

HEPPNER

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Lighting contest winners announced



Glen Ward took first place in the Chamber of Commerce lighting contest for outdoor light display. He received \$50 for his efforts. Other winners were: second-Larry Mills, \$25, third Steve Brownfield \$15, honorable mention-Chuck Moeller, Don Crompton, Alan Burkenbine, Don Kenison, Dean Connor, Marcia Sweek.

Linda Dutcher took first place for the indoor lighting contest winning \$20. Gary Clark was second for \$10. Kay Fowler owner of Hair Expression was the business winner receiving \$15.

Solutions hunted for sports funding problems

Sports programs and other extracurricular activities are threatened with extinction in Morrow County Schools. Sports programs, food service, transportation, music and art programs are being considered for cuts and a pay-to-participate program has already been instituted for sports and other activities.

But, cost-saving measures may not be enough to make up for the effects of Ballot Measure 5 on the school district budget. Morrow County School District Superintendent Chuck Starr estimates cuts of \$1.6 million in the district budget in the 'worst case' scenario. Even in the 'best case' scenario, in which the state legislature decides to 'hold harmless' school funding, Morrow County School District anticipates losing around \$1 million. Starr said that if the school bond issue passes in March, the district's budget outlook would improve by \$400,000 immediately.

Some concerned citizens, however, are not content to sit and watch school sports and other extra-curricular activities go down the drain. A group met at the school district office Thursday, Dec. 15, to brainstorm solutions to the district's funding problems.

One option discussed would transfer the extracurricular fun-

ding to the various park districts in the county. However, committee members Thursday night reported that while the Willow Creek Park District Board indicated interest, the Boardman and Irigon park districts did not. The possibility of funding south Morrow County extracurricular activities only was also discussed, but Starr stressed the importance of those activities for the entire county. Creating a special district may not be feasible because, by law, districts cannot overlap services.

The committee also explored using the county government as an umbrella for funding. County officials would have to be persuaded to create a district by resolution or the committee would go through the process of gathering signatures for an initiative petition to get the issue on the ballot. Funding for the district would also have to be approved by the voters.

Officials estimate that it would take around \$380,000 to fund extra-curricular activities for the entire county. This would include sports currently funded, both high school and junior high, in addition to cheerleaders and C-teams, which are no longer funded by the school.

Funding for other government entities in the county

would be affected by compression if an additional bond issue passes. All those entities are placed under a \$10 per thousand assessed valuation cap. For example, if the bond issue passes, apportionment of the \$10 would be squeezed and the city of Heppner and Morrow County would get less of the pie. Gary Marks, Heppner City manager, estimates that such a move would cost the city around \$3,000 if sports and other activities funding is spread out county-wide. Cost to the city would rise substantially if funding is limited to south Morrow County. The utilities and rural residents would help pay for the program if it is funded county wide.

Morrow County Assessor Greg Sweek estimated that taxes to fund a program serving the entire county would be around 49 cents per thousand assessed valuation.

Morrow County Judge Louis Carlson told the Gazette Tuesday that it was the county's goal to hold the line on tax spending, but the court was willing to look at the committee's proposal.

It was the consensus of the committee that sports and other activities were not only important to the youth of the county but also to entire com-

RV campsite nears completion



Kenny Turner stands at RV Park site. Willow Creek Lake is in the background

It has been almost 10 years of hard work, lobbying, disappointment and frustration, interspersed with hope, for the Willow Creek Park District's RV campsite project. But there is finally cause for celebration. The Willow Creek Camp Site, designed for recreational vehicles, is nearing completion and is expected to have its grand opening St. Patrick's weekend.

The project has certainly had its ups and downs. In 1986 the Willow Creek Park District was formed expressly to develop Willow Creek Lake. In 1988 the Willow Creek day park was developed with a dock and a boating access ramp. This portion of the project was funded through a 50 percent cost share program. The State Parks and the Marine Board each awarded \$20,000 for the project and the rest was funded through in-kind donations.

In 1990 Willow Creek Park Board secretary Nancy (Brownfield) Snider traveled to Washington, D.C. seeking funds for further development. Funds were allocated, but not appropriated. After a visit to Heppner by Senator Mark Hatfield, a \$100,000 federal allocation was dedicated to the project as an Army Corps of Engineers' line item. The \$100,000, however, was eaten up by a Corps of Engineers' study. In February of 1993 funding for the project was denied. According to Ken Turner, WCPD chair, the Corps declined to fund the project because they didn't think the Willow

Creek Park District Board could come up with matching funds. The Corps had estimated the cost of the project at over \$1 million. "We just couldn't cost share \$600,000. The Corps wanted us to blast in rock and make 14 foot cuts and 14 foot fills. We would have been using dynamite up there until the dam fell in. That was just a three-year waste of time," said Turner. "We felt for a long time we could build it for \$200,000," said Turner. The board is very proud of building it within our budget." Construction began this year and the project came in at \$201,746.

"It's just that the funding has been so slow," continued Turner. "In hindsight, a local construction levy would have been wise because we would have had this in place four years earlier."

The Oregon Economic Development Department, with the help of Mike Nelson, gave the park board \$20,000 for construction and Kinzua Corp. awarded another \$20,000 out of their community fund. The board also used tax monies since 1990 to fund construction.

The RV site project is still short \$50,000 for funding of the final phase which includes paving, landscaping, a sprinkler system, picnic tables, signs and markers and a dump station. The board had hoped to qualify for Regional Strategies monies, but, says Turner, "we fell through the cracks on the first round of regional strategies money." Turner says that the board will borrow that \$50,000

from the Port of Morrow revolving fund.

The campsite has 24 units for RVs with water and electrical throughout. Eleven of the units include hookups to the city of Heppner sewer. The restroom shower facility is constructed out of textured concrete blocks with a metal roof and is complete with separate facilities for men and women, hot water and heat.

But perhaps the best thing about the new camp site is the view. Every unit has an unobstructed view of Willow Creek Lake. "The RVers that have come are outspoken about the site, because of the vista-the view of the lake and the unique view looking up the valley and over the lake," said Turner. "There's not going to be one more aesthetic."

The real benefit of the project will be to the community. Turner says the project is probably the best thing possible to bring tourists into the area. "Probably tourists come through and we don't even see them. They go on. This is probably the key to our tourist industry," he said.

Turner credits his fellow Willow Creek Board members-Bob Kahl, vice chairman; Nancy Snider, secretary; John Ripple, treasurer; and Robin Baker, for making the project possible. "We've had the same board during this period and they've all stuck with it," said Turner. Others contributing to the project were Jim McElligott, the design; Lori Seitz, surveying; PACAM, sign off on design; Jerry Gentry and Dave Allstott, construction of the restroom; park manager Vern Keithly, general contracting and roof construction; Jamieson and Marshall, plumbing; Roger's Electric, electrical work; Bill Gentry, overseeing the utility design and installation as a volunteer; Guy VanArsdale, finish work on the pads and loop roads, in addition to donating his skill and grader to finish the landscape preparation; Miller and Sons, contractor for the rock and gravel distribution; and donors, Columbia Basin Electric, Morrow County Grain Growers and Umatilla Ready Mix. A group of volunteers installed the imbedded pipe and electrical conduits.

After the initial opening, the park will operate March 15 through Nov. 15. The tentative cost to campers will be \$12 a night per site. Turner says that the board projects income of \$12 to 15 thousand the first year, with much higher use anticipated in subsequent years. During the busy season, Keithly will be at the park daily.

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