

# Local

## Gold Rush to film in Baker County



Submitted Photo.

The Gold Rush guys visited a bit with former Truck Corral employee Shelley Jampolsky at that establishment after a meeting there will Phillip Wirth.

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#### Location, location, location.

The new location itself is a claim with which most Burnt River residents are familiar, located just around the bend from Ann Racey's home, and somewhere up the hill toward Dooley on the other side of Highway 245 from Boone Sullivan's ranch in Hereford.

Decades back, a local miner named Sam Drefs—"Seldom Seen Sam" according to the late Andrew Racey—was notorious for disappearing for weeks in the area of that sagebrush-laden claim, returning to town with pockets full of gold flakes.

The gold was then sold via the local post office in Baker City where employee Gilbert Jones, now deceased, recounted that Drefs would always respond, "Sam knows," when asked where he'd found his treasure.

Flash forward to today, and the primary claim in that area is now owned by the Wirth family.

Jan Alexander of Unity tackled some of the onerous state permitting process for the Wirths' Western Mine Development, LLC, and attested to the value of the claim.

"There is good gold there, and the program I watched last night was right on as far as values. I wish them lots of luck and sure am hoping having the show filmed here will help the economy of Baker County," Alexander said.

"We tested that mine during the last episode," Hoffman said. "We got good gold there but less overburden to move. So it'll be a smaller, more meticulous production than up in the Klondike. This

will be more like a treasure hunt."

Wirth said that episode featured his two sons, William, 24, and Jared, 22.

"They've been working hand-in-hand with me since they were little kids," Wirth said. "They've farmed and ranched—and mined. Like most kids who grow up that way, they can operate just about any piece of equipment there is."

According to Hoffman, historical records show a 700-ounce quartz and gold nugget was once removed from that claim, but miners eventually broke it up into smaller pieces.

While the "Gold Rush" crew has no specific goal this coming season in terms of ounces, Hoffman said he would love to uncover a 100-ounce nugget.

The Wirth family also owns a second claim, The Buckland, a few miles down the road in Bridgeport, up Clark's Creek to be precise.

The property, a split-estate situation, is owned by the Elliot Ranch of Bridgeport with the mineral rights in possession of the Wirths. A conditional use permit application has been submitted to the County, asking for approval for potential housing on that site for up to 30 individuals.

#### The production and economy.

Many locals are wondering when exactly filming will begin and end. The production company for the show wrote in an email via their public relations representatives at the Discovery Channel, "It's too early to tell. But we envision that each one of the main episodes will feature Todd in Baker County."

Around 20 crew members are expected to relocate to the area to be on site in Hereford, as well as a possible base in Baker City.

Said Commissioner Bennett, "The production is an exciting economic opportunity for the county and the community. Purchasing vehicles, supplies, equipment and services. Most importantly hiring approximately 70 staffers at family wage salaries. This infusion of dollars will result in a multiplier effect of seven times the expenditure into our local economy. While the initial production is slated for approximately six months, we have the potential for a multi-year opportunity to showcase the county."

A Discovery Channel representative also said that production management plans to hire locally for several positions, but was unable to specify the type at this early date.

Hoffman corroborated that statement. "We'll be hiring locals," he said. "Bringing in tourism will have a definite impact in Baker County."

When asked what kind of impact in terms of dollars, Hoffman said, "In the millions—if we can make it a success."

Hoffman pointed to significant economic growth in the areas where other seasons were shot.

Another member of the production stressed the desire to "put the money" into the Burnt River area and around the County in finding housing there, promoting tourism, etc.

For those wondering whether their favorite miner will return for the Baker County season, Hoffman said simply, "Most of my guys will be back."

Hoffman believes filming in Baker County will be more visually appealing than the Klondike for purposes of cinematography.

"It's much prettier in Oregon than the Klondike—it can't hold a candle to Oregon," he said. "We

are so looking forward to bringing some economic development to the area."

Hoffman also pointed out, "We were nominated for a reclamation award for the Klondike last year. We worked hard for that and have a very good history environmentally."

Hoffman said they won first runner-up, and intend to apply those same reclamation skills next season.

#### The future.

Hoffman stressed that the future of "Gold Rush" in Baker County is largely dependent on the reaction of the community.

"We're pretty low key," Hoffman said. "We're all about faith in Jesus and our families. This doesn't mean we're perfect, but to be able to come home here is far better for our families."

While production plans past this coming season are largely unknown, Hoffman did say there is a possibility, as Bennett mentioned, for more than one season to happen in Baker County, depending on whether a number of variables line up.

"We're looking forward to working with the community," Hoffman concluded.

The cast of "Gold Rush" is already tentatively scheduled to appear at the Wicked Ways Masquerade Ball on October 29, 2016 at the Geiser Grand. Tickets will go on sale for that event this spring with updates posted on *The Baker County Press* Facebook page and web site.

Should this season of "Gold Rush" be a success for the local area, it could turn into, well—an economic gold mine.

"I'm so excited to see the show come to Baker County and bring its gold-rich history back to life," said Wirth. "It's what we were founded on here."

## 5J School Board meets



Sunny Werner / The Baker County Press

Sophia Hanson, 3rd grade Student of the Quarter, receiving her award from 5J chair Kevin Cassidy with Brooklyn principal Gwen O'Neal and teacher Angela Wilson.

BY SUNNY WERNER  
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The regular meeting of the 5J School Board was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Student of the Quarter from Brooklyn Elementary, Sophia Hanson, was presented by her teacher, Angela Wilson. Wilson explained to the assembly that Sofia is "a great example of perseverance and internal drive."

BHS Promise Student of the Month Koby Hansen could not attend and will be recognized next month.

Both FFA and FBLA have qualified to go to State. Wrestling is also going to State.

The District Championship game for girls was in La Grand. District Championship for boys was at home.

The volunteer help with the parking management for the District games has been tremendously helpful.

The Meeting Agenda was approved. The Minutes of the January 21 and the February 2nd Executive Session were approved.

#### Information.

The Working Groups who report to the Superintendent are: OSEA Negotiations—Chris Hawkins and Kevin Cassidy; Calendar—Melissa Irvine and Autumn Harrell; Facilities Master Planning—Kevin Cassidy and Autumn Harrell; Baker Technical Institute—Andrew Bryan and Kevin Cassidy; BEA Negotiations—Chris Hawkins and Melissa Irvine.

#### Second Reading of Policies for Web Academy Support.

According to Melissa Irvine, there have been "lots of changes and organizing taking place." Scheduling issues have precluded some meetings from taking place.

Andrew Bryan stated, "2017 will be a major year for the Web Academy."

Superintendent Witty explained, "Baker is doing innovative work. Not all web academies are equal to Baker's."

#### Superintendent's Report.

Witty's report included "the need to get meetings organized to make the planning productive."

Witty went on to explain, "Long-term planning needs to be included, and the Budget Board members must be involved all the way through the process."

Summer Academy teachers and community partners are already involved in deciding which classes should be offered. Witty went on to explain that "much deliberation and input from staff, community, School Board and Administration is needed regarding the proposed Calendar. The Calendar must be completed to allow secondary decisions to be made."

The Assistant Superintendent, Betty Palmer, presented her report to the Board. Palmer said that benchmark testing was beginning now, with a follow-up in March.

Palmer also described some of the activities in which the instructors have been involved. "Curriculum Associates has trained 20 teachers in analysis. We had K through 12 grade teachers involved; they actually took the same tests the kids take," she said.

Palmer explained that instructional staff are being sent to various conferences and trainings.

She said, "Educators need 75 professional credit units each time they reapply for licensure—these trainings help our teachers obtain relicensure."

CFO Doug Dalton informed the Board, "Budget planning needs to be in first draft form by March." Dalton explained the reasons, including the fact that school staff need to be able to begin their planning for the coming school year. Dalton said Baker 5J has a 28-million-dollar budget. Dalton went on to inform the Board that "property taxes are in, and the District is in good shape." Dalton explained the summer school program already has grant funds dedicated. Further budget reporting covered the Seismic Grant, which was submitted December 31. Dalton hopes to hear results by March.

An engineering service company has been hired. They have produced all the documentation regarding their district-wide engineering audit. The company has installed data recording equipment at the High School and Baker Technical Institute welding shop.

All deadlines are being met and the engineering facts will be collected by March 10, 2016.

Baker Technical Institute has been selected as "Success of Eastern Oregon." The Institute has been working with WorkSource Oregon to pre-screen applicants, some of whom are then having their tuition paid by the Training Consortium. Behlen Corporation will be hiring some of these students upon their graduation.

Finally, Laurel Calaway was hired as BHS Assistant Track Coach.

As reported last week, Ben Merrill will leave as principal of the high school and take a new position at Eagle Cap.

## Baker County GOP banquet planned for March 19

The Baker County Republican Party will hold its annual banquet featuring Congressman Greg Walden on Saturday, March 19th at the Elks Lodge in Baker City.

Tickets for the prime rib dinner are on sale now and can be purchased through any Republican precinct committee person.

Tickets are also on sale at Tom Van Diepen Insurance Agency on 10th Street in Baker City.

State Representative Cliff Bentz will be in attendance.

As this is an election year candidates from local Baker County races and statewide races will also be in attendance.

Come join the group for a fun evening of conservative politics. There will be door prizes, silent auction items and oral auction.

The oral auction will be performed by Mib Dailey and Congressman Walden who always brings interesting items of his own to donate.

Social hour begins at

6:00 p.m. and a prime rib dinner begins at 7:00 p.m.

Deadline for purchasing tickets is Wednesday, March 16th.

No tickets will be sold at the door.

For more information, call Suzan Ellis Jones, 541-519-5035.

Tickets are \$35 per person.