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BULLETIN

CBEC worker killed

Grant Weatherford of Heppner was killed Wednesday morning when he came in contact with a live power line while making repairs near the Columbia Basin Electric Co-op building. Weatherford and other workers were attempting to repair a power outage when the accident occurred.

Hospital meeting / Public questions board on personnel administration and doctors

By Rick Steelhammer

An overflow crowd of nearly 150 persons jammed into the circuit court room in the Morrow County Courthouse Monday night to attend a town hall meeting on the county's health care crisis.

For more than four hours, citizens probed hospital board members and hospital administrator Bob Byrnes for answers to questions ranging from hospital staff morale to future plans for the hospital's use. At times, the questioning was heated.

Hospital officials acknowledged that morale was poor among employees. "To have employees as uptight as they are at the moment does not help anything," commented Byrnes. The hospital administrator said he believed "the conflict has come to a crisis as we attempt to solve the salary adjustment problem." The hospital board is currently working on a salary schedule with an eye towards narrowing the gap between the higher paid employees, and workers at the lower end of the pay scale—some of whom are near the minimum wage level.

PR question

But Byrnes shouldered at least some of the responsibility for hospital staff tensions. "Perhaps I haven't made the time to get out on the floor with the employees and talk about their problems," he said. "I'll try to spend less time at my desk and more time with the employees." Byrnes also stated that he would make rounds with the nursing supervisor to visit patients. He acknowledged that hospital public relations "is an area which needs a lot of work done on it."

Several persons attending the meeting accused the hospital administration of reprimanding employees for speaking against hospital policies.

"Why did some employees feel their jobs would be jeopardized by attending this meeting?" asked Arlene Peterson.

"I'm surprised at the question," responded Byrnes, adding that it is not hospital policy to stifle dissent. At least a half dozen hospital workers were at the Monday meeting, with several speaking out on hospital issues. Director of nursing Karmon Bjella said he encouraged his staff to attend the meeting, a statement verified by several nurses in the audience.

Vic Groshens suggested that the hospital board set up a grievance panel to handle complaints from staff members on a confidential basis, a suggestion that hospital board members appeared ready to adopt.

Another suggestion was made that an advisory panel of medical staff members be established to work with the board, to provide input on employe problems and technical matters facing the board. The board members indicated they would consider creating such a panel.

Bjella was criticized by several in the audience for spending little time on floor duty, directly involving himself with patients. The nursing director responded that when he applied for his position, he made it clear that his primary focus would be on administrative duties. He noted, and other nurses confirmed, that he does spend time on the floor and in the emergency room when a staffing problem

occurs. A nurse in the audience noted that past nursing directors were not required to spend the majority of their time in direct patient care.

Hospital board members stated that any employe with criticism of hospital policies, or having a disagreement with the administrator, would be welcome to address the board in private during executive sessions. But board president Fred Martin cautioned that "we are interested in documented evidence, not hearsay."

The hospital board was asked why its members were appointed and not elected, since county-raised money was used in financing the hospital. Judge D.O. Nelson answered that since the hospital is one of the few remaining county-run facilities in the state, Oregon law states that its board members be appointed by the county court.

Board member Larry Mills noted that one of the reasons the hospital is going its own on a levy request this year is to allow for the formation of a countywide health district, separate from county court jurisdiction. In such a health service district, board members would be elected rather than appointed.

Why did MD's leave Heppner?

The board was also questioned on the reasons for the departure of doctors Joseph Gifford, Richard Carpenter and Joseph Diehl.

"All we know is what they told us," said Mills. "Gifford left to take a residency in the southwest, to become a specialist. Dr. Carpenter has not really said why he is leaving, but he plans to go into a residency. Diehl feels he cannot stay by himself, and doesn't want to work seven days a week—and I can't blame him. He has a practice he can return to in Pendleton, from what I understand."

Judge Nelson said Diehl, who was unable to attend Monday's meeting since he is suffering from hepatitis, asked him to convey to the public that his departure had nothing to do with the hospital or its administration.

Budget questions are answered

A number of questions centered around the hospital's \$146,000 operating budget, to be voted on during an Aug. 8 election.

Roughly \$50,000 of the money being sought would be used to replace worn or outdated equipment—items like typewriters, laundry hampers, light medical instruments, and a walk-in cooler. Nearly half of the \$50,000 would be used to replace and equip an outdated ambulance.

Copies of the budget were passed through the crowd, with major items explained by Mills and other board members.

Several persons questioned including a \$20,000 item on the hospital operating levy to pay for locating new physicians in the county.

Judge Nelson responded that he, too, was uncertain whether the item should have been placed on the hospital levy or on the county excess levy. But the important thing, he said, was to collect the money from any source, since it will be needed immediately, in light of the Aug. 1

physicians' pullout date.

If medical services are to continue uninterrupted at the hospital, the \$20,000 will be needed for cash outlay to doctors who contract on a temporary basis. Hiring the temporary physicians would give the county-appointed Doctors Search Committee time needed to locate a permanent team of physicians.

Martin noted that money spent on finding a doctor would be returned, since studies show that each doctor "is worth about a quarter million dollars in revenue to the hospital annually." Without doctors, he added, "we lose the staff and everything goes to pieces."

"It may take four to six months, if we're lucky, to find permanent doctors," said

Kent Goodyear of the search committee. "The timing is such that recent medical school graduates have already found work elsewhere. If we attract someone who already has established practice, it will take time for him to close the practice to come here."

Goodyear added that the committee is trying to raise

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Public 'executive session' scheduled for hospital

The Pioneer Memorial Hospital Board of Directors has called a public meeting that will be conducted under "executive session" for Thursday, August 3 at 7:30 p.m. at the Courthouse.

The purpose of the meeting is to offer hospital employees and the public the opportunity to discuss with the board and administration specific problems that are personal in nature.

Oregon law provides public

bodies with the right to go behind closed doors for a variety of reasons including "...consideration of matters pertaining to the function of the medical staff of a public hospital...including the dismissal or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee or staff members."

"We feel the employees and public wanted us to hold an executive session for this

purpose and an executive session is the proper place to handle personnel matters," said Board Member Dick Sargent.

The hospital board is also setting up grievance procedures for hospital employees.

The meeting next Thursday is open to anyone wishing to make comment before the board and individuals will be interviewed one at a time during the executive session.

Heppner couple is arrested on Marijuana charges

A rural Heppner couple was arrested Tuesday on charges of delivering marijuana to a minor and manufacturing a controlled substance, following an investigation that led to the seizure of a large quantity of marijuana at their Willow Creek area home.

Ronne Cleo Lawrence and his wife, Phyllis Ann, were arraigned on the drug charges in Morrow County Justice Court Tuesday afternoon. Lawrence was lodged in jail in lieu of \$10,000 bond, and his wife was released on her own recognizance. Both are 28 years old.

Two juvenile boys, both 16, also face juvenile court action on marijuana charges in connection with the same case.

State police officers Tom Dixon and Vic Groshens and Morrow County Sheriff Larry Fetsch, executing a search warrant for the Lawrence place, located about three miles up Willow Creek from Heppner, discovered a quantity of cut marijuana drying in an attic, according to police reports. A total of 48 large plants, up to four feet in height, were seized, along with about 40 smaller plants, plus several paper envelopes containing processed marijuana and bags containing stems and twigs from the plants, police said.

District Attorney Dennis Doherty said the Lawrence couple will be the first defendants to be tried under new Oregon drug laws that took effect July 1. The new law breaks down illegal drugs into five categories of controlled substances, and provides for more severe maximum penalties for a number of drug offenses, including cultivation and sales to minors.

Under the new law, delivery of a controlled substance to a minor constitutes a Class A felony, punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment and a

\$2,500 fine. The sentence may be levied regardless of the quantity of drug involved. A marijuana cultivation, or

manufacturing, charge also constitutes a Class A felony with stiffer maximum penalties.



Green grass of home

Sheriff Larry Fetsch displays part of the contraband collected when a Heppner couple was arrested Tuesday on marijuana charges. The couple allegedly grew the substance and were allegedly involved in marketing the product.



The old master

Retired City Foreman Vic Groshens Sr., pours molten lead around repaired pipe. Groshens offered his services to the city last week when the water shortage became critical. City Foreman Randy Krueger looks on.

Water pipe break leaves Heppner residents dry

Temperatures were high, temperatures were short, and water was virtually nonexistent in Heppner last week.

The trouble began Tuesday afternoon, when a 12-inch mainline developed a crack at a location along Balm Fork Road, before the water supply reaches the city.

City workers first diagnosed the trouble as a defective valve. "Water had been leaking from the top of the valve prior to Tuesday," said City Foreman Randy Krueger. Since the valve cover reaches above the surface of a road leading to an apartment building, city workers initially theorized that a vehicle might have struck the cover, damaging the valve enough to cause the massive leak.

However, after the area around the leak was excavated, it was discovered that water was coming from a pipe insert connected to the valve.

Noting the worn condition of the valve, and taking into account the proximity of the pipe leak to the valve itself, "I thought the valve was ruined," said Krueger. "It's one of those guesses you have to make."

In retrospect, Krueger acknowledged that repairs "could have been done faster if we had just gone in and patched the pipe...but we probably would only have saved six to eight hours—the difference between improvising with an old piece of pipe or using a new one."

Adding to the lag in making the repairs was the fact that the city has no mobile power source for lighting that would have allowed pipe sealing and

packing work to continue through the night. Such work includes the spreading of molten lead on pipe jointing—a chore Krueger said he would not want to perform using flashlights.

Former city water superintendent Vic Groshens aided city workers in repairing the line. He received a cut requiring 14 stitches to close in the process. In a special council meeting last Friday, the council voted to give the retired watermaster \$100 in appreciation for his services.

"I really appreciated his help," said Krueger. "If anyone knows the Heppner water system, Vic Groshens does."

Once repairs were made, many city households remained without water throughout much of the day Thursday, waiting for water pressure to build in the various holding reservoirs. Adding to the problem was the fact that a number of Heppner residents ignored police requests to refrain from non-essential uses of water, such as irrigating lawns and washing cars.

Residents of the Rasmussen and Lott subdivision were without water until nearly midnight Thursday.

The water loss had a monetary effect on a number of Heppner businesses. Car washes, the laundromat, beauty salons, and restaurants were all forced to close temporarily. Central Market, which utilizes coolers requiring water, had to remove a large quantity of perishable goods from display coolers. Food losses were minimal, but

the items could not be sold during the time they were relocated in refrigerators inaccessible to shoppers.

Krueger left Wednesday afternoon for Portland to pick up a replacement valve, returning with the equipment Thursday. The pipe had been cut open to accommodate the new valve by city workers on Wednesday. Krueger said the city had attempted unsuccessfully to contact area pilots and air freight companies to fly the part back to Heppner on Wednesday.

Wilson resigns

Misunderstanding given as reason

Heppner City Councilman Hubert Wilson told the Gazette-Times Wednesday that he was tendering his resignation as councilman because of an apparent misunderstanding concerning comments he made at a special council meeting Friday, July 21.

At that meeting, called for other business, Wilson said he wanted to make sure that retired city foreman Vic Groshens Sr., was paid for work he did on repairing a broken water line last Thursday.

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