

Heppner brings out the Irish in visitors

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

Green of all shades covered Heppner this weekend for the 34th annual Wee Bit O'Ireland Festival, the celebration of Heppner's Irish heritage and, of course, St. Patrick's Day.

Wee Bit O'Ireland started on Thursday with the performance of the play "Intrigue at Glendalough," and grew each day with sheepdog trials, vendors, food, children's activities, a talent show, art shows, competitions, the classic car "Cruz-In," the KUMA Coffee Hour — with its highly esteemed Irish Brogue Contest — and the Great Green Parade down Main Street.

"We have a good crowd, and they all seem to be having fun," said Sheryll Bates, Heppner chamber director. "There's such a big, rich Irish heritage here that it's important to share it and for the younger generations to pick it up. It takes a lot of people to do this, but they're Irish, so of course they do it. We always say if you're not Irish when you get here, you will be when you leave."

Of all Saturday's events, one of the most popular is always the Welly Toss, a competition where individuals and teams launch a Wellington boot as far as possible. The team and the individual able to throw the boot the greatest distance win bragging rights and prizes.

According to the community website for Uppertong Village — the United Kingdom location of the Welly Wanging World Championships — the Welly toss originated during an argument between two farmers after one spilled ale on the other. During the argument, the offender ran, and the farmer with the soiled boot removed it and threw it at his compatriot. The spat turned into a fun re-enactment and eventually a friendly competition that found its way onto the streets of Heppner. For the 2016 competition, four teams tossed the Wellingtons as well as more than 60



Ben Fink, 11, tosses a Wellington boot during the Welly Toss at Heppner's Wee Bit O'Ireland festival.

Staff Photo by Jennifer Colton

Welly Toss winners

TEAMS

1. Extinguishers
2. Murrays
3. Team Tom Gregg

MEN'S CATEGORY

1. Jeromy Wilson
2. Kevin Murray

WOMEN'S CATEGORY

1. Caralen Proebster
2. Jennifer Ashbeck

Boys 2-8: Jace Wilson

Boys 9-16: Ty Boor

Girls 2-8: Clara Connor

Girls 9-16: Chantiel Rumenapp

Parade winners

IRISH THEME - GREEN:

1. Grand Marshal's Float
2. Hermiston Funrunners

IRISH FLOATS - BUSINESS:

1. Heppner Post Office
2. Morrow County Grain Growers (CASE Apache Sprayer)

ANTIQUE & CUSTOM VEHICLES:

1. Blue Mountain A's
2. Desert Shrine Club

MERCHANT TROPHY:

1. Bank of Eastern Oregon
2. Community Bank



A young parade participant entertains onlookers during the Great Green Parade, Saturday in Heppner.

Staff Photo by Jennifer Colton

individuals. The 4-H Club "Grow Em and Show Em" organized the Welly Toss this year, handing out appropriately sized Wellington boots to participants of all ages.

"We started helping three years ago, and then we started taking over," Jennifer Wilson, 4-H club co-leader, said Saturday. "It's a lot of fun." The fun brought out crowds

from Heppner, Umatilla County and beyond. Two boys from Dallas, Oregon, visiting the area sported green and took a chance at the Welly Toss.

"It's tricky and harder than it looks," Ben Fink, 11, said. "But it's fun to come to this."

While Fink performed well in the toss, his fellow Dallas visitor made it even farther.

"It's fun because we don't get to do things like this back home," 11-year-old Garrett Munkers said. "We have parades, but we don't have these kinds of activities. This one (the Welly Toss) is my favorite. I love this."

The Wee Bit O'Ireland Festival continued Sunday with vendors, sheep dog trials, and "Road Bowling" at Balm Fork Road.

New administrator takes the helm in Morrow County

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

Jerry Sorte grew up in Corvallis, but is no stranger to Eastern Oregon. As a kid, Sorte remembers long road trips to visit family in Pendleton, or go fishing at Wallowa Lake, or even head as far down as Owyhee Reservoir.

"I was fortunate to spend a lot of time recreating in Eastern Oregon," said Sorte, who on Dec. 1 became the first ever full-time administrative officer of Morrow County. "This whole area I just think is beautiful, and a great place to be."

Sorte's hiring on Dec. 1 marked the first move in a major shakeup of Morrow County government. For years, the county has had an elected judge and two part-time commissioners serve on the court. But in a 2-1 vote last September, the court decided to abolish the judge position in favor of three part-time commissioners, while hiring an administrator to provide management and oversight.

Those jobs used to be done by the county judge, who also presided over juvenile court. Judge Terry Tallman will retire after his term ends on Dec. 31, and the May election will determine who steps in as the third commissioner.

Meanwhile, Sorte said he's been working with Tallman to get his feet wet and start building relationships with the



Jerry Sorte was hired as Morrow County's first full-time administrative officer last November.

Staff photo by George Plaver

county's 108 employees. "I think we have a really good team in place here," Sorte said.

Sorte, 35, already has nearly a decade of experience working with cities and counties. He earned his master's degree in public administration from the University of Missouri before returning to Oregon, where spent eight years working his way up to planning manager of Polk County.

Sorte headed back to Missouri for a year and a half working with the city of Fulton before he and his family decided Oregon was truly where they wanted to be. Sorte and his wife recently bought a house in Heppner, where they live with their two children.

"One of the things we really liked about the area is

how friendly people were, and how outgoing people were in Heppner," Sorte said.

As the county's administrative officer, Sorte said he supports the commissioners and helps them to put their ideas and policies into place. One thing that has clearly surfaced as a priority, he said, is infrastructure development, including roads and facilities.

The county dedicated

its recently completed Bartholomew Building Friday in Heppner, and Sorte said talks are underway about potential building renovations — or possibly a new facility — for the north end of the county. Revenue coming in from wind energy projects, as well as Portland General Electric's new Carty Generating Station, should continue helping those projects become a reality, Sorte said.

"We have wind facilities and utility facilities in this county that bring in money through strategic investment programs," he said. "That's put the county's budget in a good position."

As far as specific projects, Sorte said the commissioners and department heads continue looking into investments they feel will last. He encouraged residents to attend county court meetings to share their ideas and make their voices heard.

"We're planning for the future," he said.

PENDLETON



Photo by Debby Green

Rhythmic Mode coach Debbie Kishpaugh won Coach of the Year and received a lifetime achievement award this weekend at the OSAA State Dance & Drill championships at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Portland. She poses here with Sydney Jones, Chynne Carey, Charla Simons and Terika Christensen, who also won awards. [More photos at www.eastoregonian.com](http://www.eastoregonian.com).

Coach Kishpaugh receives lifetime achievement award

East Oregonian

Show Division.

Coach Debbie Kishpaugh raked in some high-powered recognition at this weekend's Oregon State Activities Association Dance & Drill Competition at the Memorial Coliseum in Portland.

Kishpaugh, who led Pendleton High School's Rhythmic Mode dance team to multiple state 5A championships, was honored as Coach of the Year and also received a lifetime achievement award. So far, Kishpaugh has led her team to six straight state dance titles, making seven in all. A few years ago, needing more challenge, the team switched to the trickier

This year, the team earned fifth place behind 6A perennial powerhouses Canby, Clackamas, Grant and Parkrose. Pendleton dancers also brought home individual honors. Charla Simons left the Veterans Memorial Coliseum with an academic scholarship, a Dance and Drill Coaches Scholarship and a place on the 2016 All-State Dance Team. Pendleton dancers Sydney Jones and Chynne Carey also won DDCA scholarships. Terika Christensen won second place in the Drill-Down Competition.

Hermiston's team finished seventh in the 5A classification.

BRIEFLY

TRCI reports another inmate death

UMATILLA — A 60-year-old inmate died unexpectedly Sunday in the infirmary at Two Rivers Correctional Institution.

Prison staff found Ronald Marcus unresponsive in his cell at about 10:10 a.m. An investigation is underway by Oregon State Police. No other details have been released.

Marcus was incarcerated on Feb. 18, 2014, out of Multnomah County on one count of first-degree manslaughter. His earliest release date was March 15, 2028.

This is the second unanticipated death at TRCI in less than a month. Joel Abbot, 60, who was serving a life sentence for first-degree murder since 1993, was found unresponsive in his cell on February 27 and flown to a Portland hospital, where he died.

TRCI houses approximately 1,800 male inmates.



Marcus

Rotary club to distribute tree starts

HERMISTON — In recognition of Arbor Day, tree starts will be given away in Hermiston.

Sponsored by the Hermiston Rotary Club and Hermiston Parks & Recreation, the event is Saturday, April 2 beginning at 9 a.m. in the parking lot at Smitty's Ace Hardware, 1845 N. First St., Hermiston. Those planning to attend are encouraged to arrive early, as supplies go fast.

Trees to be distributed include red maple, select river birch, eastern redbud, green ash, bald cypress and little leaf linden.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April, but many states observe Arbor Day on different dates according to the best tree-planting times. Rather than designating a single day, the Oregon Legislature identifies the first full week in April as Arbor Week.

For more information, call 541-667-5018.

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