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Gazette  
Times

VOL 117 NO 37 8 Pages Wednesday, September 16, 1998 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## Health District in dire financial situation; board to seek services from Good Shepherd

The Morrow County Health District Board voted at their regular meeting Monday night to approach Good Shepherd Hospital concerning provision of medical services for the health district. The board's action follows news of the district's dire financial situation and imminent closure of Pioneer Memorial Hospital and Nursing Home.

George Koffler, president of the Bank of Eastern Oregon lambasted the board and Adventist Health Systems, who provides administrative and other services for the district. "I'm concerned about the viability of the district," said Koffler. "Your situation is bad, as bad as I've ever seen."

"This pill would have been easier to swallow," he said, "if I thought the district had been managed properly. It's just awful."

"The billing mess is nothing like I've seen," Koffler added.

Larry Mills, former CEO for Morrow County Grain Growers and president of the hospital foundation, concurred, saying, "You have some extremely serious problems and those problems are not going to go away."

"I agree with George that Adventist Health has done a tremendous disservice to the community (by not letting the community know earlier)," Mills said. "My recommendation to the board is that you've got to move forward. You can't sit around and cry in your beer. It's not going to be pretty and it's not going to be painless."

Nurse Practitioner Wendy Haack pointed out that if there is no hospital, there are no Adventists. "They do not manage clinics," she said.

Roger Rieger, Adventist Health Systems vice president and representative to MCHD said that they "were not going to run away."

"We understand the consequences to the community," he said, adding that they planned to "work with the community."

Mills countered by saying, "I would caution you, that if you're going to make a smooth transition, that you keep a low profile."

At one point during the meeting, board member Meg Murray, who opposes the closure of the hospital, threatened to resign from the board. Board chair Cara Osmin said that it was not the wish of the board that Murray resign.

The board held a lengthy executive session where board members met with MCHD administrator Susan Brock, who is employed by Adventist Health Systems, MCHD Chief Financial Officer Dan Grant, Rieger, Daniel F. Vidas with the Portland law firm of Dunn, Carney, Allen, Higgins & Tongue, a bankruptcy attorney hired by Adventist Health, and MCHD human resources director Scot Jacobson.

The group then invited into executive session three of the district's medical providers and the director of nurses, Tami Henderson. The three providers were Wendy Haack, nurse practitioner employed at Pioneer Memorial Clinic and PMH; Dr. Clyde Burnham who works at PMC, PMH and the Boardman clinic; and Dr. Ken Wenburg, physician at PMC and PMH. Dr. Shanilka DeSoyza, provider at the newly opened Irrigon clinic, was not present.

According to Grant, the problem is not the district's debt, but the operating expenses. According to Grant, the district has only \$36,000, which is enough to meet payroll for only another three weeks. Grant said that the district is losing \$1,500 a day, amounting to \$45,000 a month. Total debt

for the district, including current and long term debt and payroll is around \$850,000, he said.

Brock said that the district simply does not have enough people to support a hospital. "You cannot survive on 1.6 patients per day. You just don't have the population to support it." Brock and Grant also pointed out the declining reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid patients.

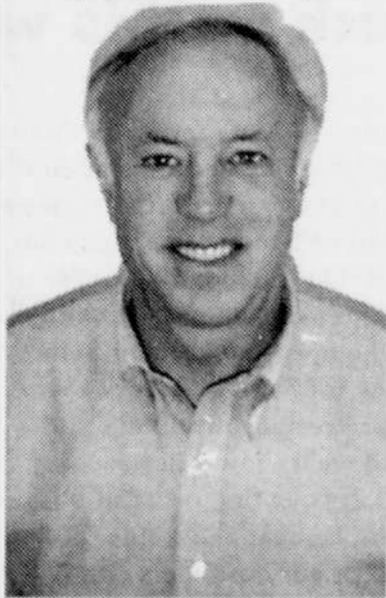
The board discussed selling the dental practices in both Heppner and Boardman while they are still viable, but concluded that their sale would just be a "band-aid" and would not staunch the cash flow crisis.

The board also discussed putting a tax measure before the people, but feared such a measure would not be approved and could not occur soon enough to bail the district out.

The board voted to have Osmin and Brock speak with the Morrow County Court concerning the district's financial situation. Murray abstained.

In the earlier vote to contact Good Shepherd concerning the clinics, two board members, Norma Stahl and Vicki Kent, stated that they were employed with Good Shepherd, but would have no monetary gain if GSH took over clinic operation.

## Heppner city manager selected



Gerald W. Breazeale

The city of Heppner has hired Gerald W. Breazeale, Madras, as new city manager, replacing former administrator Gary Marks, who resigned to take a position with the city North Bend.

Breazeale, 50, has been public works director for the city of Madras since 1989. He was a utility worker for the city of Veneta from 1985-89. He

farmed in northern Minnesota from 1980-85 and was a planner for the Georgetown Divide Public Utility District in northern California from 1975-80. He worked as foreman for Cioli Landscaping in Sacramento from 1972-75 and for Pacific Coast Landscaping from 1971-72.

Breazeale attended Chico State University from 1966-71 with a major in industrial arts and a minor in biology and has taken numerous continuing education classes. He holds certificates in wastewater treatment system operation, wastewater collection operation as a water treatment plan operator, water distribution system operator and cross connection inspector.

Breazeale, who is engaged, has three children, a daughter in Ukiah, CA, a son in Sacramento and a daughter in Redmond.

Breazeale says that he plans to spend time getting to know people in the community and wants to help the community accomplish its goals.

## HHS Booster Club elects officers

The Heppner Booster Club elected parent class representatives and officers at their meeting held Wednesday, Sept. 9.

Officers are: Sonja McCabe, president; Sherry Matteson, vice president; Patti Allstott, secretary; and Georgia Van Winkle, treasurer.

Class representatives are Bobbette Lovgren, seventh grade; Tonia Adams, eighth grade; Judy Barber, freshman class; Debbie Scott, sophomore class; Karen Clough, junior class; and Judy Eckman, senior class.

Members discussed the tailgate barbecue held Sept. 11 and the steak feed and auction to be held Saturday, Oct. 17.

The group also changed their fiscal year to October 1-September 31 and increased the treasurer's term from two to four years.

Cyde Estes spoke to the group about the upcoming advisory vote concerning the funding of school extracurricular activities and community activities by the Morrow County Unified Recreation District. The ballot will ask voters if they want to continue funding MOURD.

The next Booster Club meeting will be held October 14.

## Volunteers put up building framework at Wilkinson arena



Volunteers began putting up the framework on the Wilkinson arena at the Morrow County Fairgrounds in Heppner last weekend. A crew is expected to put up the siding in mid October. Those volunteering Sept. 12 included Greg Close, Burrell Cooley, Jim Lunders and Jimmy Lunders, all of Irrigon, Ron Baker, Boardman and Tim Griffin, Prime Equipment and N.W. Metal Fabricators, both Hermiston, and Baker Hay Co., Boardman, donated equipment.

News deadline  
5p.m. Monday

## NRCS reviews CRP contracts



Connie Holmquist makes a field certification visit at Lyle Peck's CRP grass

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is at the tail end of conducting Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) status reviews on 71,000 acres in Morrow County.

The status reviews determine whether land placed in CRP is meeting contract criteria, including adequate grass stands and proper weed management. The contracts involved in this review are from the 15th CRP sign-up that took place in March, 1997.

NRCS staff from Heppner and Pendleton are reviewing 230 approved contracts in Morrow County. NRCS will conduct status reviews for the first three years of the contract or until the stands are certified, whichever comes first.

Producers and the Farm Service Agency will receive copies of the completed CRP status reviews.

New to this CRP sign-up is an emphasis on wildlife habitat. In order to meet criteria, landowners agreed to enhance their fields with legumes or shrubs that provide benefit to

wildlife.

In Morrow County, about 70 percent of the status reviews are complete for this year. "So far, the reviews have been going well," says Connie Holmquist, NRCS, Heppner. "There is some work left to be done in enhancing stands for wildlife, but landowners are gearing up for that step."

The CRP program takes highly erodible cropland out of production for 10 years, reseeding the land back to grass. The result is reduced soil erosion, improved water and air quality, and an increase in wildlife habitat.

The first CRP sign-up was established in 1985. Since that date, 16 signups have been implemented, with a total of 330 active contracts on 102,000 acres in Morrow County. Each contract is effective for 10 years.

Another program, Continuous CRP, emphasizes riparian buffers, filter strips, and grassed waterways. Unlike the regular CRP program, the Continuous CRP program is not competitive, and producers can sign up any time.

The status reviews are taking place throughout Oregon and the rest of the nation.

## Forest fire precaution level reduced

The Industrial Fire Precaution Level (IFPL) went down to a Level I on both the north and south halves of the Umatilla National Forest on Sept. 10, due to cooler temperatures and scattered precipitation, announced Jeff Blackwood, forest supervisor.

An IFPL allows firewood cutting and other operations to resume. Woodcutters are required to carry a shovel and 8 oz. capacity fire extinguisher. Power saws must be equipped with an approved spark arrester. In addition to the IFPL change, travel, smoking and campfire restrictions are rescinded.

## Glow ball tournament set

The Glow Ball Golf Tournament will be held at the Willow Creek Country Club in Heppner on Friday, September 18, at 8 p.m.



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