

Heppner offers wee bit o’ St. Paddy’s fun

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Despite an abundance of snow this winter, Heppner is getting ready to roll out the green carpet for this week-end’s Wee Bit O’ Ireland.

“We’ve been hauling away mounds of snow,” said Sheryll Bates, Heppner Chamber of Commerce executive director. “The thing that’s great is a lot of people have stepped up. We have lots of leprechauns that keep this event alive.”

The only canceled activity is the sheep dog trials. Bates said the weather caused concerns about the welfare of the dogs and sheep.

The St. Pat’s Polar Plunge — a fundraiser for Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue — will have a change of venue. With the Willow Creek Dam still frozen, organizers reached out to Morrow County Grain Growers, who are making a tank for the event. People can register Saturday at 10 a.m. for the frigid fun at 11 a.m.

In its 37th year, there’s no admission charge to attend the celebration, however, there is a fee for some of the activities. Also, for a chance to win \$100 in the pot o’ gold drawings, be sure to purchase an event collector’s button. They cost \$3 and are available at local businesses before and during the celebration. Drawings will be held Saturday at Ceili and intermission during the Tiller’s Folly performance.

The weekend offers a variety of activities. Bates said people have enjoyed the return of the bed races and O’Planky Team Relay Race. The Welly Toss provides an opportunity for prizes and bragging rights as people fling Wellington boots.

Other activities include the Irish Coffee Hour (Saturday, 10-11:30 a.m.). Featuring music, laughter and lots of blarney, host Tom Melton will trade barbs with retired



The March’n Mommas compete in the bed race during the 2018 Wee Bit O’Ireland. In its 37th year, the celebration runs Thursday through Sunday in Heppner.



The Murray family of Heppner pulls away from their competition during the O’Planky Team Relay Race at the 2017 Wee Bit O’ Ireland celebration.

priest Father Gerry Condon, U.S. Rep. Greg Walden and local attorney Bill Kuhn. Also, audience members will be invited to enter the Irish Brogue Contest.

Kids won’t want to miss the Great Green Parade, which rolls through downtown at 1 p.m., or the Bouncin’ Leprechaun Fun Zone from 1:30-5:30 p.m. at the elementary school.

Music also takes center stage on Saturday: Ceili (2-4 p.m., Elks Lodge), talent show (6-7:20 p.m., parish

hall), Blue Mountain Old-Time Fiddlers (6:30 p.m., fairgrounds) and Tiller’s Folly (7:30-9:30 p.m., parish hall).

Food choices include the St. Patrick’s Altar Society Irish Dinner (Friday, 4-7 p.m., St. Patrick’s Parish Hall), Saturday O’Brunch (8 a.m. to 1 p.m., St. Patrick’s Senior Center), the Elks Irish Buffet Dinner (Saturday, 6-8 p.m., Elks Lodge) and the Wee Hours O’Benefit Breakfast (Saturday at 9 p.m. to Sunday at

3 a.m., Old Fire Hall).

Also, Condon has written and is directing an Irish drama. “The Tale of Two Lives,” which features original music and local actors, will be staged Thursday at 7 p.m. at St. Patrick’s Parish Hall. Admission is free.

And, back for a second year is Murray’s Irish Beer and Wine Fest. It runs Friday from 8 p.m. to midnight at the Morrow County Fairgrounds. The electrifying live DJ show includes music, lights and fog with Dan Burns 3D Productions. There is a \$5 cover charge. Also, food and drinks will be available for purchase from Breaking Grounds.

Road Bowling closes out the weekend Sunday at 1 p.m. on Balm Fork Road. Teams of 2-4 people can register at the chamber, the chamber’s website or prior to the event for \$20. The top three teams win cash prizes.

For more information, www.heppnerchamber.com or 541-676-5536.

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Hawthorne tries to turn around students inside and outside classroom

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The Pendleton School District’s graduation rates are already higher than average, but if it wants to raise them further, Hawthorne Alternative High School will have to be one area it addresses.

While Pendleton High School graduated 89.7 percent of its seniors in 2017-18, Hawthorne was almost

full- or part-time basis. Nearly half of those students also take classes at Pendleton High School and another four are enrolled in Hawthorne’s GED program.

Simpson said some students split their time between Hawthorne, PHS, and the district’s online school program.

In recent years, local school systems such as Hermiston School District and the Milton-Freewater Unified School District have folded their alternative high schools, consolidating students into their flagship high school’s student body.

Despite being the last holdout, school officials have said that their alternative program is important in offering students options outside of the typical high school experience.

And some students strongly identify with Hawthorne as an independent school. When the school board considered merging Hawthorne with PHS in 2017, students and staff went to a meeting to oppose the move.

Although the board decided not to pursue it, Simpson said he still sees Hawthorne as an extension of Pendleton High School.

“Kids need to feel some sort of attachment,” he said after the meeting. “If we need to hang up a sign that says ‘Hawthorne,’ we can do that.”

Simpson said Hawthorne isn’t changing its curriculum, which relies on two internet programs to provide students with learning material.



Simpson

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