

Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: Letters to the Editor must be signed. The Gazette-Times will not publish unsigned letters. Please include your address and phone number on all letters for use by the G-T office. The G-T reserves the right to edit.

Setting the record straight

To the Editor:
Voters of Morrow County, I am confident by now that you know that I lost my bid for re-election as the district attorney by a total of seven votes in the May 19, 1998, primary election. Let me first of all congratulate Mr. Allen on his election and wish him the best and give my appreciation those people who voted for me.

Before I leave I want to clear up a few misconceptions that were published in a letter to the editor published in the E.O. the evening before the election and signed by Sharon Barrick who is a counselor at Riverside High School in Boardman, Oregon.

Ms. Barrick is a member of the multidisciplinary team in Morrow County but has been virtually invisible to law enforcement and the team for the past couple of years for reasons of which I am unaware.

Ms. Barrick's letter stated that I was less than diligent in my efforts as the district attorney and I want to assure you that isn't true. She spoke of a case where I "civilly compromised" a case where a female victim had been subjected to "psychological terror" when forced to watch an individual slit the throat of her dog. My secretary and I have searched our files and no such case was ever brought before this office.

Ms. Barrick also stated that I plea bargained a case where a 24-year-old man "raped" a 13-year-old victim. The facts are that when the girl became pregnant she was 14 years old and living with the defendant. The fact is also that the victim refused to testify against the defendant and I could not put her in jail for summary contempt because she was pregnant (jails won't take pregnant people ordinarily). I was also informed by the Umatilla Health Department that the defendant was a very responsible young man and involved with both the mother and her pregnancy. In addition I was contacted by the defendant's employer who spoke highly of him. Based on these facts I allowed the defendant to plead to Contributing to the Sexual Delinquency of a Minor and required him to take care of the mother and the child as a condition of probation. I thought it more important that the father be able to financially provide for the child and the mother than putting him in jail. I would also point out that this 24-year-old had no prior criminal record.

Ms. Barrick also said that I wouldn't even bother to make a phone call to the Corrections Division on a murder case that occurred back in 1983 and as a result the board reduced this inmate's sentence by five years. Nonsense. The process that is used by the Board of Parole involves a review every three years of inmates committed to extensive periods of time in the penitentiary, for crimes committed before 1989. The Board will only undertake to hear a case if there is a positive recommendation from the Department of Corrections. The Board takes into consideration whether the inmate has been involved in programs such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation and employment training and whether the inmate is responsible. If the Board decides under OAR 255-40-025 that the inmate's behavior during incarceration is favorable then they can reduce the time an inmate will remain in custody.

When these hearings come up, the district attorney is not notified because this is essentially an in-house procedure. The victim or victims are notified and given the opportunity to be heard. The victim in this case is living in another county and this office was not notified.

Ms. Barrick also stated that a grandfather molested his grandson and that even after he confessed I did not prosecute. Nonsense. I did prosecute that case and the grandfather was convicted of Sexual Abuse in the first degree, served jail time, did therapy and counseling and is a registered sex offender.

The last statement that Ms. Barrick made in her letter relates to a charge against the director of

the Morrow County Road Department who was charged with dumping gasoline on Columbia Avenue in Boardman, exposing it to the air and then covering it with asphalt (which is a petroleum product). This situation developed when I was in Bosnia. When I got back I discovered that my replacement had neglected to appoint Matt Galey, who is a Umatilla County Deputy D.A., as a special prosecutor for Morrow County and, as a result, the misdemeanor case was still in Morrow County. By the time I became aware of all of this the Morrow County Court had already voiced strong support for a compromise. When I learned from the defense attorney that Louis Carlson had signed a civil compromise agreement and was asking the Circuit Court to dismiss the charges because of the compromise, I called Matt Galey and asked if he had any objection to the compromise and he stated he did not. I had no objection to it as I understood that the Board unanimously supported it as well. This may reek of the "good ole boy" system at work to Ms. Barrick but frankly I thought putting the petroleum product gasoline on an area to be covered with the petroleum product asphalt resulted in a no harm situation. I was not and I'm still not offended by the compromise.

I am hoping that you Morrow County voters won't see this response as bitter grapes because it's not intended that way. My only wish is that instead of printing Ms. Barrick's letter on the eve of the election that it had been printed at a time when I could have responded to it.

(s) Earl R. Woods Jr.
District Attorney-Morrow County

Support daycare

To the Editor:
In my role as a state child care consultant, I have visited and worked with staff at the Heppner Day Care Center for the last three years. My last visit a couple of weeks ago was a wonderful surprise.

The center is cleaner than I have ever seen it. Staff were interacting with the children and the children were laughing and having a wonderful time. The new director Merry Brannon appears to have a real commitment to making the center a place the community can be proud of. Her long range plans seem to speak to her desire to provide children with a safe inviting atmosphere with lots of developmentally appropriate activities.

If you have not used the center or visited Heppner Day Care in the last month, I urge you to stop by with your child and see the difference. Your community needs to support the facility and the efforts being made by the new director. I hope that my next visit will see an increased enrollment.

(s) Kay Burns, consultant
Hermiston

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GRAND OPENING

at **RJ's Steakhouse and Lounge**

on Saturday, June 6, from 12-8 p.m.

Meet new owners, Gary & Diane Lent

Hamburgers & Hot Dogs furnished by RJ's

*Buy & Cook your own Steak!

KARAOKE by the BUFFALO BOYS

Horseshoe Tournaments

Join The Fun!

The Dining Room will be closed Saturday evening, June 6th for the grand opening.

RJ's is now OPEN for BREAKFAST,
LUNCH & DINNER everyday from 7 a.m.-9 p.m.;
Sundays from 7 a.m.-7 p.m.

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Weigh implications of decisions

To the Editor:

I would like to set forth some ideas for our community to consider in the aftermath of the recent youth accountability camp decision.

I would like to address the issue of delinquent detention and criminal incarceration in a historical context.

In the past, 50 to 100 years ago, every county and every city of any size had a jail for holding and punishing juvenile delinquents and petty criminals. Such facilities were a basic part of community infrastructure right along with water and wastewater systems, police and fire protection, and streets. The responsibility for jailing local delinquents and low level criminals was accepted and handled at the local level.

With the passage of time, in the interest of efficiency, jail facilities were consolidated into larger, more cost effective structures, increasingly away from the locale of the delinquent or criminal behavior. With the rise in concern for prisoners' rights, even more consolidation took place as old, obsolete facilities were phased out of use.

For example, in Morrow County the old county jail has been converted into office space for the assessor's department.

At the present time, our delinquents and criminals are housed out-of-town and out-of-county. We currently have only one 24 hour holding cell at the Morrow County Sheriff's office. Delinquents are housed at the Northeast Oregon Regional Facility in Pendleton on a space available basis. The juvenile director reports that our needs for detention of juvenile offenders are frequently turned down due to lack of space. Our adult offenders are housed at the Franklin County Jail in Tri Cities, Washington or at the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton on the basis of a limited amount of guaranteed space and additional space as available.

Jailing of charged delinquents and criminals is further controlled by availability of funds for paying for this service.

The 1998-99 budget for Morrow County provides \$278,000 for out-of-county jail room and board and \$4,500 for out-of-county jail medical expense for adult criminals, which, incidentally, is \$50,000 less than the sheriff's department felt it needed to handle anticipated jailing needs in the coming budget year. The same budget includes \$10,000 for detention of juvenile detainees.

So it is that we house our delinquents and criminals elsewhere, out of sight and out of mind. We pay a considerable sum of local tax money to do this and we get absolutely no local monetary benefit from these expenditures. However, the governing boards of Franklin and Umatilla counties are very happy to accept Morrow County's payments to them for provision of jailing services.

The only county tax funds for jailing services that stay in Morrow County are the salaries and benefits that are paid to the two sheriff's department transport deputies who do live in our county. These costs amount to approximately \$90,000 annually.

The Morrow County Court has

properly set up our jailing services as it does because, in total, it costs less to transport prisoners and house them in available out-of-county facilities than it would cost to construct and operate an in-county jail facility.

Additionally, when the possibility arose of partnering with four counties to the west of us in the construction of a regional jail, it was determined that, due to the high per capita property valuation in Morrow County, we would have been paying a disproportionate share of the cost of building this jail. So, Morrow County elected not to participate in this project and to continue housing prisoners out-of-county and paying for this service to the other jurisdictions.

How does this relate to the youth accountability camp issue? Simply put, we are avoiding the direct responsibility for providing jailing for our own delinquents and criminals, it is costing us taxpayers a lot of money, and we're not getting any direct monetary return into our local economy for our tax expenditures. Also, because we house our delinquents and criminals at the convenience of governmental bodies over which we have minimal control, it is often the case that charged individuals return immediately to our streets and neighborhoods without serving any jail time.

The accountability camp would have provided us with some measure of economic benefit in the total picture of corrections and juvenile detention. But, we passed on this opportunity for a lot of reasons.

The accountability camp decision is behind us and we have to move on to other pressing community issues such as the assisted living facility, economic diversification and job creation. But while we do this, please keep in mind some of the implications of the decision that was made and resolve to look unemotionally, thoroughly and analytically at future project proposals.

(s) John Edmundson
Heppner

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Apologizes for "stupid" actions

To the Editor:

My name is Michael Phillips. I used to be citizen of Heppner and Ione but not any longer. I wanted to publicly apologize for my actions I committed in 1995 and 1996, because of some stupid actions I have done by breaking into a house and taking a rifle from the residence of Todd Peterson and four months later I stole a four-wheeler from Jerry McElligott's Ranch and went joy riding on it. I now know that my actions were stupid. I got over a half of a year in jail and paid some fines for it, but that's not all. I am having trouble getting a job because of my record and I lost the respect and trust of the people of Morrow and Umatilla counties. My life has changed from an easy to a hard life. And the same with my family, especially for my kids. They haven't spent much time with their dad. I wasn't able to be there when my daughter was born. I do spend time with them through visitation every week, if I can get a visitation with my kids.

I have to listen to others say that I don't love my kids, but they

don't know what I am feeling inside. I know what I have done to hurt others. I also know how long it will take to get their respect back.

Some people have different opinions about people who are on probation or on parole. Some people know how it feels and some don't, and some can forget and some can't. I don't blame others for my problems. Don't judge me for what I have done, but judge me for who I am and the effort to get back on track and to clear my name.

I apologize to the people of Morrow and Umatilla counties for my actions. My crimes are no one's fault but my own. So I'm not upset with the victims or with the police or with my probation officers. It's with me and only with me.

I will carry this for the rest of my life. There's no doubt in my mind I will clear my name and I am trying to learn from my actions and the repercussions. For Morrow and Umatilla counties, I apologize for my mistake.

(s) Michael W. Phillips

Clinic, hospital continue to provide area.

To the Editor:

Many of your readers may have recently received a memo from Dr. Ernie L. Atkins, DO, announcing his resignation from the clinic and the Morrow County Health District as of June 30, 1998.

To clarify any misunderstandings, because Dr. Atkins has resigned, does not mean that the clinic is closing.

Family Nurse Practitioner Wendy Haack will continue to see patients as she has for the past year and is remaining in Heppner. We currently have three prospective physicians who are interested in relocating to our

area. While the district continues to recruit a replacement for Dr. Atkins, Doctors Berretta and Wenberg will continue to provide clinic and hospital coverage. As needed, the district may utilize locum tenens physicians (temporary physicians) until such time as a permanent physician is employed.

The clinic and hospital will continue to provide for your medical needs as it has for years.

Sincerely,
(s) Cara Osmin,
Board Chair
(s) Daniel Grant
CEO

YARD SALE

Rain or Shine!
At Dr. Atkins' home:
458 Morgan St., Heppner
June 5th and 6th starting at 8 a.m.

Donations gladly accepted starting June 1

Yard Sale to benefit Faith Healy

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"REAL QUIET"
Tries for the Triple Crown!
Doors open: 9:30 a.m. • Post time: 2:27 p.m.

Ring 'Em Up Slot Tournament!
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TOTALING \$20,000!
Two sessions every Wed.,
Thurs. & Fri. 7 pm to 11 pm
Night Owl Sessions • 11:45 pm to 4 am thru June 5
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