

Local

American Legion struggles

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Citing an aging and shrinking membership at Baker City's American Legion Post #41, in existence for almost 90 years, Commander Bill Bishop has a clear message, regarding the fate of the post: if its members don't attend the monthly meetings, and take a more active part in the voting process and in leadership roles, the future of the post will most likely be a short one.

"I've got a crossroads coming. Basically, what's happening is, is they're (the State American Legion, or Department) going to try to close down our charter," Bishop said.

The decision Bishop refers to—whether to keep both the charter and the post alive—will be a pivotal one, ultimately in the hands of officers of the Department, who plan to meet with Bishop and others representing Post #41, at the post's monthly meeting, on Thursday, April 7, 2016, 7 p.m., at the Sunridge Inn Restaurant, in Baker City (the post holds monthly meetings there on the first Thursday of every month, the next one scheduled for March 3, 2016).

Bishop noted the decline in membership, and financial issues, and he stepped into the role of Post Commander less than three years ago, as reported by Meghan Andersch in the Friday, April 17, 2015 issue of *The Baker County Press*.

"We have 61 members, and most of them are old fellas. So, what you end up with, you end up with what all of the other organizations are having a problem with, is having the numbers out of your membership, who will take a position in leadership," Bishop said.

He said that the post operated a bar, a legitimate enterprise, however, the post was losing money with that, so it was shut down. Another issue he pointed out with that venture is that members would be present and order beverages at the bar, but, the monthly meetings, which used to be held at the post, would see little, if any attendance. Once the meeting location was changed to the Sunridge Inn, that seems to have made no difference with attendance.



"We're a non-profit (501(c)(3)). We have to have an operating Executive Board. We have to have quorums. And, there are so many things we can't do," he said.

One of those is the sale of the property on 2nd Street, worth between \$200,000 and \$250,000, because without a quorum, Bishop said, it can't be sold, because the membership wouldn't be represented, and it would be illegal to do so without that representation.

If the Department isn't satisfied at the April meeting with Executive Board, officer, or membership presence, or other factors, the Department could dissolve the local charter (Post #41 was chartered in 1928), and then take possession of the property in order to sell it, Bishop said, which he indicates is highly likely scenario, according to the Department. He said the property is "free and clear," and a decision by the Department to sell it would make little sense.

Post #41 is part of American Legion District #6 (there are 10 in the State), which includes Post #23 (Pendleton), Post #24 (Milton-Freewater), Post #37 (Hermiston), Post #43 (La Grande), Post #72 (Wallowa), Post #87 (Heppner), Post #95 (Ione), Post #130 (Athena), Post #140 (Mission), and Post #157 (Joseph). If Post #41's charter were dissolved, members would be forced to seek participation elsewhere, the closest post located in La Grande, about 40 miles from Baker City.

In August 2015, a Department publication, *The Legionnaire*, contained membership reports, and of the District #6 posts, Post #41 was listed at the lowest membership rate, 77.24% of its goal. Bishop said the hunt is on to recruit newer,



Submitted Photos.
American Legion members hold a planning meeting at the Sunridge to discuss the organization's future.

younger members, and to urge existing members to take more active roles, but it's been an uphill battle.

"You talk to the Elks Club, to the Eagles Club, the VFW, and they all have the same thing: they've got people coming to activities, but nobody wants to go to meetings and vote on things. They don't understand, things don't just happen, you have to vote on them. That's the law," he said.

Bishop, a disabled Vietnam veteran who served in the Navy, said that the core mission of the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, the American Legion, commitment to "...mentoring youth and sponsorship of wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow service members and veterans," is being lost in the attempts to revitalize Post #41.

A critical, missing component of the fight to retain and gain membership, and to complete the mission is this, he said: there is currently no Post #41 liaison for the local Army National Guard.

Bishop said that post members were involved with many activities and programs in the past, including youth baseball,

Fourth of July, Veterans Day, Miners Jubilee, etc., but without participation, that level of activity is necessarily near zero now. Bishop, who will be 73 in March, said he's done what he could for Post #41 and what was expected of him, and he would love for a member to step up and replace him as Commander this June (election time).

A few notable historical facts, not necessarily well-known: because of the American Legion's efforts in 1921, the U.S. Veterans Bureau was formed, forerunner of the Veterans Administration; today, more than 50 percent of Major League Baseball players are graduates of the American Legion Baseball program, created in 1925; and in 1943, past National Commander Harry W. Colmery penned the first draft of what later became the G.I. Bill of Rights, considered to be the American Legion's single greatest legislative achievement.

The next two Post #41 meetings are scheduled for Thursday, March 3, 2016, and Thursday, April 7, 2016, both at 7 p.m., at the Sunridge Inn Restaurant, in Baker City.

A decision by the Department regarding Post #41's future is expected to be made during or after the April meeting.

Commissioner

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He continued, "I am committed to keeping public lands open for the public. I am determined to fight for less government micromanagement of public lands and less land use restrictions.

"I am adamant about the safety and protection of our community and promoting positive public safety awareness. I will pursue innovative and attainable avenues to ensure our public safety divisions have the resources they need to protect our community.

"As Commissioner, I pledge to bring growth and prosperity back to our community. I pledge to use a well-rounded approach to the priorities of our community and maintain fiscal responsibility. As Commissioner, I will fight for Baker County.

"I believe in preserving our quality of life for generations to come. I believe in community reinvestment. I believe in economic development and the opportunity of our local resources. I believe in Baker County."

Poker run

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President John Young opened the event, announcing a terrific participant turnout. He asked how many present had had the chance to get out and ride, drawing raised hands from most of the enthusiastic audience.

After poker and outhouse race prizes were awarded, the raffle drawing commenced. Numerous area businesses, including many in Sumpter, Baker City, and John Day, donated prizes for the raffle.

At the end, Young and Jim Sheller spoke a few heartfelt words about Neal Bork, long-time Club member and President who passed away last August.

Son Mike Bork donated \$100, which was drawn as the last raffle of the night in Neal Bork's name.

Rally

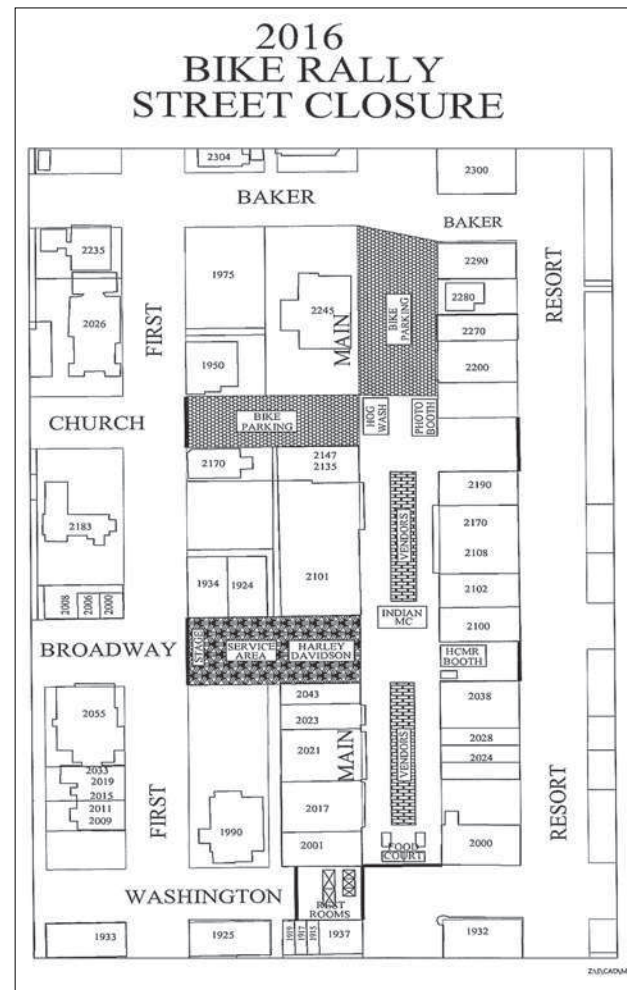


Photo courtesy of BCPD

The proposed route of the 2016 Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally.

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The meeting to will be held in the Baker City Council Chambers starting at 7 p.m. The public and business owners are encouraged to attend and comment.

OTEC hires

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative (OTEC) is proud to announce that Chris Page has been hired as the new Northern Division Superintendent.

An Eastern Oregon native heralding from Cove, Chris brings 25 years of experience to the position which is based at OTEC's La Grande District Office.

Chris studied outside line construction at Columbia Basin Community College before joining OTEC as a meter reader, in 1989. After two years, Chris moved towards taking his National Joint Apprenticeship and Training for the Electrical Industry (NJATC) line apprenticeship.

In 1991, Chris was hired as an Apprentice Lineman at International Line Builders in Tualatin, Oregon followed by two years as an Apprentice Lineman, then served as a Journeyman Lineman and safety committee member for Chelan County PUD before returning to OTEC in 2000. In 2003, Chris was promoted to Working Foreman for the La Grande District and began his duties as Northern Division Superintendent on Monday, February 1, 2016. Chris will supervise operations employees in both the La Grande and Baker offices.

Friends of the Baker Heritage Museum's
"A NIGHT AT OLD AUBURN"
Annual Casino Fundraiser

Saturday, February 27,
6 pm–10 pm

Tickets \$30.00
after Feb. 21 \$38.00

Dinner, Live Entertainment,
Casino style gaming, Bingo
1860-70s Apparel optional
Silent Auction

Let's make history! Deal me in!

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