



FAC annual tree planting

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Wyden forum Friday, Feb 23

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) will host a Josephine County Town Hall meeting on Friday, Feb. 23 at noon at Grants Pass City Hall, 101 N.W. "A" St.

County residents can attend the open forum to voice their questions and concerns.

During Wyden's first Senate campaign in 1996, he promised to hold a Town Hall meeting in every Oregon county each year. Since being elected he has held 430-plus such gatherings.

Figures show population up

Josephine County's population rose by 1,480 from July 1, 2005 to July 1, 2006, reaching 81,125, according to information from Portland State University.

The city of Cave Junction went from 1,380 residents to attain a total of 1,600. The city of Grants Pass now has a population of 39,390; up from 27,195.

Populations of other Southwestern Oregon counties also show increases.

*Curry: 21,365 (+175).
*Jackson: 198,615 (+4,100).

*Douglas: 103,815 (+910).

*Coos: 62,905 (+210).

Pool group diving into solutions

By MICHELLE BINKER
IVN Staff Writer

Supporters of Cave Junction's swimming pool already are trying to figure out how to get this season off the ground.

Without much-needed repairs the pool is not fit to open this year, said Shawn Carmody, CJ Pool Committee president.

The committee has a target fund-raising sum of \$250,000, which would fund much-needed repairs and operating costs for opening this year.

"To replace the pool would cost millions of dollars," said Carmody.

The critical repairs -- which Carmody said could net an additional 15 years of pool life -- include resurfacing inside the pool and retiling; replacement of the pump and filtration system; and repair of the solar water heating system.

Loss of the solar hot water system, which Carmody said failed dramatically last year, required pool operators to use significantly more propane to heat the water, which was expensive.

Other noncritical upgrades on the wish list include new lockers, a diving board and a mobile life-guard chair.

"We're really hoping that someone with a big heart and wallet will step forward to help make this happen," Carmody said.

"I think it would be a loss for the valley if the pool went away."

All donations to the CJ Pool, when made through the Josephine Parks Foundation, are tax-deductible, and are earmarked solely for use on the pool.

"The city can't use that (Continued on page 3)

Locked-up federal land tied to reduced tax base, county income

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

The severity of the situation for Josephine County without federal O&C income is stressed by the county's leaders.

Jim Raffenburg, Chairman of the county board of commissioners, and Sheriff Gil Gilbertson went to the state capitol in Salem Thursday, Feb. 15 to testify before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Commit-

tee regarding the discontinuation of federal O&C funds.

They testified in support of House Joint Memorial 5, which urges the federal government to continue payments to rural counties.

During the committee hearing, Raffenburg emphasized the severity of the county's pending financial woes.

"Unlike the counties of the Willamette Valley, Jose-

phine County's taxable land base is comprised of less than 10 percent of the total county land mass," he noted. "More than 60 percent of our land is locked away in federal ownership.

"Of the remaining, 30 percent is held either in state ownership or privately held timber resource reserves that pay little to no property taxes. As a result, we do not have the tax base necessary to permanently support local

or state-mandated services," said Raffenburg.

He urged the legislators to pass laws that would allow counties with tax rates less than \$2.24 per \$1,000 of assessed property value a one-time option of adjusting their permanent tax rates to the statewide median level.

"Rural counties in Oregon need the help of the state Legislature," Raffenburg said.

He also suggested pass-

ing legislation that would allow for newly constructed homes and existing homes sold on the open market to be assessed at their real market value instead of the artificially adjusted lower values currently required.

"The current system of funding local governments is broken and failing fast," Raffenburg said. "Failure to take action in the state Legislature in this session will

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HOOP, HOOP HOORAY! - Second and third graders in the Boys & Girls Club basketball team from Illinois Valley defeated the Redwood Elementary team from Grants Pass at Evergreen Elementary School Wednesday night, Feb. 14. The Junior Cougars next home game will be Wednesday, Feb. 28 at Evergreen. The season lasts through March 3. (Photo by Dale & Elaine Sandberg for 'IVN')

There will be a 26th annual berry festival

Organizers Mark and Judy Russo dispel rumors that Junction function defunct

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

For months, there have been whispers around Cave Junction that the annual Blackberry Festival would not be returning.

But organizer Mark Russo would like to put that speculation to rest once and for all.

"There is no truth to the rumor that there won't be a Blackberry Festival this year," Russo said.

In fact, Russo has been working quietly behind the scenes to make the festival bigger and better than ever.

"I'm excited," Russo said. "There are all kinds of ideas being tossed around."

He and his wife, Judy, planned, organized staged last year's 25th annual event.

Among improvements being discussed are multiple stages to allow for more musical performances and spread the festival throughout a larger area of Downtown Cave Junction.

"That will give all the businesses a chance to have something nearby," Russo explained.

He said that businesses and individuals have started donating to the festival, and

that applications for vendors and artists will be sent at the end of the month. Approximately 60 vendors participated in last year's event, and Russo said that he would like to increase that number to 90.

Last year's beer garden was so successful that Russo said it would "mostly likely" be coming back. Russo said he also would like to have a kick-off dance for the festival, tentatively scheduled to start on Saturday, Aug. 11.

As part of his vision, Russo said he is looking for a local organization or person to coordinate youth activities.

"We want to make everyone happy, from infants to teen-agers," Russo said.

A spring garage sale is in the works, with all proceeds going toward the festival. Russo said that he is accepting donated materials, and that a date for the sale will be announced soon.

Long-term, Russo said he wants to change the festival and transform it into a year-round entity.

"I would like it to evolve to become a more benevolent organization that

can become more self-supporting," Russo said.

Russo said he wants to change the festival organization's status to a 501c3 nonprofit, which would make it easier to pursue grants and obtain donations. The organization could then offer support to other valley groups.

"I would like to see it utilized by other organizations in the community," Russo said. "It needs a focus. And I believe that if the focus is on something community oriented, it will be easy to keep members."

He said that he is seeking volunteers and is open to suggestions and ideas on how to improve the festival.

"We're looking for volunteers with vision," he said.

Blackberry Festival meetings are scheduled for first and third Wednesdays at the county building in Cave Junction at 7:30 p.m. Russo is also available every Wednesday at noon at Wild River Brewing & Pizza Co. in Cave Junction for informal meetings.

For more information, phone him at (541) 592-6509 or e-mail itstheberry@yahoo.com.

Northwest to benefit from benzene reduction

DEQ Air Quality experts like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) decision to institute a nationwide cap on the amount of benzene in gasoline that will reduce levels in the Northwest threefold.

EPA had previously proposed a rule that could

have left levels in the Northwest higher than other parts of the country.

In response to concerns expressed by Oregon and Washington environmental experts, and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), EPA has established a benzene cap on each refinery in the country.

Controls must be in place by 2012. In the Northwest, this means that benzene in gas will be reduced approximately 70 percent by 2012; the largest reduction in total percent of benzene fuel content of anywhere in the country for less than a cent a gallon, said DEQ.

Siskiyou Health Center nearly ready for opening

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

After eight years of planning and months of construction, the new Siskiyou Community Health Center (SCHC) is nearly ready to open its doors.

Once "the clinic" opens,

it will be able to service patients with private insurance, the Oregon Health Plan and Medicare. A

discounted fee schedule will be available for uninsured and underinsured patients, Mason said.

Two full-time physicians already have been hired, along with one part-time physician's assistant. The clinic is in the process of recruiting another physician to start in July, and Mason said that the new facilities have made it easier to bring in top talent.

"The new clinic has been a great recruiting tool," said Sheila Mason, SCHC regional director.

SCHC will work with Asante Health System's Three Rivers Community Hospital. It will provide imaging and X-ray services.

Although construction on the building along Hwy. 199 at the north end of the city of Cave Junction has been complete for months, sewer and water connections still need to be installed. The sewer work has been finished, and a water meter should be in place

within the next few days.

It was hoped that "the clinic" would gain its certificate of occupation by Wednesday, Feb. 21, according to Susan Scheufele SCHC chief executive officer. Once that is obtained, equipment necessary for

clinic operations can be moved in.

Mason said that she hoped to start that process during March, and that the center plans to have a grand opening.

"There have been delays, but people have been working hard with us to get the facility open," Mason said. "A lot of people in the community have given lots of time and resources to make this happen."

Nurses will be taking phone calls during the move, Scheufele said, and patients still will be able to receive services.

"We're going to make sure people have access to care while we're in the process of moving," she noted.

Mason stated that the clinic will serve an increasingly crucial role in the projected growth of the city, and its environs.

"It really brings pride, and I think that's very important," Mason said. "It's part of the future of Cave Junction."



Photo by Josiah Dean/IVN



ILLINOIS VALLEY GARDEN CLUB celebrated its 80th anniversary Friday afternoon, Feb. 16 at Immanuel United Methodist Church in Cave Junction with a luncheon and garden-themed cake. Among displays was a collection of past minutes. Notes taken at the inaugural meeting of the "Friday Afternoon Garden Club," held Feb. 12, 1927 indicate eight members were in attendance. (Photo by Michelle Binker /'IVN')