

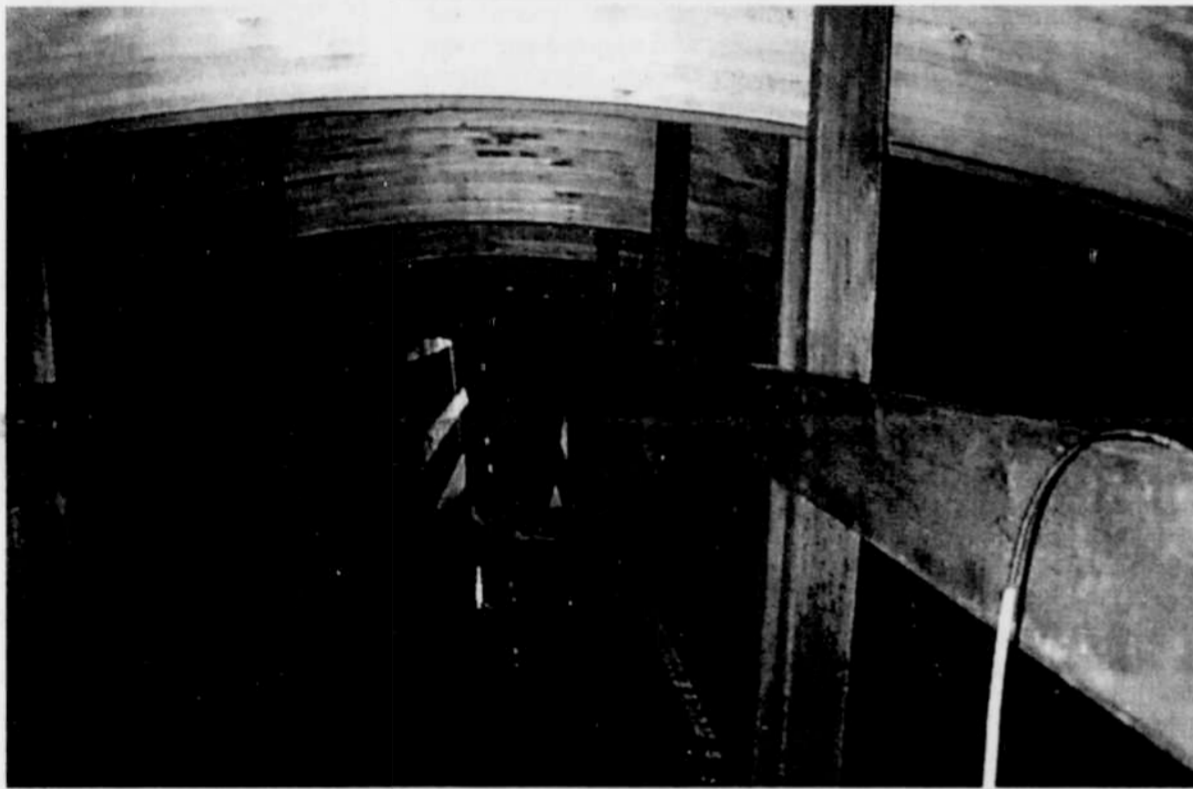
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HEPPNER

# 50¢ Gazette Times

VOL 117 NO. 38 8 Pages Wednesday, September 23, 1998 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## Ione's water tank gets a cleaning



Inside Ione's water tank

The city of Ione's water tank was getting a cleaning Saturday. Underwater Services, a company from Klamath Falls, sent one of its divers into the tank with a large vacuum to suck the sediment out.

The tank had not been cleaned since about 1983, and sediment from the water supply had settled on the bottom of the tank.

A camera attached to the diver's helmet sent video back to the company's trailer where workers could watch the cleaning process.

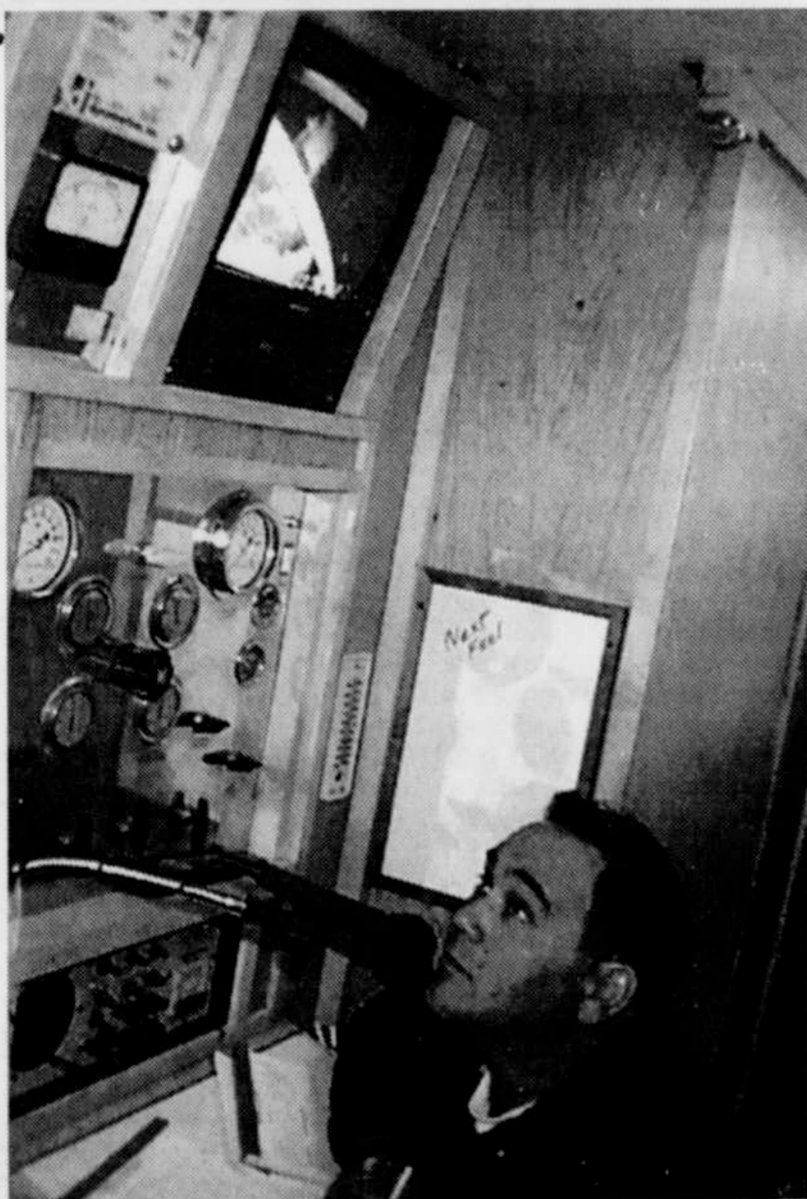
## Football "experts" match wits

Who knows the most about football? By the end of the season the Heppner Gazette hopes to have that question answered.

The GT has assembled a team of football "experts" to make college and professional picks during the season, and at the end we shall see who picks the most winners.

The panel includes: Chris Sykes, Greg Grant, Butch Laughlin, Larry Mills, George Koffler, Molly Rhea, Dennis Stefani, Les Payne, Kim Gutierrez, Rick Paullus and Stef Jensen.

This week's picks are on page 8.



Cleanup work monitored by camera

## Medical board to look at loan option

# Hospital shut down could be averted



Over 300 people attend medical board meeting at the Elks Club

The Morrow County Medical Board voted Tuesday night to seek emergency funding in an effort to avert shut down of the Pioneer Memorial Hospital and nursing home.

News of a financial crisis at the medical district which could cause the shutdowns came to a head last week, and prompted over 300 people to attend the board meeting. The meeting was first scheduled at the St. Patrick's Senior Center, and was then moved to the Heppner Elks lodge to accommodate the overflow crowd.

An overview of the district's financial woes showed only enough money to keep operating for the next three weeks.

The district is reportedly losing \$1,500 per day, and only had enough money to meet the payroll one more time. The district has an \$80,000 payroll every two weeks, said chief financial officer Dan Grant.

Grant said the district has had money problems for quite some time, but has finally run out of cash to operate.

An operating loan has been offered by the Bank of Eastern Oregon that would keep the hospital open for the next 90 days, and district officials were to meet over the next several days to work out details of the loan package. Grant said \$250,000 should be enough to keep the district solvent till the end of the calendar year.

The money would be paid back when the district's taxes start coming in in mid November. The district receives about \$525,000 per year in property taxes.

The infusion of cash would give the medical district board of directors time to decide what to do about the financial situation in the district.

Larry Mills, of the hospital foundation, said the foundation had agreed to provide funding up to \$20,000 for the hiring of a consultant to study the district's financial situation and the services it provides.

The loan would stop the shut down of the hospital facilities in Heppner, which if ever closed would never be reopened, hospital official say. Because of its age the hospital would never be relicensed.

Reasons for the financial crunch seem to point to several things: decrease in reimbursements, poor billing procedures, a drop in patients at the hospital and nursing home, and expenditures of cash reserves on items which should have been purchased through borrowing. Long term debt was low and not a factor in the financial crisis, Grant said.

The district's billing procedures were criticized as being too slow, causing a slow down in cash flow.

It was also pointed out that the new Irrigon clinic and a new ambulance were earlier purchased with cash when loans should have been used.

The drop in patients at the hospital was attributed to a recent period of time when the local doctor was not admitting people to the Pioneer Memorial Hospital. It was pointed out that admissions should pick up now with doctors working in the area.

Recently hired hospital administrator Susan Brock, was not as optimistic about the hospital and nursing home as some. Brock believes that the population base of the hospital area is less than 5,000 and might not be enough to support a hospital. Brock doubted that the financial situation at the hospital could be "turned around" in 90

days. Brock, who has worked for the district for only about two and one half months, has hired a professional accounts receivable company in an effort to improve the districts collections and cash flow. Several members of the audience at Tuesday's meeting commented on the slowness of the billing process from the medical district.

She stressed that situations are changing in health care, and especially rural health care, that make it harder and harder to operate small hospitals like Pioneer Memorial.

Brock has pointed out the hospital no longer performs many of the more lucrative procedures that had provided money in the past, and that coupled with lower reimbursements from government agencies, and fewer patients, has put a squeeze on the hospital it may not be able to withstand.

The hospital on average has only a little over one half patient per day. The nursing home has only 18 residents in a 32 bed facility. Medical district board members and officials were not sure why the nursing home had taken a drop. In the past there has been a waiting list to get into the nursing home.

It was also announced that the medical district is attempting to sell its dental clinics, a move which would also raise needed cash.

Another meeting has been scheduled for Monday. It is expected to be at the senior center in Irrigon, but the exact place was not determined by press time.

News deadline  
5p.m. Monday

## HHS homecoming this Friday



Classes compete against each other in a noon-time homecoming activity at Heppner High School Tuesday

Heppner High School is celebrating homecoming week Sept. 22-25.

Activities include: color day on Monday, with a competition between classes and an egg blow contest; 80's day on Tuesday, with guy cheerleader/girl football player dress-up contest; a hillbilly day on Wednesday with a "diaper rash" contest; and blue and gold day Thursday with a tug of war. Thursday's activities also

include a parade downtown beginning at 2:40 p.m.; a pep assembly at the Shamrock at the corner of Main and Willow streets downtown; and a bonfire at 7:30 p.m. at the fairgrounds.

The events culminate with the football game against Wahtonka on Friday beginning at 7:30 p.m. and the homecoming dance to follow from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.

The homecoming court includes: senior class princesses, Jill Barber, Janelle

Healy and Amber Peck; senior class princesses Jared Eckman, Derek Gunderson and Shane Matheny; junior class princesses Casey Ingraham and Allison Sykes; and junior class princesses Corey Miller and Jake Roy.

Junior prince and princess are Colter Raver and Torri Lovgren.



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