

HEPPNER



VOL. 119 NO. 7 10 Pages Wednesday, February 16, 2000 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

MCGG holds annual Customer Appreciation Day



Morrow County Fair & Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Queen Tracy Rankin (right) tries out a tub with a couple of friends at the MCGG annual customer appreciation day Saturday.



Pancake breakfast at the Morrow County Grain Growers customer appreciation day Saturday is enjoyed by (left to right) Amy, Becca, Suzanne and Eric Jepsen.

St. Pat's Celebration seeks donations

With the St. Patrick's Day Celebration just over one month away, the auction committee is at work to make this year's auction "entertaining, exciting and big," said the St. Patrick's Committee.

"'Tis a great amount of support we are needin' for the auction," says the committee.

The members are seeking and accepting donations for the live auction, silent auction, drawings and country store. They have noted increasing interest and support from businesses and individuals over the past three years and hope that this year's event will continue that trend.

While the committee continues to fine-tune the Sunday, March 19, event, it does offer a peek at some features: entertainment this year will come from Ron McDonald's Outhouse Singers, a "fun-loving, versatile group of musicians and singers" who will offer almost two hours of music

before bidding begins and provide some music during two breaks in the auction.

The Country Store will open when viewing of auction items begins at 11 a.m. that day. The drawings for a "pot o' gold" and for the 1972 Volkswagen "Bug" will be two highlights at this year's event. Tickets for the VW drawing are now available at Murray's drug store and at the office of Kuhn, Spicer and Mills. Soon, committee members will also have those tickets available.

An auction schedule and list of items will be published at a later date.

The committee welcomes donations of new, antique and fine-quality items. Although it plans a noisy kick-off to local solicitations on Monday, Feb. 21, the committee wants donors to know that items are already being offered and accepted and

that donors do not have to wait. They are invited to contact committee members Diana Ball, John and Ann Murray, Cara Osmin, Tom and Jerri Sly, Ann Spicer or Pam Wunderlich.

Donors who wish to donate may call 676-5886 during the day to arrange for pickup of items or call 676-5382 in the evenings.

St. Pat's to meet

The Heppner St. Patrick's Committee will meet on Thursday, February 17, at 6:30 p.m., upstairs at Kate's. With the Wee Bit O' Ireland celebration just one month away it is important that all committee chairmen involved in any way with the event be present to go over the agenda, give input on decisions and support to the committee, said Claudia Hughes, co-chair.

Over 200 attend meeting, most oppose cuts

School board approves \$992,000 in budget cuts

The Morrow County School Board, at its February 14 regular meeting at Sam Boardman Elementary School Monday, voted to cut \$992,000 from the 2000-2001 budget despite impassioned pleas to the contrary from many people in the audience.

The five-hour open meeting, before a crowd of over 200 people, drew occasional applause and cheers and, at the conclusion, tears and exclamations of dismay.

"Teachers are absolutely the last item that should be eliminated in times of budget crisis," commented Heppner attorney Bill Kuhn in opposition to the proposed teacher cuts. "Instead, our administration is recommending teachers be the first, most significant and only area where there is a substantial amount of budget cutting. This is not responsible planning for our future. This is not a compassionate approach. This doesn't make good common sense from any perspective."

Kuhn and others suggested that the board review the impact of the proposed cuts before implementation and give the public time to comment. Kuhn also suggested phasing in recovery of a cash carryover loss and incorporating as many maintenance needs as possible in proposed capital improvement bond levies.

Kuhn asked that the board not disproportionately impact the education program of any particular community.

Several others who commented at the meeting, however, noted that school revenues for the current year show that Heppner Elementary and Heppner Junior/Senior High School spend much more than they generate, compared to Riverside High School and Sam Boardman Elementary which generate more funds than they spend.

The amount each school receives from the state is dependent on the number of students—the more students, the more money.

According to district figures, for the current 1999-2000 budget Heppner Elementary will spend over \$642 thousand more than it has generated; Heppner High School, over \$284 thousand more than it has generated; Columbia Middle School, over \$182 thousand more than it has generated; A.C. Houghton over \$114 thousand more; Lone Elementary, over \$96 thousand more; and Lone High School, over \$77 thousand more; while Riverside High School generated over \$22 thousand more than it spent and Sam Boardman generated over \$42 thousand more than it spent.

The cuts, announced earlier, will eliminate 17 full-time teaching positions in the school district next year (4.3 from Heppner Elementary; 3.5 from Heppner Junior/Senior High School; 2.3 from Lone Schools; two each from A.C. Houghton Elementary in Irrigon, Riverside Elementary in Boardman; and one new position from Columbia Middle School in Irrigon.

Additional reductions would include cutting funding for a half-time superintendent, half-time business manager, one and a quarter time office assistants and one and a half time custodians).

The district is recommending district-wide cuts in PE, art and counseling positions at the elementary level and vo-ag and Spanish programs at the senior high level.

The additional cuts,

particularly in the smaller south-end schools, also bring the student/teacher ratios closer district-wide. Morrow County School superintendent Bruce Anderson said earlier that the district cannot make the smaller schools equal financially, because smaller schools still require a certain number of teachers to operate, but added that the district will strive to make the schools more equitable.

"We are spending more than we're generating," said Anderson Monday night. He added that in the past the district began contracting out transportation services, reorganized the food service program, drastically cut the co-curricular program, which has been transferred to a special district, consolidated Heppner junior and senior high schools and moved to a four-day week to cut costs. "We're at a spot now where we don't have a lot of that stuff to do," he said.

Anderson said that around 80 percent of the budget is personnel costs.

According to information released by the district Tuesday, in 1998-99 the district spent over \$5.5 million for teachers' salaries and an additional \$1.7 million in benefits. Over \$6 million is budgeted for teachers' salaries in 1999-2000 and over \$2 million for benefits.

For 1998-99, the district spent over \$700 thousand for the business manager and administrators' salaries (seven principals, two vice principals, superintendent, assistant superintendent) and an additional \$256 thousand for benefits.

The 1999-2000 budget calls for over \$800 thousand for salaries for administrators (seven principals, three vice principals, superintendent, assistant superintendent) and business manager and an additional \$311 thousand for benefits.

The district's Hispanic community, which comprises around 43 percent of the school district's student population in the north end was well represented at Monday night's meeting in opposition to the teacher cuts.

(Hispanic students comprise 35 percent of the student population at A.C. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon; 41 percent at Columbia Middle School, Irrigon; 59 percent at Sam Boardman Elementary, Boardman, and 34 percent at Riverside High School, Boardman).

"Most of us never come to these meetings because we are very hard working people," said Guadalupe Colin, Boardman, who said she was there representing the Hispanic community, speaking against the proposed cuts. "We don't come very often because we don't get very involved in the Anglo community, but when it comes to our children..."

A majority of the board, however, voted five to two in favor of the cuts, maintaining that the district would be around a million over budget and stressed that to go over budget would not only be fiscally irresponsible, but also illegal.

"It's only prudent for us to propose a budget that's balanced," said board member Pat McNamee, Irrigon. "I don't think we'd better spend more money than that's coming in."

John Rietmann, board member from Lone, concurred, saying, "When next year rolls around and we have growth in this community, we'll have students in this building (Sam Boardman Elementary) we won't see money

for until the next year."

Rietmann said he felt it was better to make the cuts now to allow teachers who are impacted to seek employment elsewhere.

Board members repeatedly stressed that they care about children and did not want to have to make the cuts, but saw no other alternative.

The board earlier said that if they received monies over and above what they anticipate for next year, they hope to add back teachers and programs.

In the board's first vote Monday which proposed the \$992,000 in cuts, board member Borney Lindsay, Lexington, proposed an amendment which would reduce the cuts to \$692,000 to retain teaching staff.

Lindsay's amendment targeted administration and administration's use of district vehicles as areas to cut back. Lindsay proposed that the budget committee meet with two board members from the south end of the county, two from the north end and advisory committee members prior to voting on the proposal. He also proposed a change in the wording of the original proposal from "current programs" to "district programs."

The amended resolution, however, was defeated five to two, with board chair Gary Frederickson, Boardman, and board members, Dwayne Carroll, Irrigon, John Rietmann, Lone, Pat McNamee, Irrigon, and Julie Weikel, Boardman, rejecting the proposal and Lindsay and Keith Lewis, Heppner, voting in favor.

The same five members, in a second vote, approved the \$992,000 in cuts with Lindsay and Lewis voting nay.

The board recommended that citizens contact their legislators to address the funding crisis. They also recommended to Anderson that the district go to the voters for a local option to add \$500,000 in taxes for five years to the district budget. If the local option passes, the district could levy the difference between the market value and assessed value to help replace some of the monies.

If the district sends the issue to the voters in the May election the local option must pass with a double majority, meaning that 50 percent of the registered voters must approve it, rather than a majority of those voting. However, only a majority, not a double majority is required for an issue to pass in the November election.

Anderson said that the funds in a local option must be approved before the fiscal year so that it may be used in the 2000-2001 budget.

Museum seeks members

The Morrow County Museum Commission, a volunteer policy-making board appointed by the Morrow County Court, is seeking two new members for three-year terms.

The commission is the policy-making body for the Morrow County Museum and is responsible for the oversight of the Museum Trust Fund and museum development. The commission regularly meets every two months and more often as necessary.

The commission encourages anyone, particularly anyone in the Boardman/Irrigon area who has an interest in the overall Morrow County Museum operation and future, to contact the Morrow County Court at 676-5620.

FILTER SALE

15% OFF Fleetguard Filters

Through Feb. 29th

MORROW COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS

Lexington 989-8221 • 1-800-452-7396 For farm equipment, visit our web site at www.mcggr.net