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Gazette  
Times

VOL. 115 NO. 5 6 Pages Wednesday, January 31, 1996. Morrow County Heppner, Oregon

## Hospital administrator has led varied and interesting life

By April Hilton-Sykes

Pioneer Memorial Hospital administrator and Morrow County Health District CEO Kevin Erich looks like your typical mild-mannered businessman, probably raised in Iowa, Nebraska, some Midwestern town. Actually, Erich grew up back East, way back...as in Far East.

The son of a physician and missionary, Erich spent his youth in Korea.

Erich was born in 1958 at Ford Ord, CA, to Louis and Lillian Erich. His father was a captain in the U.S. Army, as well as being a doctor. His mother, Lillian had a teaching degree, majoring in religion and minoring in secondary education.

Active in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Erich family had a long history of philanthropy, sometimes linked with danger, but always with an abiding faith. His grandfather, who was a missionary in China, was once captured as a spy and condemned to death. On the eve of his execution, the Nationalist armies recaptured the area and he went free. Erich's father heard about the incident over the radio.

Erich's father was born in Shanghai. When he was around 11 years old, a war broke out between the Nationalists and the Japanese. He, his mother, older brother and younger sister were asked to come out of central China and asked God's guidance for their travels. They had planned to take the train, but as they approached the station, the train pulled out. The train was full and no other trains were scheduled to leave that day. With no other option, they were able to get tickets for the next day. The next day they discovered that the train they were scheduled to take had been completely destroyed by the Japanese. They had to roll the train, still burning, off the tracks so they could proceed. Once on the train, the family was faced with an incredible dilemma. The train had just passed a bridge, which was a common target for bombings, and there was an air raid. On one side of the train was a lake and the other a swamp, so they couldn't escape, but they couldn't go back to the bridge either. They decided to stay where they were, circled by 27 Japanese bombers. Amazingly, the bombers finally left without destroying the train.

"I have a big trust in God," said Erich, "some based on my experience and some on my family's."

When Erich was one year old, his family went to Korea to work as missionaries, living in the southern port town of Pusan. When he was seven they moved back to the States so his father, then a general practitioner, could take his residency in internal medicine. Erich spoke both English and Korean, but up until returning to the U.S., 'thought' in Korean. He spoke Korean to his friends and he and his brothers often translated for their parents. The Erich family then went back to Korea for four years. From 1970 to 1973 they returned to the U.S. while his father finished a residency in obstetrics/gynecology.

They returned to the Far East, this time to Singapore for Erich's high school years, from 1973 to 1977. He graduated from the Far Eastern Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist school which had students attending

from all over the world.

Erich's high school campouts were a little more exotic than most—to the jungles of Malaysia, complete with the howling of baboons. During one campout in the jungle with his friends, Erich almost fell over a trip wire. He followed the wire and came face to face with a guerrilla fighter who had a gun pointed at him. Erich had entered the perimeter of the guerrilla camp. In visiting with the soldiers, they told him that they believed that charms protected their opponents from death. Erich said that there were still many skirmishes in the area following the Vietnam War and the communists used the soldiers' superstitions to propagate fear.

During Erich's senior year he traveled to Sarawak with his parents and a student missionary who was teaching at his high school. Sarawak, a state of Malaysia, is in northwest Borneo. Erich's father held a medical clinic there for around a week, offering one of the few opportunities for the people there to get medical care. The Erich family stayed in a longhouse, traveled by dugout canoe and walked through swamps with the aide of a guide. Crossing the swamps was difficult because only the guide knew exactly where to cross, stepping on logs invisible under the water. "We had to follow him step by step," said Erich. While in Sarawak they traveled to a mountainous village and were the first white people the villagers had seen. The people were no longer cannibals, but the vestiges of the practice were still apparent—the skulls of earlier victims.

Besides Korea, Singapore and Sarawak, Erich has traveled to Japan, Hong Kong, Falkland, Australia, New Guinea and Vietnam.

Erich has a lot of respect for his father, who was the only U.S. physician to pass medical boards in Korean. The Korean boards were especially difficult, because knowledge of three languages was required on the exam. If there was no Korean word for a particular item or procedure, a Chinese word was used. And if there was no Chinese word, they used English. Erich said that because of the primitive conditions and isolation, his father was sometimes the only hope the people had. He added that the elder Erich sometimes studied a procedure the night before surgery the next morning. His father, who is still practicing medicine, and mother now live in Sonora, California, north of Yosemite.

Erich has an older brother, Jonathan, who is a physician in Vancouver, WA, and a younger brother, Timothy, a high school history, government and economics teacher in Carmichael, CA. Timothy is running for the U.S. Congress on the Reform Party (Ross Perot's party in California).

After high school, Erich enrolled at Pacific Union College in Northern California, then vacillating between studies in business and pre-med. After his sophomore year, he took a year off to take a position in Indiana as assistant boys' dean at an Adventist academy for high school boys. There Erich, who was on a gymnastics team in high school and college, taught gymnastics. While he was paid only \$60 a month, he found the job "really rewarding". After his stint there, he returned to Pacific Union to finish his bachelor's



Kevin Erich

degree in business.

Motivated by the desire to obtain his master's degree and to find someone who shared his beliefs, Erich enrolled at a Seventh-day Adventist college, Andrews University at Berrien Springs, Michigan. He achieved both. On the morning of August 5, 1984, he received a master's degree in business administration. In the evening he married his wife, Sharla. Sharla, who grew up in Michigan, was born in Walla Walla and has relatives living in the Bend area. When the couple met, her father was the chairman of the physics department at Andrews. Her mother, who is from the Centralia area, has a master's degree in piano performance.

After their marriage, the couple moved to Illinois where he was employed at the Broadview Academy and she attended school at North Illinois University at DeKalb. She was then accepted into the physical therapy program at the University of Health Sciences Medical School, located near the Wisconsin-Illinois border. Right before she finished school, their first child, Robbie, was born on March 15, 1988.

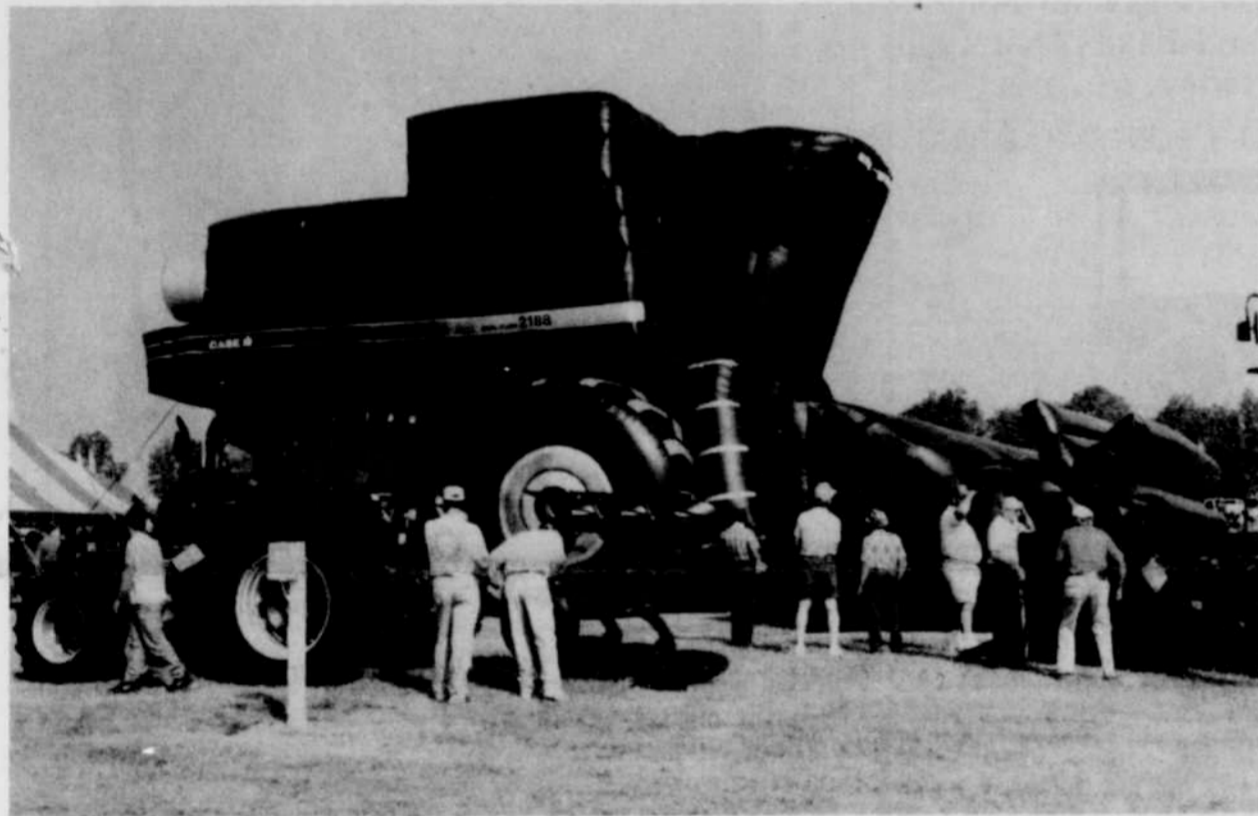
In 1986, Erich began working for an Adventist chain of nursing homes. He was assistant administrator for a 200 bed facility, administrator for a 50-bed facility and then administrator for an 80-bed facility. On April 18, 1990 their second son, Stephen, was born.

Wanting to broaden his base of experience in managing an acute care facility, and get away from the city, he accepted the position as administrator of Pioneer Memorial Hospital (PMH), which now includes administration of Morrow County Health District (MCHD). The Erichs arrived in Heppner during St. Patrick's weekend of 1992. Sharla, 31, began working as the physical therapist at PMH the summer of that year. In addition to her job, caring for their two children, and staying active in their church, Sharla is an accomplished musician and plays in the East Oregon Symphony.

"It's been fantastic," said Erich, 37, said of their move to Morrow County. "It's been a tremendous learning experience. We also like the idea of a small town. We've enjoyed living here. We've had the opportunity to get involved in so many things."

Erich says that as administrator of MCHD, he is "trying to do what's best for the institution and for the county." Since he began as administrator, the health district has added dental offices in both Boardman and Heppner, and a third physician in Heppner. The district has proposed a bond issue which would fund construction of an acute care facility in Boardman and a clinic in Irrigon.

### World's largest combine at MCGG appreciation day



Big combine to be on display at MCGG appreciation day

The world's largest display combine, the CASE IH 2188 inflatable AXIAL-FLOW combine, will be at Morrow County Grain Growers (MCGG) in Lexington on Saturday, Feb. 10, during their customer ap-

preciation day, from 7 a.m. to noon.

"This is no ordinary combine," according to Larry Mills, MCGG general manager. The inflatable combine is 60 feet long, 28 feet tall, and has a 45 foot grain header. The grain tank would hold 1600 bushels.

The replica serves as a goodwill ambassador for Case IH dealers and is scaled at twice the size of a standard series combine.

MCGG invites everyone to view the monster combine, which is the first appearance in Oregon. MCGG is located at 350 Main Street.

### Brrr...it's cold; winter is here

Winter has hit Morrow County with a vengeance. During the past week, Heppner has been on the receiving end of around six inches of snow and a blast of an arctic cold front.

Heppner City foreman Dave Winters reported a high of 18 degrees Monday, January 29, with a low of minus eight. The Bank of Eastern Oregon's thermometer reported a high of around 13 degrees Tuesday,

### Two local men injured in rollover

Two men were injured in a one-vehicle rollover accident January 25 around 5:40 p.m. across from the Kinzua Resources mill near Heppner.

According to Oregon State Police Senior Trooper Tim Cundell, Kevin Lee Brewer, 26, Lexington, was driving a 1989 Ford Bronco, when he dropped a cigarette lighter. As Brewer bent down to pick up the lighter, he lost control of the vehicle. When the vehicle roll-

ed over, both Brewer and his passenger, Anthony Scott Wichlan, lone, were ejected. Neither was wearing a seat belt, said Cundell.

Brewer suffered internal injuries and was transported to Good Shepherd Hospital in Hermiston by ambulance. According to Cundell, Wichlan suffered a possible broken back and was airlifted to St. Charles Medical Center in Bend.



It's cold

dropping to seven degrees around 3 p.m. and down to four degrees only a few minutes later.

Monday's precipitation was .03 of an inch, amounting to about an inch of accumulated snow with 2½ inches still on the ground.

Sunday's high was 40 degrees with a low of 15 and .05 inches of precipitation in the form of ½ inch of new snow and 2½ inches accumulated.

Saturday's high was 36, with a low of 23 and .24 inches of precipitation (2½ inches of snow). Friday's high was 41, with a low of 18 and .25 inches of precipitation (three inches of snow).

### Morrow County Election Results

Tuesday, Jan. 31, 1996

Rep. Gordon Smith vs Dem. Ron Wyden

	Smith	Wyden
Boardman	381	225
lone	242	62
Irrigon	397	306
Lexington	208	48
Heppner/Hardman	595	293
Totals	1823	934

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