

Off the Wall By Meryn Robinson

Leaping reindeer. It's almost time for Santa Claus to make his infamous run. While hitching up for that trip, Santa's elves aren't likely to make a mistake in the order of things. However when it comes to putting the cart before the horse, there seems to be some misinformation on a local issue.

Contracting of school services including transportation, janitorial and food service isn't at present being considered by the school board. According to superintendent Chuck Starr, research would be needed to determine if such action would be considered a cost-cutting measure.

With only nine student school days in December, those costs have already taken a holiday-like nosedive. Judging from the number of high school students who buy school day lunches downtown, their tastes must fancy a different cuisine. Although students are often involved in fund-raising causes, it could be that they never heard of packing a lunch to school. Or perhaps their at-home cupboards are bare because the Christmas elves made a raid to give to the more unfortunate.

But the burning question of how to finance schools can dim Christmas candles. In an effort to tighten up after-holiday belts, the classified employees have indicated a willingness to cap salaries at 1995 levels. In contrast, many school boards are approving four to six percent teacher wage hikes along with salary step increases. This is in addition to a healthy portion of health insurance costs for teachers and families. In comparison to other professions, teachers are employed for nine months including holiday and spring vacations. In line with a day's work for a day's pay, teacher absentee costs should be borne by that individual teacher.

Meanwhile public employees are crying in their Tom and Jerrys about measure eight, that rules PERS benefits will no longer be paid by employers, who are also the taxpayers. A trade-off seems likely in the form of another salary increase.

Middle class living standards seem to know no bounds when it comes to the latest model vehicles, recreational equipment and home embellishments. It's fortunate that Santa wears the same suit every year and doesn't attempt to keep up with the latest trends. But then he probably has to make do with his old suit since he's considered a part-time employee without full benefits or a hefty retirement salary, somewhat like agricultural producers and small business peons.

Stepping on slippery turf, not necessarily caused by the weather, can cause one to fall on the posterior. Yet an increasing snowfall of paperwork for landowners probably clouds my judgement while hanging up a Christmas sock that has developed a hole in the toe.

Before saying farewell to that wasted figure representing the old year, every frog puddle which might sometimes hold a drop of water, is supposed to be registered with the Oregon Water Resources Department.

Hear ye, any off-channel ponds up to specified dimensions will not be assessed a fee for registering, not currently anyway. Yet the paper chase includes submitting specifications as to water storage capacity, use, water source and geographical location. In line with increasing water regulations, Representative Chuck Norris said that the state hasn't yet determined that toilet tanks are holding reservoirs in line for assessment, even though those water closets often hold more water than many ponds during summer months.

Making merry, the elves in the Water Resource Department will be singing 'Happy New Year' as checks come rolling in to obtain water rights for ponds using water from a stream, lake or in a on-channel course, particularly those that support fish.

Filing for a water right might take years to get more spendy and expensive well drilling is nothing compared to the agony of getting permission to pump water from same.

Let the deer roam, but keep cattle out of creeks. I just hope that overzealous conservationists do their part in resource management. I remember when bathing and clothes washing was once a weekly ritual. Nowadays some of our influential policy-makers take decision making baths more frequently.

Christmas List

- | | |
|---|--|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> DeWalt Power Tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Truck Seat Covers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rival Heaters | <input type="checkbox"/> Jonsened Power Saws |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Skil Power Tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Stanley Tools |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vice Grip Pliers | <input type="checkbox"/> Rubbermaid Boxes |
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Dog's return helps family over the holidays

He's got the spunkiness of the dog in "All Dogs Go To Heaven", the love of three young boys and is well on his third "life". Blackie is just a special dog.

Blackie, a two year old labrador-German shepherd and possibly border collie mix, is owned by the John and Rhonda Looney family of Heppner. The dog was with John Looney when Looney was involved in an automobile accident near the Echo junction Nov. 7. Looney was critically injured, sustaining injuries to his head, ribs, knee and lungs. He was transported by ambulance to good Shepherd Community Hospital in Hermiston and air-lifted to the Oregon Health Sciences University Hospital in Portland. Following the accident, the dog ran off and the family didn't think they would ever see him again.

Finally, almost two weeks later Rhonda Looney got a message at work that a friend had read an ad in a newspaper that described the Looney's dog. According to Rhonda, the friend was positive that this was the Looney's dog.

Rhonda called the family, and sure enough, it sounded like Blackie. The dog had ended up at the Harry and Shana Geer place on Buttercreek the Friday before Thanksgiving. "They just took him in," said Rhonda. "He was a little skinny and favored his right front paw, which had been broken, but he was okay." Because Rhonda didn't have a car that was working, the Geers offered to bring Blackie to Heppner when they came to town.

Twelve year-old Matt Looney said that the family was happy

to be reunited with their dog, especially 13 year-old John. "John was very glad," said Matt. "He just grabbed him." The family also includes 10 year-old Tony, who got the dog for his eighth birthday. While Blackie was technically Tony's, he really belonged to everyone in the family, said Rhonda.

"They say that cats have nine lives," commented Rhonda. "I think this dog is well on his third. He's been in two car wrecks." Rhonda says that since her husband has been in the hospital, she feels comforted by having the dog in the house. "He's very protective of us," she says.

While the Looney family will have their dog home for the holidays, it doesn't look like their husband and father will make it home this Christmas. John Looney is improving, however, and has been moved from OHSU Hospital to Highland Hills Nursing Center. He has started physical therapy and, according to Rhonda, has had his "trach" taken out and can speak. "But we're still talking a long time," says Rhonda. She says that John's 50th birthday is Dec. 21 and the family plans to go to Portland for a birthday surprise. But, after that they will stay home for Christmas. "I'm hopeful that we'll have him home soon, or at least closer to home," added Rhonda.

Meanwhile the holidays will be hard this year for the Looney family. "I wasn't going to have a tree," said Rhonda. "I was going to be kind of 'bah humbug'. But then somebody gave us a tree and I got more into it." She said that she is very appreciated of the many people who have donated any-



Rhonda, John Matt and Tony Looney with Blackie

mously to the family. They received two Christmas trees, one of which Rhonda gave away. She added that the family was fortunate in that they

had applied and were accepted into the Oregon Health Plan shortly before the accident. But still, John Looney is not expected to be able to go back to work for at least a year.

Blazer/Avia scholastic awards announced



Trailblazer/Avia scholastic improvement awards for the first semester of school were announced at Heppner High School recently.

Recipients of Basic Improvement Phase One awards are pictured: front row l-r: Chris Sykes, Jon Hanna, Shawn Hisler, Colin Anderson, Rod Zumwalt, Randy VanEtta; second row: Shawn Wilhelm, Angela Debo, Anji Bergstrom, Bryce Tucker, Chris Holland; third row: Lonnie Rill, Frank Martin, Jennifer Rankin, Deana Hendricks, Bev Haugen, Stephanie Johnson; back row: Jeremy Cimmiyotti, Frank Martin, Donald White and Miles Hill. Not pictured are Bill Schlaich and Casey Betzold.

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