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Sheriff's office moves to new facilities



Undersheriff Verlin Denton (left) and sheriff Roy Drago display new communication equipment in their new office.

A move by the Morrow County Sheriff's Office to new facilities at the former U.S. Forest Service building on Willow View Drive in Heppner will not only provide the office more space for their expanding department, but will also avail them to new state-of-the-art communication equipment.

The department moved from their three-and-a-half room, windowless cubby hole in the courthouse basement to a 10-room modern facility beginning Monday, Oct. 18. Moving is expected to be completed and the facility in full operation by Thursday, or Friday.

The move was prompted by the sheriff's office's designation as a coordinator for emergency procedures in the event of a chemical agent release at the Umatilla Army Depot during destruction of chemical weapons.

Purchase of the \$200,000 building was funded by the Army for the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP). The Federal Emergency Management Administration paid for the \$80 thousand remodeling job and the \$120,000 radio console and 911 system were funded through state 911 funds. Another \$20,000 of 911 monies were set aside for the changeover of phone lines from the previous system. County tax monies were not used for the facility. The new system is in preparation for an enhanced 911 system which will

be implemented as soon as a rural addressing system is completed. With the enhanced 911 system, when a dispatcher picks up a 911

call, the computer system will automatically display the origin of the call.

The old 911 system will remain at the courthouse as a backup in the event of an emergency.

The new facilities are also much more secure than the old offices. The new office has security cameras at each of the three entry ways and a security front door which will be locked after 5 p.m. business hours. To obtain entry after 5 p.m. anyone without a key must use a security phone located outside near the front door. If the person is determined to have a legitimate reason to enter the building, the dispatcher will then signal the computer to open the door. The front office/dispatch center is also now protected by high impact glass.

The sheriff's office now has an "interview" (interrogation) room, a booking center that will eventually have a locked security room for temporary holding of prisoners, an evidence room, a radio and computer room and offices for the sheriff, undersheriff, civil deputy/business manager and 911 and dispatch center, in addition to the CSEPP command center/squadron room and emergency management office. The CSEPP command center is equipped with a multitude of phone jacks for use by federal emergency experts, if the need ever arises. Drago said that the entire facility will be taken over in the event of such an emergency.

The office also has a propane generator that will automatically kick on in the event of a power failure. At the previous office, the

generator had to be manually started if the power failed.

The new facility is also handicap access, which the courthouse basement was not.

Concerning the communication center, Drago commented, "We're looking at a system that will probably be here when we're gone." He said that the former system is just now starting to fall apart after 20 years of use.

"We know it's just a matter of time before we have to expand our services," added Denton. Drago said that when he first came to the department, they received around 28 calls a year. Now the department receives around 1,500 calls. Part of the increase in calls is due to an increase in crime, said Drago. But, he added, more people rely on the department to handle calls now. "We still answer calls," he said. In addition to the business office and Morrow County 911 calls, the department also handles 911 calls for Wheeler and Gilliam counties, who pay \$5 thousand and \$10 thousand respectively for that service. Those two counties also contributed financially to the department's move.

The county sheriff's office is still a bare-bones operation, however, as far as personnel goes. In addition to the sheriff and undersheriff, the department employs seven deputies, five fulltime dispatchers, one part time dispatcher and the chief civil deputy/business manager.

School district plans could include Boardman and Irrigon high schools, new Heppner Junior High building

Irrigon resident Dan Creamer and mayor Don Eppenbach asked the Morrow County School Board to include a new high school for Irrigon and a new junior high for Boardman in an upcoming capital improvement bond issue. The board is seeking to put the issue on the March ballot.

Irrigon high school students are currently bused to Riverside High School at Boardman and Boardman junior high school students are bused to Columbia Junior High School in Irrigon. Riverside has 397 students, of which approximately half are from Irrigon.

Proponents of the plan say that since recommendations already call for the addition of many classrooms to accommodate an estimated four percent growth in the north end, new schools should be built instead.

School superintendent Chuck Starr said that if both Riverside and Columbia Junior High School were remodeled to accommodate students in seventh through 12th grade, the plan could be feasible.

Starr said that a bond issue to fund construction would not fund staffing and general fund budget constraints would not allow for funding of staff at two additional schools. But, if the schools were expanded to seventh through 12th grades, staffing needs would probably remain much the same. The district faces additional cuts in the general fund because of the passage of Ballot Measure 5. The district growth committee

had earlier recommended that the following additions or changes be made:

Riverside: addition of 12 classrooms, gymnasium with wrestling/balcony area and locker rooms, auditorium which could seat the total student body, storage space, remodeling of several areas and disabled access between the main floor and gym level;

A.C. Houghton Elementary: addition of eight classrooms (sixth grade students would be schooled at Columbia Junior High) library, remodeling of present library for staff/conference rooms, storage space;

Columbia Junior High: addition of 10 classrooms (six classrooms for new sixth-grade students to be schooled at Columbia and two additional classrooms for growth in the seventh and eighth grades.

Sam Boardman Elementary: addition of four classrooms for growth (sixth-grade students would be schooled at Columbia Junior High School), two conference rooms, one staff room;

Heppner Elementary School: remodel or replace gymnasium; Safety issues: Heppner High School-provide disabled access between lower level and upper level of building; Heppner Middle School-provide disabled access to the top floor; Ione Elementary School-provide disabled access to all levels.

Ione resident John Bristow spoke in behalf of the plan for high schools and junior high

schools in both Boardman and Irrigon. He said that 115 Ione residents had signed a petition in favor of construction of the schools. "It's not good to bus kids away from the people who care about them," said Bristow. Bristow, Eppenbach and Creamer concurred that a school focuses a community and creates a sense of pride and identity.

While Starr and school board members stressed that the decision to build or remodel schools should be based on educational need and not politics, Heppner resident Rollie Marshall said that including a new junior high school in Heppner in construction plans would make passage of a bond issue more likely.

Starr said that preliminary estimates of costs for implementing all recommendations for the bond issue total \$16 million.

Starr said that the estimated assessed valuation for the \$16 million in improvements would be \$1.92 per thousand, based on a six percent interest rate. For example, a person with a \$40,000 home would pay \$76.80 a year; a person with a \$100,000 home would pay \$192 a year; a person with a \$300,000 business would pay \$576 a year and a person with a \$1 million farm would pay \$1,920 a year. The \$1.92 rate per thousand would be lowered by a lower interest rate, additional construction in the county and higher valuations. The \$1.92 rate would be offset somewhat by a lower school tax rate mandated by Ballot Measure 5.

School board rejects HHS dance team request, changes graduation date

The Morrow County School Board turned down a request to allow a dance team at Heppner High School, despite assurances from the petitioners that the program would be self-funded and required no school district funds.

The district had earlier voted to cut funds for cheerleaders and dance teams from the budget of all Morrow County Schools and turned down a similar request to allow cheerleaders at Heppner High School in September.

The board vetoed the request on "principle", saying that approval of such a request would create inequities among the schools and further antagonism between the communities.

Student body president Gretchen Berretta told the board that the dance team already had \$200 and would receive another \$400 from Oregon Together to pay for a parttime advisor during basketball season. Volunteers are prevented from donating their time because of the certified staff's extra duty contract.

A.C. Houghton Principal Don Holes, says that his school's dance team, which also has been cut, would have difficulty raising funds to support a dance team.

Berretta, other dance team members and Heppner community members criticized the board's acution, commenting that the dance team is a healthy alternative to drinking, drugs and gang activity and praised the girls for using their initiative in raising the funds.

Heppner High School teacher Bob Sagely suggested that the dance team become independent of the school. Superintendent Chuck Starr said that was a possibility as long as the dance team did not have HHS or Heppner High School on their uniforms and requested in advance, as is required by any other non-school group for permission to perform during halftime.

In other business the board: -agreed to change the graduation dates of both Riverside and Heppner High Schools to Sunday, June 5. Proponents of the change cited conflict with state baseball playoffs and senior trip plans for Heppner High School and state softball playoffs for Riverside High School. Other members of the delegation said

that Heppner's Thursday night, June 2, graduation date, would not allow relatives and friends from out of town to attend. Riverside's graduation date was previously Saturday, June 4. Ione High School's graduation date remains on Friday, June 3.

-heard a report from Holes and Riverside High School principal Dave Youngbluth concerning gang activity in their respective schools. "We cannot stop gangs in the community," said Holes, "but we can stop them in the schools." Youngbluth said that administrators have undergone training in dealing with gang activity and said that training involved the use of "pepper spray". "We have safe schools,"

added assistant RHS principal Kevin Fry, "but we have to be proactive." The principals said that problems arise from outsiders on campuses.

-approved a request from the Irrigon Park District to use an undeveloped piece of land for a little league park. The park would be developed and maintained by the park district, but ownership would be retained by the school district.

-learned of applications for grants to fund site council expenses and to fund a satellite dish to broadcast classes that are not presently offered at the schools, such as foreign languages and other specialty courses.

MCGG annual meeting Nov. 1

The Morrow County Grain Growers annual meeting will be Monday, Nov. 1 at the Morrow County Fairgrounds in Heppner.

Dinner will be served by the Willows Grange at 6:30 p.m. The

program will include reports from company officers and election of directors.

The speaker for the evening will be Fritz Hill who will give a humorous talk on agriculture.

Nominations sought for ASC ballot

Farmers are asked to nominate candidates of their choice by November 1 to be on the ASC county committee ballot, says R.H. Matthews, chief executive officer.

The ASCS county committee election will be conducted from November 26 to December 6 by mail ballot.

ASC committees are responsible for managing federal farm programs on the local level. To meet the needs of individual producers, ASC committee members must be concerned and responsible individuals, Matthews said. Morrow County farmers have the opportunity to nominate people they feel would best serve the farm community. Farmers will be receiving petition forms by mail and will be submitting them to the county ASCS office.

A few basic considerations should be kept in mind when circulating petitions, said Matthews. In order to be valid, petitions must be limited to one nominee each, must include written certification that the nominee is willing to serve if elected, must be

signed by at least three eligible farm voters in the ASC community, and must be received in the county ASCS office by November 2 deadline.

Farmers may circulate or sign nominating petitions for as many candidates as they choose. Anyone wishing to nominate a farmer for the ASC committee election may contact the county ASCS office for full details, including eligibility requirements for office holders.

Farmers should petition for and elect those individuals they feel would do a good job as a member of the ASC committee, said Matthews. The election of concerned farmers to positions on ASC committees is essential in the administration of farm programs, he said.

Matthews further explained that the county ASCS office welcomes all valid petitions. The opportunity to nominate, vote, and to be elected to office is guaranteed to all farmers regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, marital status, handicap, or national origin.