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HEPPNER



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Everything seems to be Y2AOK

Everything seems to be Y2AOK for Heppner area businesses and government agencies with no computer problems reported in the rollover to the year 2000.

"We'd been testing and had done enough preparatory work that of our systems went fine," said George Koffler, President of the Bank of Eastern Oregon. "We had no down time. Everything went very smoothly."

Andrea Mortimore of Klamath First Federal in Heppner concurred, saying, "We had no problems. All of our systems are up and running and the ATM's are fine."

Gerry Breazeale, Heppner city manager, reported no problems with the city's computers as did personnel at the Morrow County Courthouse.

Senior water rates under review

The Heppner City Council will hear testimony on January 10 on a proposed increase in water and sewer rates for low income seniors.

Currently seniors over age 65 who have incomes below the federal low income level may take advantage of a special low rate for water and sewer service from the city. Qualified seniors receive water service for \$3.75 per month for the first 1,000 gallons and five cents per 1,000 gallons for the next 2,000 gallons. Additional water usage is charged at 15 cents for the next 2,000 gallons with usage above 5,000 gallons charged at 10 cents per 1,000 gallons.

Sewer service is billed at \$2.50 per month. The rate was established in 1976 and has not been adjusted since.

The Utility Commission examined the policy of neighboring cities for discounted rates for seniors for water and sewer service for comparison to what Heppner offers. Discounted rates varied from none in Pendleton to 50 percent off normal rates for Hermiston. In Hermiston, the discount extends only to the first 3,000 gallons used and usage above that is billed at the normal rate.

After consideration of the needs of low income seniors, the rates of neighboring cities, and the effects on the water system and billing procedures the Utilities Commission has presented a new rate proposal for city council consideration.

As proposed to city council, the low income senior water and sewer rate would increase significantly. The proposed rate is a 50 percent discount off the current rate for the first 5,000 gallons of water used.

Additional water used above the 5,000 gallon limit would be billed at the normal rate, currently set at 80 cents per 1,000 gallons.

Sewer service would be billed at 50 percent of the normal rate for both sewer service and the sewer bond. Additionally, the Utilities Commission is proposing that the rate be allowed also for persons on medical disability who fall below the federal low income guidelines regardless of age.

Annual applications for the special reduced rate would be required along with proof of household income.

The review and proposed adjustment of the senior low income rate is part of a comprehensive rate review of the water and sewer systems. When any rate is set below the cost of providing service, according to City Manager Jerry Breazeale, the balance of the rate payers must pay for the subsidy. In the case of low income disabled persons and low income seniors, the Utilities Commission felt that the subsidy was appropriate and proper, Breazeale said.

Health district stops seeing red-at least for November

The Morrow County Health District was finally in the pink-not the red-for the first time in many months. The district showed a real profit of around \$18,407 for the month of November.

"It was a good month, said Nicole Mahoney, MCHD accounting supervisor, at the district's regular meeting January 3 in Irrigon.

The district actually showed a gain of around \$169,000 for the month of November, however Mahoney said that over \$150,600 of that was due to other revenue, but the \$18,407 was actual profit.

Up until November, the district was losing an average of over \$50,000 a month. November's rosy financial picture slashed the losses to around \$2,000 a month.

Mahoney and administrator Victor Vander Does said that while December was not as good as November, January was already picking up.

In addition to an increase in patients, the district's improved financial situation may also be attributed to cost cutting and an increased emphasis on collection of past due accounts receivable since Vander Does came on board.

Also at the meeting, a contingency of Irrigon residents, patients of Sheridan Tarnasky, physician's assistant at the district's Irrigon Clinic, protested Tarnasky's reassignment to Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner. Several of the patients attributed their health and even their lives to Tarnasky's care and said they would not remain as patients at the Irrigon clinic if she left. Several expressed concern that many Hispanic women did not feel comfortable seeing a male physician and may not return to the clinic unless there was a female health care provider.

The board agreed to consider having Tarnasky work at the Irrigon Clinic more than was initially planned, perhaps twice a month or once a week.

Tarnasky was transferred following the announced resignation of Wendy Haack, nurse practitioner at Pioneer Memorial Clinic and Pioneer Memorial Hospital the end of February. Haack intends to enroll in medical school and says she hopes to return to Heppner to practice as a physician. The district is in the process of locating a physician's assistant or nurse practitioner for the Irrigon Clinic.

Tarnasky lives in Heppner and was formerly a nurse at the Heppner clinic and hospital.

In a separate issue, the board voted unanimously to make public the district's contract with Dr. Robert Boss to provide medical services for patients in the Boardman area. Dr. Boss, currently practices independently in Boardman.

Board member Sharron Meyers earlier opposed the action, while board Chairman Larry Mills said he favored making the contract public.

The issue arose when Laura McElligott, R.N., director of the Morrow County Health Department, asked for a copy of the contract. She received a draft copy of the contract earlier, but met some opposition to her request for the final document.

McElligott, at the January board meeting, maintained that since the district is a tax supported entity, its finances, including Dr. Boss' contract, should be discussed openly. She also expressed concern that a segment of the population which is not able to pay for health care may not be adequately served by Dr. Boss' private practice. "We want to know what would be expected of Dr. Boss in terms of the community," said McElligott

Boss countered that his practice was "private enterprise", and added, "I think we have socialism here." "I think you need to look at the motives about why people are asking (to see the contract)," said Dr. Boss. "There are other agendas going on here. You (the board) weren't entirely in favor of this contract. I wasn't entirely in favor of this contract. You need to look at why she's (McElligott) pressing this issue."

However, Boss said he would publish the terms of his contract with the district. Two attorneys had differing opinions as to whether Dr. Boss' contract with the district should be disclosed and Morrow County District Attorney David C. Allen declined to offer an opinion on the matter until after the board had made its decision, according to Mills.

The board previously had a contract with Dr. Boss, but the district and Boss could not agree on the terms of a new contract.

In other business, the board: -received clinic reports for the month of December with 241 patients visiting the Irrigon Clinic, with 22 of those new patients; and 566 patients visiting Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner. Vander Does said that the Heppner Clinic is "breaking even", but the Irrigon Clinic was currently losing money.

The monthly ambulance report indicated that Heppner and Boardman had 15 each runs in December and Irrigon had 13. Yearly ambulance records show Heppner with 222 total runs in 1999; Boardman, 173; and Irrigon, 169.

-heard a request from Tom Meyers, mayor of Boardman, concerning the lease or purchase of the district's now-vacant clinic building in Boardman. The board authorized Vander Does to negotiate with the city of Boardman.

-discussed a proposed contract with Murray Drugs to provide consulting services for an in-house pharmacy at Pioneer Memorial Hospital. Vander Does said that the district should see a 40 percent or more reduction in pharmacy costs compared to its current arrangement.

-learned of an anonymous donation of \$25,000 with an additional \$25,000 to be received by the district when hospital remodeling begins. Mills reported that another \$50,000 gift, left to the district in a will, will also be used for remodeling. "It makes me feel good," said Mills, "because it shows support for what we're trying to do."

-learned that Dr. Kenneth Wenberg has resolved some issues with the IRS and has had "two busy holiday weekends" working in the PMH emergency room.

-heard a recommendation from Vander Does that the district pay off one large loan and extend another until June, "hoping to live off cash flow with money we have." "I have a feeling we can do it," he said.

Livestock Growers offer reward

The Morrow County Livestock Growers are offering a \$500 reward for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons involved in the assault of Ross Westburg, cattle manager for the Wilkinson Ranch, on October 29.

Anyone with any information should call Bill Broderick, MCLG secretary, at 676-9642.

Sunday school

Youth Sunday school classes for Hope Lutheran Church and All Saints' Episcopal Church will be held at All Saints' beginning Sunday, February 6.

Classes begin at 10 a.m. All youth are invited to attend.



Back to school - Heppner elementary students were back in school Monday following Christmas break and the beginning of a new millennium. photo by Sandi Day

Town and Country tickets going fast

Everyone planning to attend the annual Town & Country Chamber Awards Banquet, Thursday, January 13, 2000, at the Heppner Elks Club, is encouraged to purchase tickets ahead of time as there is no guarantee they will be available at the door.

Attendees will experience "Then and Now ...A Night To Remember" as technology takes them from the 1890's to 2000, accompanied with music and narration from Ed Dailey, KORD

radio announcer. Peterson's Jewelers will again donate a gem for a drawing. Morrow County's Oregon Trail Pro-Rodeo Queen and Court will be crowned and the annual Man, Woman, Educator, Business and Youth of the Year awards will be presented.

Tickets for the prime rib banquet are available at Klamath First Federal, Bank of Eastern Oregon, the Chamber of Commerce, Morrow County

Grain Growers and Murray Drugs. Social hour, hosted by Morrow County Grain Growers, is at 6 p.m.

Everyone is invited to attend the afternoon panels provided by Morrow County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Morrow County Livestock Growers. At 1:30 p.m., the panel will be on the Tillamook Dairy Industry in Morrow County and at 3 a panel will be held on the subject open range. Both entities will hold their annual meetings.

SWD, Livestock Growers plan annual meeting

The Morrow County Soil and Water District and the Morrow County Livestock Growers will combine their annual meeting and programs on Thursday, January 13, at the Heppner Elks as part of Town & Country Day. Morrow County SWCD will have their annual meeting at 1 p.m. and at 1:30 p.m. a panel will follow on the emerging dairy industry in Morrow County.

The panelists will be: Gary Neal, Port of Morrow; Kim Puzey, Port of Umatilla; Mike Gamroth, OSU dairy specialist; Eric Moeggenberg, ODA-CAFO; Harold Schild, president, Tillamook Creamery; and Tamra Mabbott, Morrow County planner.

The Morrow County Livestock Growers will follow with a discussion on "Open Range" and "Livestock Districts." Tentative speakers will be Larry Rew Pendleton attorney; John Hays, OCA president; and Glen Stonebrink, OCA executive vice

president, membership and administration.

Hays and Stonebrink will be on hand to discuss OCA issues as we move into the next millennium.

The MCLG's annual meeting will follow the afternoon

Basic Word class offered

A Basic Word computer class is being offered this winter term by Blue Mountain Community College beginning Thursday evening, January 20. (This is a late change from the winter term flyer.)

The class will run from 6:30-8:30 p.m. for four consecutive Thursdays at Heppner Elementary School.

The class is designed for the computer student who has some experience working with computers and the Microsoft Word program but who would

like to know more. Those attending the class will learn how to make tables, columns, cut and paste and more.

Students planning to enroll should be familiar with basic computer operations, including the keyboard and use of the mouse.

Cost of the class is \$25 or \$11 for those 60 and over. Pre-registration is required and space is limited.

For more information or to pre-register, contact Anne Morter, BMCC coordinator for South Morrow County, 422-7040.

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