

HEPPNER



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Heppner welcomes back favorite son for 13th year

It just wouldn't be the Wee Bit O' Ireland St. Patrick's celebration without Heppner's favorite son and Ireland's too--Bill Mitchell.

Mitchell, who at 6 feet, 5 inches is affectionately called "Big Willy" by his friends in Heppner, has returned without fail for 13 years to attend the festival. In fact, he wouldn't miss it, despite some complicated travel arrangements. "Here I am again in 1998," said Bill. "And, the good Lord willing, I'm hoping to journey north many more years to come."

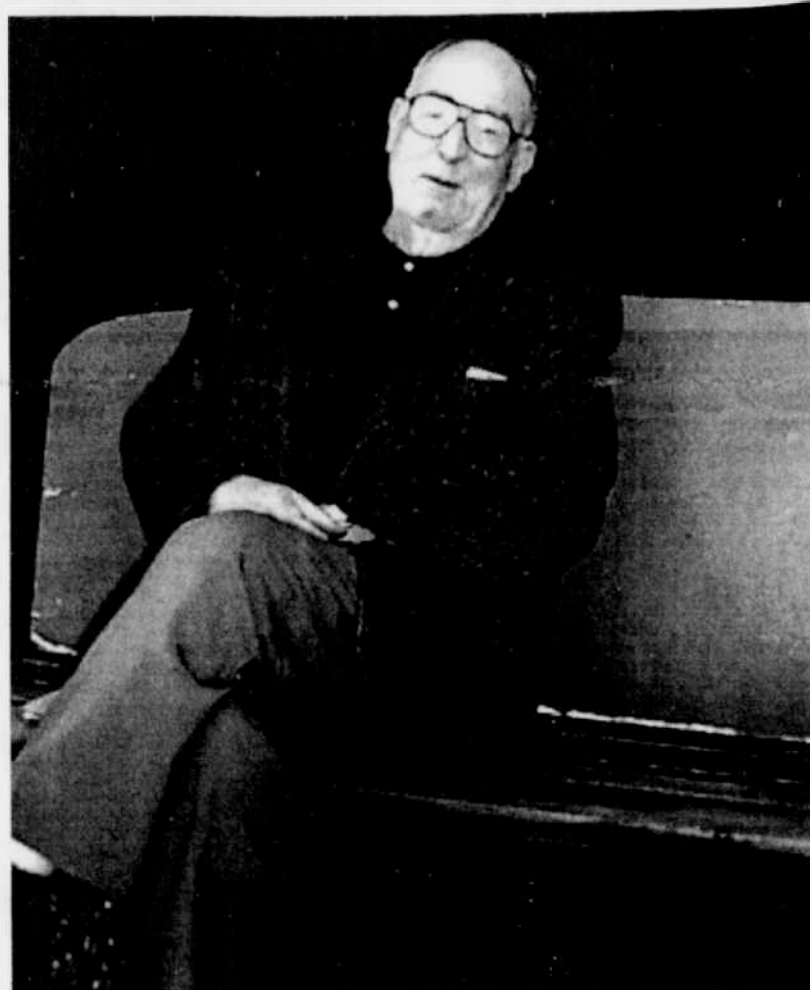
Bill was born on a small farm in Cloone, County Leitrim, Ireland, on November 3, 1918. His parents, John Mitchell and Rose O' Brien Mitchell, sold their family farm and left Ireland in June of 1925 to move to New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada. The family lived there for over a year and then came to Little Buttercreek in August of 1926.

Bill enrolled in school at Pine City that fall and the following year the family moved up the creek and he spent one year at the Pleasant Point School. At Pleasant Point he was taught, says Bill, by the "brilliant" teacherage of Juanita Leathers Carmichael. "The Pleasant Point school was a one-room schoolhouse, where Bill's schoolmates included the Dalys, the Cunninghams and the Swaggarts."

The Mitchell family moved to Heppner in the fall of 1928 and lived in the Phil Hirl house. The Hirls are the festival's honored Irish family this year. Mrs. Phil Hirl was the grandmother of current Morrow County Commissioner Raymond French. In Heppner, Bill attended school at the schoolhouse on the hill from fourth through eighth grade. Some of his classmates included Kathryn Hoskins, Riley Munkers and Lloyd Burkenbine.

The family left Heppner and moved to Pendleton where Bill attended St. Joseph's Academy, graduating in 1937. Two years later, the whole family moved to California where Bill has lived ever since. Although he has lived in Daly City, CA, for the past 59 years, Bill says, "I've always considered Heppner, with its great people and sprinkling of Irish, as my second home." He says what he treasures most are his many friends here, including Jim Farley, Dean Gilman, Bill Kenny, Jack Healy, Raymond French, Dan Brosnan, Howard Bryant and "others too numerous to mention."

"I remember the old days of Heppner," says Bill, "with all the Irish sheepmen--the Kilkennys, Kennys, O'Briens, Monahans, Farleys and Healys, among others. There was a large influx of young Irish who came over



Bill Mitchell

and tended sheep. At that time the town had a real Irish flavor and many were native born Irishmen." Bill says that Pete Lennon was the last native Irishman of the early immigrants to pass away.

Bill's father John worked in construction, helping build the Heppner-Spray Road and assisting Father Thomas Brady in construction of the Catholic Church in Boardman. He continued construction work after the family moved to Pendleton and then to California. Bill's mother, Rose was a homemaker. Rose's brother was Tom O'Brien, who is the father of Gordon O'Brien of Heppner. Her sister was Kate Campbell of Condon.

Bill says that his parents "dabbled" in Gaelic, but spoke mostly English at home. Bill's brother, James, who has passed away, and sister Kathleen Mitchell, now of Walnut Creek, CA, were also born in Ireland. Youngest sister, Margaret Prindle, now of the San Francisco Bay area, was the only sibling born in the U.S. She was delivered by Dr. McMurdo in January of 1927.

Bill and his wife, Claire, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in November 1997. They have three grown daughters, Joan Thomas, Cindy Mitchell and Maureen Mitchell, all of the Bay Area, and two grandchildren, Tyler and Emily Thomas. Bill was in the freight transportation field in operations and sales, working for truck lines and railroads before his retirement in 1984. Bill and his

wife bought their three bedroom home in Daly City in 1950 for \$15,000. Now, says Bill, the house could be put up for sale at over a quarter of a million dollars.

Besides his annual trek to Heppner, which entails flying to Portland, renting a car and driving from there, Bill has been to Ireland six times since 1980. "I had two very delightful trips with the number one Heppner Irishman, Jim Farley," laughs Bill. "It was the highlight of his life to go back to County Longford and locate the ancestral home of his mother and father." Bill says he has a number of cousins scattered throughout Ireland and really enjoys the socializing there and "a sampling or two of a pint of Guinness, which is so nice and easy on the draw." He says that more and more of his Irish relatives have come over to visit. His cousin, Brede Lyons, was the grand marshal for the 1989 honored Irish family, the O'Briens.

Bill says that he has noticed a change for the better this year in Heppner. "The town looks good with the golf course, the up-to-date hospital, the new swimming pool and the newly renovated Main Street," he says. While those things are all very nice, it's clear that what Bill really loves is the view from his favorite park bench in front of the Heppner Post Office, sitting and visiting with his dear, longtime friends.

Waterpark plans family swim day

The Willow Creek Waterpark is planning a special family swim day on Friday, March 27. The multi-use spa will be open for use from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. and no appointments are necessary. The charge is \$2.50 per person or \$6 per family (immediate family members only).

"We want to encourage those who have never used the spa to come try it out for exercise or fun," says Waterpark manager Sarah Carlson. "The spa is kept at 90 degrees which is a comfortable temperature for people of all ages. However, exercising in water of this temperature does have its risks. We suggest that individuals and families limit their exposure to 30 minutes. We have deck chairs set up for spectators, or for those who need a break from the water. The room temperature is kept at a comfortable 75 degrees," adds Carlson.

Parents will need to accompany and supervise their children. Oregon State Health law prohibits anyone under the age of 14 years to use a spa unless accompanied by an adult. The law also does not require a lifeguard to be on duty at a spa. "We feel families should know that while Waterpark personnel are available anytime the spa is open, there is no certified lifeguard on duty in the spa," says Carlson.

The multi-use spa is usually open every Friday-Monday by appointment from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Anyone may make an appointment by calling the Waterpark, 676-5752, and leaving a message as to the desired date and time of use, preferably 24 hours in advance. Waterpark personnel will call back to confirm appointments.

Aquatic exercise classes are given in the spa on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for four weeks. There are four times during the day when those classes are taught: 8-8:30 a.m., 12:15-12:45 p.m., 1:30-2 p.m. and 6-6:30 p.m. The last session of these aquatic exercise classes will start Monday, April 6. A session of lessons costs \$35.

"These are great classes for anyone of any age and fitness level to participate in. Those who have taken the classes have been amazed at the benefits they have received just by exercising in the water for 30 minutes. These are the types of classes that you can participate in and not even get your hair wet," says Carlson.

The Waterpark has season passes at discounted prices until Wednesday, April 1. A family pass at the discounted rate is \$150 and the individual pass is \$60. These will go up to \$160 and \$75 after April 1. Season passes or spa punch cards are available at the Waterpark or may be purchased by sending a check payable to the Willow Creek Waterpark, P.O. Box 291, Heppner, OR 97836.

Corps changes flow

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers increased water releases March 11 from the Willow Creek Dam in Heppner, water regulators have announced. Flows were increased from the level of nine cubic feet per second to 30 cfs to help regain some flood control space in the lake following a recent period of rain.

Saturday, March 15, the Corps decreased flows to nine cfs to settle the creek prior to the O'Ducky Race. The race ran from 3-5 p.m.

The flow adjustment is done each year to facilitate the race, part of the city's annual St. Patrick's Day celebration.

Following the race, flows will be increased again, and held at 15 cfs.

The alteration in the flows for this event will not affect the flood control capability of the dam, said Russ Davidson, Corps hydraulic engineer.

Bucknum's Tavern opens in time for drinking o' the green



Patty Dean and John Gochnauer
A familiar place is back in operation in Heppner and what's best of all is that it's now owned by a familiar face.

Yes, Bucknum's is open and made its debut just in time for the Wee Bit O'Ireland celebration in Heppner last weekend.

New owner is John Gochnauer. John and his wife lived in Heppner for 10 years, leaving in 1978 to move to Davenport, WA, and then to North Bend seven years ago. John, now the district manager for Farmer's Insurance at North Bend, started the Farmer's Insurance agency here, drove school bus and worked for Kinzua. His wife, Judy, who recently passed away, was a teacher in Heppner. All of the Gochnauer children attended school in Heppner. Daughter Lynn Gohlke is now a counselor at Davenport, WA; daughter Melody Nuxoll, Spokane, was an insurance agent, but now is a stay-at-home mom; daughter Cindy Gochnauer is an insurance agent and artist in Spokane; their son Kenneth passed away in 1984. John also has six grandchildren.

John says that he plans to move to Heppner when he retires from Farmer's, but until he does, he plans to be here "a lot of weekends."

New manager at Bucknum's, Patty Dean, worked with John in the insurance business at North Bend.

Patty, 28, who was born in Connecticut and grew up in North Bend, moved to Heppner three weeks ago with her two

daughters, Cortney, seven, and Macey, five.

Patty says that she loves the area. "People have been wonderful to me," says Patty. "When I came to this town, Sandi Matthews, who had never met me, left her door unlocked and let me spend my first weekend at her house." Sandi also helped out at the tavern over the busy St. Patrick's weekend. Sandi's parents, Don and Jean Bennett of Heppner, are close family friends of the Gochnauers and Jean was Kenneth Gochnauer's godmother. "Suzie Jepsen has been wonderful, too," says Patty. "She says she's going to mother me."

Ken Eckman of Eckman Construction and Jason Hanna remodeled the tavern. Bucknum's has been painted and paneled and it now features a big screen TV and an anti-smoke device, which basically sucks the smoke out of the building. "Everyone seems to be excited about the changes," says Patty. "I know we are."

Monday Bucknum's was to begin serving food, including taco salads, soft tacos and soup and sandwiches. Patty says that they plan to expand their menu after they get the kitchen installed and eventually they hope to have a full service bar. For now, they have seven beers on tap, coffee and pop. Peanut night-where everyone eats peanuts and throws the shells on the floor- will still be a fixture.

Hours will be 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays; and 8 a.m. to around 12:30 a.m. weekends, although they stayed open later for customers over St. Patrick's weekend.

Heppner in running for youth camp

Heppner has been selected as one of three sites still in the running for locating an Oregon Youth Accountability Camp, according to Heppner City Manager, Gary Marks. Marks passed this information on to Morrow County Juvenile Judge Louis Carlson, last Friday.

"We want to keep our citizens informed about the progress of this selection process so that there will be no surprises," Judge Carlson said. As a result, an informational forum is scheduled to be held at the St. Patrick's Senior Center on Thursday, March 26, at 3 p.m. and at 7 p.m.

Betsy Leighty, director of the Central/Eastern Oregon Youth Accountability Camp, will be on hand to answer questions as well as Doug Smith, assistant Director of the Tillamook Youth Camp.

"We also believe that someone from the Tillamook Youth Camp Citizens Advisory commission will be in attendance to discuss

how the local citizens advisory commission represents the community in regards to camp operations and procedure," Judge Carlson said.

"I believe that we have a good shot at getting this worthwhile facility here in Heppner. The state committee will be taking a second look at the site again in the very near future," Carlson said. "We recognized that not all of our citizens will be pleased with the location of this facility for various reasons. We think it is important that we listen very carefully to these people and evaluate their concerns in the final decision making process."

A public hearing on the site will be held Monday, March 30, at 7 p.m., with the location to be announced.

The other two sites being considered are both in Union County--one near the city of Union and another next door to an existing youth facility near LaGrande.

Try wheat cake samples Thursday

The Morrow County Wheat Growers League will hand out samples of this year's Oregon Wheat Growers League contest cake on Thursday, March 19, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Central Market in Heppner.

The event is planned to celebrate National Agriculture Week March 15-21.

The 1998 contest cake is a white honey cake. The MCWGL invites everyone to stop by the market to try a sample of the cake. Recipes will be handed out with the samples for those who would like to try their hand at baking the cake.

A recipe for the cake will also appear in the Gazette-Times.

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