

The Official Newspaper  
of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

# Heppner GAZETTE-TIMES

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Morrow County's Home-Owned Weekly Newspaper

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## 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. The G-T is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters.

### Denton well respected

To the Editor:

I have known Verlin Denton for the past decade. As the OSP Criminal Division sergeant for most of the decade, I worked with closely with Verlin on efforts with the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team as well as the Morrow County Major Crime Team. As the OSP station commander in Pendleton during the past year and a half, I worked with Verlin as a fellow law enforcement administrator.

Verlin Denton is one of the most professional law enforcement administrators I know. As the undersheriff, Verlin virtually ran the department, taking care of the day-to-day operations. As such, Verlin has a decade of administrative experience under his belt! In this day and age, law enforcement is a very complicated job and it takes experience, maturity and intelligence to run an organization.

As sheriff, he is charged with a multitude of responsibilities, which he carries out with true dedication and professionalism. Verlin is one of the most progressive administrators I know. His efforts with regards to drug enforcement, domestic violence issues, violent crime, rural crime and juvenile issues are second to none. The fact he took a poll of Morrow County residents to ascertain their concerns about law enforcement service levels shortly after taking office, demonstrates his willingness to be innovative and progressive.

Verlin Denton is well respected by his peers and associates throughout the region and state of Oregon. He is a leader in his profession. I encourage the citizens of Morrow County to retain a great asset they currently have in law enforcement, and to reelect Verlin Denton as sheriff.

(s) Mike McCullough,  
Former OSP lieutenant  
Pendleton

### Put away preconceived notions about schools

To the Editor:

It was nice to see the plight of limited access to equal educational opportunity in small rural schools highlighted in the East Oregonian. But George Murdock of the Educational Service District missed a few comparisons when he recounted his stories.

He failed to mention the Heppner elementary and high school students who live on Little Buttercreek. Our map shows it is a 37-mile trip through this area from Heppner, but these students have been riding the bus for years. With the longer school day necessitated by the four-day school week, this sounds like an impossibility for primary students, yet their Pine City school was consolidated years ago.

If it is correct that a student living in Cecil, 30.4 miles (state figures) from Heppner, would spend three hours daily riding a bus, then the students on Little Buttercreek must really be in trouble.

All South Morrow has limited access to education. Heppner High School currently does not have a credentialed advanced math teacher. (For South Morrow curriculum, as well as North, see the September 13 Heppner Gazette

Times.) For our students' future ability to earn a family wage, this has to change. However, due to unfortunate political and financial realities, it will not change unless or until South Morrow learns to speak with one concern and demands equal educational access. We need to refrain from dividing up an already too-small funding pie.

To offer a curriculum geared to the twenty-first century, we need to consolidate the Heppner and Ione high schools into "South Morrow High."

Some Ione persons resist losing a specific Ione identity. Certainly our schools are an important focus. I believe, however, that Heppner's people get their feelings for their community also from civic organizations and their churches. Two churches now have joint services and the fellowship is great. It remains my hope that old or perceived differences can be put aside for the betterment of all South Morrow students. If we fail to do this, it probably won't be the parents who suffer, but our children will.

(s) Meg Murray  
Ione

### Support Denton

To the Editor:

As the sheriff's election nears, I have heard several isolated comments criticizing the sheriff's department and thus, Sheriff (Verlin) Denton. These complaints are actually not new as they were voiced during (retired) Sheriff Drago's terms as well.

The first issue has to do with Morrow County's participation in the BENT drug task force and the second is a perception that the sheriff's department is unable to attract quality applicants to fill patrol deputy positions.

Shortly after being appointed Sheriff Denton mailed out questionnaires to the citizens of Morrow County requesting input on issues involving the operation of the department. One of the questions was whether or not to continue participating in the BENT drug task force. This was the only question which received a unanimous affirmative response. The citizens sent a very clear message.

Morrow County currently provides one detective to the task force. To conduct any kind of a drug investigation requires a minimum of two detectives and search warrant service is rarely done with less than 10 or more officers. If Morrow County were to elect to go it alone, it would immediately have to double the present personnel commitment, doubling the cost, and in my opinion immeasurably reducing the effectiveness of the current approach.

In addition the money used to conduct investigations is presently being drawn from seizure funds. These funds are monies which were confiscated from drug dealers as the proceeds of illegal drug trafficking which, after a civil forfeiture process, are then used to finance future drug investigations. In other words local drug dealers are financing the "war on drugs". Were Morrow County to discontinue participating in the task force, we (the citizens) would have to come up with the funding necessary to conduct investigations. This would be cost prohibitive.

Most people are probably unaware that the focus of the task force is generally mid to upper level drug dealers. This has been determined to be the best use of the limited personnel resources. Our goal is to identify the source of supply of drugs being smuggled into the area and to cut off that supply. It makes no sense to arrest a user with a quarter gram of methamphetamine and allow a dealer to import pounds into the area.

We all recognize (citizens and law enforcement alike) that there are users and dealers residing and walking the streets of Morrow County. Many are well known to all of us and thus highly visible. You are probably also aware that many are regularly arrested and shortly released on bail, or their own recognizance awaiting disposition of their charges. They are then placed on probation, or serve terms in various facilities and are then released or paroled, at which time many re-offend and the process begins again. The sheriff's department has little if any influence in the disposition of suspects after they have been arrested. Remember that each time this occurs our drug dealer becomes more experienced, more knowledgeable and more familiar with the methods of law enforcement. This obviously makes them more difficult to catch.

Drugs are an enormous problem; they are a problem in nearly every city, county and state in this, and many other

countries. It is unrealistic to believe that Morrow County or any other law enforcement agency can eliminate substance abuse until a solution to the national problem is identified. The most we can hope for, with the resources that we can realistically devote, is to keep the pressure on and prevent it from becoming epidemic. In my opinion this is not possible without pooling resources with other jurisdictions in task force type operations.

In regard to the second issue, most everyone has heard on the news or read that the city of Portland is recruiting in Los Angeles, the city of Los Angeles is recruiting in Seattle, and Seattle is recruiting in some other large city. In fact this is going on all over the United States. My previous employer has been unable to maintain full staffing levels and I was recently told that the current average level of experience for street officers there is less than four years. Not long ago I attended an international major crimes conference and learned that this is going on all over the world. An investigator from one of the largest metropolitan departments in this country told me that their annual turnover from retirements, etc., is in the neighborhood of 800 officers. Recently they tested to fill those positions and received about 800 applications. This was down considerably from the past when they had several thousand, they are also out actively recruiting.

During all this the sheriff's department has continued to fill positions with what I consider to be quality people. A little more than a year ago we had two deputies attending the Oregon Police Academy. One of the deputies was the recipient of the "Lee M. Brown" scholastic achievement award which recognizes the highest scholastic achiever of each academy class. This same deputy was also recognized for expertise in firearms training. The second recruit deputy, received an award for his achievements in the area of defensive tactics training.


In almost 4,000 hours of training and 24 years of police experience I have had the opportunity to work with numerous fine law enforcement professionals from all over the United States. I, like most of the deputies in this department, came to work for Morrow County because we wanted to live and serve in this community, not because we couldn't find employment elsewhere. I took a significant reduction in income compensation, benefits and seniority to be here. I am happy with my decision and proud to be a member of the Morrow County Sheriff's Department.

Quality police agencies don't happen by accident; they require quality direction by trained, experienced, honest and devoted leaders. Sheriff Denton has been in law enforcement for over 27 years; he has worked uniform patrol, detectives, including homicide and narcotics, and has been a police supervisor and administrator. He was the undersheriff of Morrow County for 13 years during Sheriff Drago's administration, and was appointed sheriff upon the retirement of Sheriff Drago. Without reservation I support retaining Sheriff Denton.

(s) Mark and Elaine Miller  
Heppner

**WE PRINT  
LETTERHEAD**  
Heppner Gazette-Times

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Happy  
19th  
Birthday  
Princess  
Leia!  
October 12th

Love,  
Mom, Dad  
& Camille

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### Irrigon students need a high school

To the Editor:

To Irrigon parents, grandparents and friends:  
Wake up Irrigon - now is the time. Your students need a high school. We need your help.

Call your Morrow County School Superintendent and school board members and make them aware that it is time your students have their own high school.

Heppner, Ione and Boardman all have a high school and your students should have the same benefit during their educational experiences. This is especially true since Irrigon has a larger population than any of the above mentioned.

It is fact that students do better and progress much faster if there is parent participation connected with their learning environment. Yet, it is almost impossible for families to attend all functions that are 13 miles away. Having to drive round trip 26 miles can be very expensive and many jobs keep parents later than time allowed to attend certain functions.

A new building is not needed to attain this goal. The Columbia Middle School building is designed to adequately house grades seven through 12 with minor adjustments. According to studies made, cost

is not considered a big problem either. The return of your students should not be an added expense.

Some have voiced concern that the quality of education will suffer. Not true. Kids will learn as in Boardman. The water, air or whatever has no major effect on the ability of your student to progress normally. Good teachers teach - good students learn. The plus here is that you have a chance to be more involved with your student.

Soon we are going to be asked to pass a bond to construct two elementary schools. One school for Boardman and one for Irrigon.

Morrow County School Superintendent has agreed that the construction of these buildings should accommodate K through 6 as recommended in order for it to become possible for our high school students to be returned.

We should pass this bond if this recommendation holds true. If not, Irrigon has no obligation to allow monies to be spent for things other than in the best interest of our Irrigon students.

Your students deserve it ...please see that they get it.

(s) Dan and Jean Cramer  
Irrigon

### Irrigon long overdue for high school

To the Editor:

This letter is written to clarify some questions raised by an editorial in the Sept. 9 issue of the East Oregonian, entitled "priorities" and pertaining to the merit of adding a high school in Irrigon.

The comment we would challenge the most strongly is "now is not the time to consider reviving a high school in Irrigon." Had the writer of the article been present when we made a bid for the return of our high school six years ago, he would have seen the staffing analysis report prepared by then county Superintendent Chuck Starr, which showed no electives would be lost if Irrigon and Boardman each went to a 7-12 configuration and there would even be a saving in teaching staff.

Our current superintendent, Bruce Anderson, has gone on record publicly as strongly recommending a high school for Irrigon.

The Matrix Group, a consulting firm hired by the Morrow County School Board to do an in-depth study of county schools and determine what buildings need upgrading and what new schools need to be built, came out in favor of a high school in Irrigon.

The Nelson Report, compiled after surveying various citizens of Morrow County, came out in favor of returning students in North Morrow County to their own communities (Boardman's sixth, seventh and eighth grades would return to Boardman, and Irrigon's grades nine-12 would return to Irrigon).

Both of these studies were mandated by the Morrow County School Board and funded by Morrow County taxpayers, and we believe they should be taken

seriously. With all of these recommendations, we do not think we are being the least bit unreasonable in feeling this is the time to have our high school restored.

Another comment we would take issue with is, "it would take considerable planning and work to refit Columbia Middle School and Riverside High School and the teaching staffs, to handle all secondary students." Six years ago, when we made a bid for our high school, the board made the concession of adding on to Columbia Middle School in a design that would be compatible for a seven-12 configuration. It is already designed for this purpose. If Irrigon and Boardman each went to a seven-12 configuration, we would be in conformity with the towns in our area--Stanfield, Umatilla, Heppner, Ione. This system is very beneficial for junior high students, as the teachers cross over, and students have the advantage of specialists in most fields.

I agree with the writer in his assessment of the importance of high schools in small and not-so-small towns, and his comment that they traditionally have been a focal point for the town. I close this article by saying the high school is the heart and soul of every town, large or small, and we are long overdue. We sincerely believe that it is "now or never" for us, and with all of the professional recommendations in our favor, we simply cannot think of one valid reason why our high school should not be restored.

(s) LaVelle Partlow  
Irrigon

### Grant Irrigon a high school

To the Editor:

Is this what you want for your kids? Until it happens to you personally, you are not prepared for the toll the long bus trips take on your high school students for the various sporting events. Our daughter Kimber recently participated in a soccer game in Cascadii (south of Eugene). She boarded the bus in Irrigon at 2:30 a.m., in the morning, rode for several hours, played in the soccer match, and arrived home at 10:30 in the evening.

This scheduling is extremely exhausting for our young people and leaves very little time for any family interaction, and while this may not be important to some

people, it is very important to us, and to many of our friends.

If Irrigon is successful in our bid to have our own high school, travel would be cut drastically. This would eliminate many, many long trips, which are dangerous in the wintertime and rob our families of time together.

Please support your school advisory board and our community by attending the school board meeting at Riverside High School on Monday evening, October 9, at 7:30 p.m. The board plans to vote at this meeting on whether or not to grant Irrigon a high school.

Barb Huwe  
Irrigon

### Retain Denton

To the Editor:

We intend to vote for Verlin Denton for Morrow County Sheriff in the November election.

This choice is based on the fact that Sheriff Denton is a top-notch law enforcement professional with a solid background of experience and accomplishment.

Verlin Denton has worked effectively as a deputy, as undersheriff and as sheriff. He has

earned the opportunity to be retained in office as Morrow County Sheriff.

(s) John and Pat Edmundson  
Heppner

**Notice** **BURNING BAN**

**The Burn Ban for the City of Heppner will no longer be in effect beginning Wednesday, Oct. 4, 2000. A 5-day burning permit is required for all open (out of container) fires and may be purchased for \$1.00 at Heppner City Hall, 188 NW Willow Street.**

**Rusty Estes, Fire Chief**

**SCRATCH PADS**  
**\$1.00 lb.**  
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