The agreement between local and federal law enforcement agencies provides \$6,500 per year to an annual County Sheriff's Department patrol budget of \$1.2 million, according to Southwick, who signed it.