

McBee: Beloved dentist, community activist passes away

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best, was his passion for Pendleton, his savvy as a community leader, a strong sense of ethics, a willingness to take unpopular stands and his ability to transform a stranger into a friend in mere minutes.

McBee had staying power. He was the local Rotary club’s longest continuous member at 55 years. He served 43 years on the Pendleton Foundation Trust. Forty-eight years with the Elks and longtime member of the Knights of Pythias and Main Street Cowboys. He led the Pendleton School Board through some tough issues and when he finally decided to go off in 1971, 130 teachers signed a petition imploring him to stay. For a full account of McBee’s community service, see his obituary.

He led a full and rich life until congestive heart failure finally got the best of him this week.

McBee and his wife, Carolyn, met at the University of Oregon on a blind date. Carolyn taught in the Chicago school system while John attended dental school

at Loyola University. After moving to Pendleton, she taught at Washington Elementary School until their first of five children arrived in 1959.

Stories of McBee’s soft-hearted approach to life abound.

Susie Stuvland, who once lived around the block from McBee, remembers the dentist soothing her traumatized daughter. Stuvland’s 8-year-old daughter Sally had been brushing her teeth one night when a tooth broke into multiple pieces that fell into the sink. Not knowing what to do, Susie, her husband Dave and Sally — all in pajamas — trooped over to see McBee, who was a family friend.

“He comes to the door in his robe,” Stuvland said. “Sally is hysterically crying. John sat down and talked to her. He was so sweet and kind.”

Turns out nothing was amiss, the tooth had fallen out on schedule, albeit a tad dramatically.

The story, Stuvland said, “epitomized how and who he was — he was so gracious and kind.”

Houk remembered McBee



Contributed photo
John and Carolyn McBee look happily at wellwishers on their wedding day. Thursday would have been their 66th anniversary.

opening his office to treat a member of a delegation from Pendleton’s sister city in Japan.

“He had a terrible toothache,” Houk said. “John went down and fixed his tooth.”

“He was a guy with the biggest heart,” said daughter-in-law Debbie McBee. “He wasn’t a black-and-white person, but he thought people shouldn’t cheat the system. He expected people to have the same virtuous character he did. He was a good example of how one person could make a difference.”

More than anything, she

said, “he loved Pendleton. He was all about making Pendleton a better place.”

Kevin Hale said he sat in McBee’s dental chair as a child and later served with McBee on the Pendleton Foundation Board. He said he already misses the man’s unfiltered leadership.

“He was the diplomatic, but decisive voice of reason,” Hale said. “He had strong opinions, but the majority of the time, he was spot-on.”

John Jr., a Pendleton surgeon, will miss his father’s ability to strike up conversations with total strangers,

he got ’er done.”

The elder McBee bagged two turkeys that day.

Jim Krout, a retired PHS administrator and fellow Rotarian, visited McBee shortly before his death. They talked about hunting and then McBee grilled Krout about the most recent Rotary meeting in which the speaker was Blue Mountain Community College President Dennis Bailey-Fougner.

“He was still interested,” Krout said.

McBee wasn’t perfect, as no person is. His son confirmed the fact by admitting that his dad was constantly losing things.

“He lost his cellphones, his cameras, his gloves,” McBee said. “He lost a brand new hunting hat on our first outing. He was not materialistic so he didn’t pay attention.”

McBee may have lost many inanimate objects, but he won’t soon lose the love and gratitude he garnered during a lifetime of service.

A funeral mass is scheduled for 10:30, Wednesday at St. Mary’s Church with private burial following at Olney Cemetery.

Creek: City working for approval to ready park for spring rains

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City Manager Robb Corbett said the state allows that kind of in-stream work from Dec. 1-March 31.

“We have a real short time to get this done,” he said.

But he expressed confidence in getting the permits during a meeting with McKay Creek area residents Wednesday night and said the city hired the engineering firm of Anderson Perry & Associates Inc. to shoulder that work.

“We feel they give us the best opportunity to be successful,” Corbett said.

Removing the 2,000 cubic feet of gravel from where the creek runs through and along Community Park required an emergency permit from the Oregon Department of State Lands. The agency granted

the permit because the city owns the park where the creek continued to flood. Brad Baird, president of Anderson Perry, explained getting permits to remove six gravel bars, including one he described as “huge,” takes a lot more steps.

His team has to conduct a biological assessment, a stream flow assessment, and come up with strategies to allow for fish passage. The typical process, Baird said, takes 12-15 months. But he and Corbett are hopeful this effort will move fast.

That’s based in some measure on last week’s Kaizen meeting, where Corbett, Baird, other stakeholders pitched their needs to the the alphabet soup of controlling and regulating agencies. They said those agencies agreed to review documents

within a couple of weeks rather than months.

“That was the first time I heard ‘fast track’ and ‘biological assessment’ in the same sentence,” Baird said.

The city also has key partners in this effort. The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners in August set its goals for the fiscal year, and addressing the flooding throughout the county made the list. County Commissioner John Shafer also attended the Wednesday night meeting.

The Lower McKay Creek Water Control District also is on board. Chair Bill Wohlford said much of McKey Creek needs restoration work, and that has to start somewhere. It makes sense, then, for the city to focus on the area where the housing

density is higher.

He also said he was about to walk away from any hope of obtaining permits this year until that Kaizen meeting. Still, he remained cautious about getting the permits.

City crews surveyed the six gravel bars Thursday and Friday. City engineer Tim Simons said the rough estimate is the debris totals 4,000-6,000 cubic yards. Anderson Perry will crunch the survey numbers to get a better estimate, he said, and calculate how deep to dig so the channel can carry 1,500 cubic feet of water per second.

“We’re trying to get back basically to that number,” Simons said, because that capacity reduces the risk of flooding.

The emergency excava-

tion cost about \$13,000. Baird said Anderson Perry’s bill for this permitting work could be in the \$40,000-\$45,000 range. This work would only deal with removing material and not restoration of the creek, and working outside the rules would not fly with state and federal regulators.

“They would shut you down so fast, it will make your head spin,” he said.

The city might get permission in February, he said, which would allow a few weeks to complete the project by deadline. However, permits would be good to do the work the next winter.

The community group McKay Creek Solutions Committee also is pushing for the permits. Mark Mulvihill spoke for the group and urged patience.

“This is going to be a long, long time of government work,” he said. “I think we’re kidding ourselves if this is a quick fix.”

The larger picture involves an analysis of the whole McKay Creek basin.

“We’re starting to pursue funding for that now,” Corbett said.

The study would show the creek’s route post-flood, which could inform home building in the area, and establish a list of priorities. Baird said the study is the map to funding for work on the creek.

Corbett said the basin study would be a long, public process, and encouraged locals to stay steadfast throughout.

“The community’s voice,” he said, “needs to be heard in that.”



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Imelda Tejada, left, and Kristi Brown pose for a portrait following a dress-up competition they organized for Labor Day at Marlette Homes in Hermiston on Friday.

Rosie: Paying homage

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While Marlette’s employees have been throwing holiday costume contests at work for years, this was the first time one was held for Labor Day and the first time the contest transformed into a moment of empowerment.

Originally, the idea was to hold a regular costume contest with a theme of famous women in history. But as the workers started to discuss their costume plans for Friday, it became clear the contest would be hard to judge because almost everyone wanted to be Rosie the Riveter.

So it was decided that everybody would dress up like Rosie, and Brown and Tejada took the initiative to make sure it happened.

“We believe it’s important for women to be in the workforce,” Brown said of their motivation.

Brown purchased fabric earlier in the week and Tejada began turning it into bandannas. After about two

days of work, Tejada had enough for the women who wanted to participate while everybody was responsible for putting together the remainder of their outfit.

Other than making the bandannas, the plan went off without a hitch.

“All it took was communication,” Tejada said.

According to David Campana, Marlette’s training and hiring manager, the manufacturer employs 215 people between the office and production floor, roughly 70 of whom are women. Many of those working the floor, such as Brown and Tejada, participated on Friday.

Tejada, 34, has built cabinets while working on and off at Marlette for the last five years. And Brown, 52, has spent the last six months wiring main panels but has worked on the manufacturing floor for five years in total.

“We’re doing some of the same work as the women who were doing the men’s jobs while they went to war,”

Tejada said.

Generations later, the idea that Rosie the Riveter represented still resonates with American women who have progressively filled a greater portion of the labor force and continue to integrate into manufacturing jobs that had once explicitly excluded them.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women’s participation in the workforce has grown from 32.7% in 1948 to 56.8% in 2016. But while women’s employment in manufacturing jobs rose constantly until peaking in 1990 at 33.2%, a 2016 U.S. Census Bureau report showed that figure has fallen to 29% since.

For Tejada and Brown, however; they’ve found a place where they feel valued and respected as women in manufacturing.

“I love working here and the way we treat each other,” Tejada said.

“We get pats on the back when we deserve them,” Brown added, laughing.

Rail: County working to settle land deal

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Wednesday, Aug. 21, to the board to the Malheur County Court, and the board of Malheur County Development Corp., the public company established to run the project.

Smith is a Republican state legislator from Heppner. While cast as a new mandate, records and interviews show that county officials were warned six months ago that the state would only fund what was immediately needed to get a rail center built and operating.

Smith acknowledged that in an email to the *Enterprise* last week.

“This has been part of the discussion with the state,” Smith said.

He said he expects negotiations with the state to make the case that all of the land sought by the county is key to the project.

But if the state doesn’t relent, the county faces challenges.

The Malheur County Court a year ago approved deals to buy two parcels for a total of \$3.3 million. One is featured as the prime site for the shipping center — a 293-acre lot owned by the Farmer family — and the other is a 76-acre lot owned by Nyssa Industries. Both are situated along Union Pacific tracks north of Nyssa.

Smith said the state told him last week that money would be provided for only 55 acres.

That means Malheur County could have to come up with millions to cover the balance or convince the Farmer family to break up the lot to sell a smaller portion for the rail center.

Jim Farmer, president of Fort Boise Produce, didn’t respond to a telephone message seeking comment.

“There are many ways to acquire real estate” with-

out the state funding, Smith wrote to the *Enterprise*.

He said that “negotiations continue with the owners of the Nyssa Industries property” — priced at \$394,650 under the existing contract.

But Larry Wilson, a county commissioner and minor stockholder in Nyssa Industries, said the county doesn’t have the money.

“The county can’t jump in on it, even if we had the money. That’s out of the question,” said Wilson.

In an Aug. 9 worksheet submitted to the state, Smith allocated \$3.2 million in state money to buy all that land, representing the Farmer and Nyssa Industries ground.

“It is the position of the Malheur County Development Corporation that the parcel known as the Farmer property is the minimum amount of real estate needed to operate efficiently,” Smith wrote.

Smith said he was aware since last year the state wanted to fund real estate for the project only under very specific conditions.

In September 2018, the county reported to the state it needed approximately 100 acres to build the rail center, create enough parking and build a staging area.

“This leaves an additional approximately 190 acres for future development,” the county said, not accounting for the additional 76 acres under contract nearby.

Smith said last week that officials wanted to buy all 366 acres at the site to “ensure the best opportunity for the county.”

State transportation department officials in February told Smith’s team there would be no blank check regarding land purchases for the facility.

A Feb. 22 fact sheet given to Smith emphasized that the land purchases for the project

are a “reimbursable expense when it is reasonable, necessary and directly related to the project. Additional land would not be an eligible expense.”

State officials presented the form to Smith the day after he appeared before the Oregon Transportation Commission with a presentation that covered the land purchases.

“It’s the land needed for the reload facility and the supporting infrastructure around it, such as the access roads, not for developing an industrial park or other supplementary uses. It is for the reload facility,” said Erik Havig, transportation department planning section manager.

Havig said the state “went through all that with the project sponsors, that the land needs to fit the size and scope of your facility.”

“We didn’t put any acreage on it because we are not in final design, but it is not to be land speculation or anything,” said Havig.

Wilson said last week he was surprised to learn of the restriction.

“I think, once again, they (the state) approved our project and then kind of changed it after the fact. But we are trying to set up a meeting with the state to iron out the problems,” said Wilson.

Grant Kitamura, president of the Malheur Economic Development Corp., declined to go into detail about the issue.

“We are working on it,” said Kitamura.

The dispute over real estate may have long-term implications for the facility and isn’t the first challenge for the project.

The project has faced intense state scrutiny since January when its operating plan — including queries about rail car availability — were questioned.