

Pools pose a dilemma for small communities

Commentary by Dave Fisher
Blue Mountain Eagle

When I set out to do a story last issue on John Day's municipal pool and the problems it is experiencing I might as well have been back home in Nehalem.

As the crow flies, Nehalem is roughly 175 miles from John Day (over twice as far by automobile) and located on the north Oregon coast, sandwiched in-between Manzanita and Wheeler. The three small coastal communities are often referred to as the three villages.

So, why is this geography lesson of importance to Grant County residents that live in the "two villages" of John Day and Canyon City?

Turns out, that area of north Tillamook County is having similar problems with its aging pool and is looking to replace it.

Nehalem is home to the second oldest pool (80 years and counting) in operation on the West Coast. Who actually keeps track of these fun facts, I don't exactly know, but that's the story, according to the North County Recreation District (NCRD), which was formed in the 1990s.

The pool is housed on the ground level of what was once an elementary school. The district came about shortly after the school district consolidated its schools and walked away from the 80-year-old building, pool and all. Not long afterwards, NCRD was formed and tasked to keep the year-round pool open and operational. Other programs evolved, but the pool remains the heart and soul of the recreation district.

The conversation of one day replacing the pool probably was initiated soon after the district was formed but has become more serious in recent years. Consultants were hired to guide the board of directors in the decision-making process, including an architect and experts in fundraising. How to pay for a pool was the main sticking point, as it is here in Grant County.

Here's what NCRD learned:

- A very basic four- to six-lane covered pool with changing rooms, showers, etc. would cost anywhere from \$4 million for the smaller pool to over \$6 million. These numbers are now three to four years old.

- The district, in securing grants and donations, could realistically expect no more than \$1.5 million in outside funding, if that.

To NCRD's credit, it has set aside \$1 million, thanks to voter approval of a 5-year special operations levy in 2008 when the district was in a financial pickle. Five

years later, the financial emergency had passed but voters approved a similar levy to continue to fund various programs. Barring a change of plans, the district could have upwards of \$2 million to kick in towards a new pool before 2020 rolls around.

That amount, even adding another \$1.5 million from outside fundraising efforts, is still woefully short and who knows what the cost of a new pool will be then. Construction costs, as we're all aware, have a tendency to go up, not down, over time. At the end of the day, voters would likely be asked to make up the difference.

John Day's mayor is spot on in his observation that municipal pools are not, for the most part, money-making operations, particularly in smaller communities. Get too giddy with the bells and whistles in the design phase and a pool can be a real drain on the community. That's the concern on the north Oregon coast as well.

The best advice is to keep it simple. For its part, NCRD, at last report, was no longer considering a six-lane pool, but sticking with four lanes. The district even researched renovating or replacing the pool where it currently is, inside an 80-year-old structure. The price tag, at about \$2 million, didn't seem like a good use of taxpayer money. Putting a new pool in an old building didn't make sense and construction was problematic. In addition, the pool, where school children have learned to swim since the 1930s, would have to be closed for at least a year and, perhaps, even longer.

While everyone is pretty much on the same page when it comes to the need for a community pool, how to pay for it is when the conversation becomes strained. My guess is the pools currently in Nehalem and John Day will be around a few more years. Who knows, Nehalem may one day have the dubious honor of being home to the oldest operating pool on the West Coast, with John Day not far behind.

Still, during the depression-era 1930s and later in the post-WWII 1950s the citizens of these two small Oregon communities found a way to finance pools.

How did they do it?

More importantly, how will we do it?

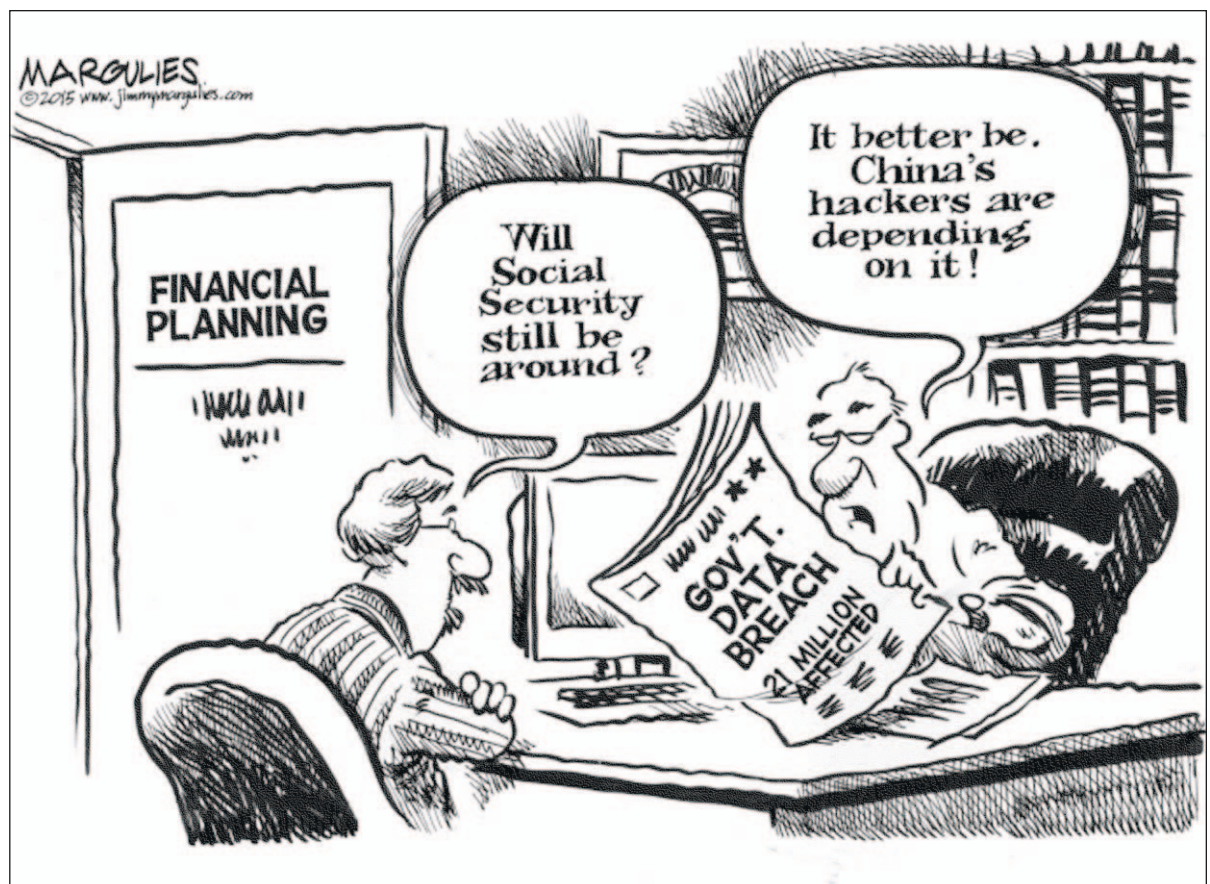
That's the question that has yet to be answered.

Dave Fisher, a Nehalem resident and former owner, publisher and editor of the North Coast Citizen, is the interim editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle.

CORRECTION

In last week's article regarding the forest access public listening session, Sabrina Stadler's first name and job title were inadvertently omitted

in the final version. She is the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team leader, working out of the Forest Service office in Baker City.



John Day Reflections

By Andrew Janssen
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Medicine is not for the faint of heart. Like many of my colleagues I entered medicine with compassion, commitment, hope and the aspiration that I could bring helpful change. Somehow through years of education and training I thought I would be able to touch lives, bring healing.

Now as I reflect on ten years in John Day I find myself captured not by medical success but by the patients who have inspired me, my heroes. Many are people others hardly notice — they go unacknowledged, unknown. But I have had the privilege to sit and listen and watch as they live through challenges that I cannot imagine. We are told early in medicine that we learn the most from patients. Often and appropriately, this refers to disease processes and treatments. Yet, if we allow ourselves to be partners together, if we are willing to "enter the chaos" and have our hearts broken, we can walk through pain, suffering, resilience and hope together. Together we live. These people are my heroes, my memories of this place. I expect to meet many more in Ethiopia but my

heart will be forever touched by those who have let me be part of their lives.

I know a child born with hip problems that could cripple but now he runs and plays. I also know a woman who still bears that disability, not having access to treatment many years ago. Yet, she goes on, feisty and persistent. My heart breaks for a child who struggles daily to breathe yet he never visits without a smile. And I smile with the 90+-year-old woman who also uses oxygen and often needs the reassurance of gentle touch to face the storms of age.

I cry out inside for the many single mothers I have known whose love for their children empowers their lives despite daunting financial and social pressures. I am in awe. I cringe to think of the men who have used, abused and left their responsibilities for fleeting distractions. At the other end of life I rest in the comfort of couples who have held each other for 40, 50, 60 plus years. Their lives have not always been easy but the love they demonstrate through such attentiveness provokes deep admiration.

There are many others. Those whose lives have been broken by abuse, alcoholism, previous heart-

break and self-centeredness — I found myself torn apart. Yet, I have been encouraged by a man who set out to walk, losing weight he never thought possible. By a frail but incredible woman who shares her life with exchange students. I have smiled with the older woman who daily chooses to live and control her blood sugars even when it is difficult.

I have been blessed by patients who have forgiven my hurriedness, my impatience, my oversights and my mistakes. They have shown me grace beyond measure.

Together we are all God's people, broken and needing each other. I am grateful for the trust and grace. I will carry many of you in my heart as we prepare to share the passions and skills we have been given. Once again, our hearts will be broken. But, once again, as we are all God's people, Americans and Ethiopians, I will be blessed to be part of their lives.

Andrew Janssen, MD, is a Family Physician. He worked at Strawberry Wilderness Community Clinic from 2005 until recently. He and his family will soon be serving in Ethiopia. He may be reached at Andrew.janssen@sim.org or janssenfamily.org.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Upset about wildfire protection

I'd like to voice myself. On July 13, 4:30 to 5:00, we had an active lightning cell coming over the Monument area, heading north of the Top area. Two of the lookouts announced they were leaving this lookout to go back to Heppner. We have no state lookout in our area that can cover us.

Well, I'm upset. I worked for 20 years for the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), was on every lookout in Grant, Wheeler and Crook counties. When you had an active storm, you called dispatch or your supervisor, and he would have you stay in the lookout till 21:00 or later. Also, any lightning strikes were marked on windows and the next day you watched

these areas closely. I would like to know why we lose protection right when an active storm comes in.

What's wrong with your people? It's like a fire gets started, you're proud that it burns 3 or 4 thousand acres plus. When we use to have fires, the ranchers would watch and were on them with gunnysacks and shovels and have the fires out. Now, with all the equipment and manpower you can't put one out.

I know for a fact we had a fire here on Dustin Point south of Monument, two ranchers had the fire all but out. The State drove up, sat, wrote and called on the radio instead of getting out and working the fires and it blew up and burned several acres. These pumpers had water; why weren't they out putting water as soon as they drove up? I've seen so much of this the last few years and it's our money

you're spending. I would like to see our state lookout back up here, but it will never happen. They say it costs too much to run them. Well, they can't cost as much as it does now, plus any homes and all are in danger.

I'm voicing myself as I've heard from so many people that feel the same way as I do. Remember, it's our tax money you're spending.

Darlene J. Forrest Monument

Asian doves an invasive nuisance

I'm writing this in response to Judy Kerr's recent letter to the editor.

I have no concern as to the logistics of her building, but as to the fact that she's wanting to "house Asian doves," you don't

even have to go on the Internet to read how they are an invasive species! All one has to do is step outside and there they are, everywhere! They have run off most of the small 'native' morning doves and they breed like flies.

If you have ever lived around a place where pigeons have taken over, you can understand my worries as to someone helping these birds to breed easier. To me, they are like the invasive thistles, pretty to look at, but they take over any area, if they are allowed to grow.

Around where I live, over the past five years, I have not seen any morning doves. They used to sit on the wires in back of my house every morning.

Something to think about before it's another "problem."

Nancy Randleas John Day

WHERE TO WRITE

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