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Heppner GAZETTE-TIMES

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Today's students are tomorrow's future

By Courtney Nelson

I know that the only thing everyone has heard about the last couple of months is the school budget cuts, but I still think it is a topic that needs to be talked about with a bit sharper tongue in print.

Yes, all we hear about is lone wanting to secede from the union, oops, I mean the Morrow County School District; but I do applaud them for their efforts and I do believe that they can do it. I think from the amount of people that they have in the community coming to their meetings and the willingness to pay for certain things, they can do it. Even if lone doesn't have a school district for very long it will be one of those stories either fondly remembered or chuckled about depending on how it works out.

Personally, I think that the best idea for our area schools would be to have the lone and Heppner schools combine on a neutral campus in Lexington. But I don't think that the schools could afford to build another school in the next year.

Most of us aren't worried about the schools combining or seceding; we care about the effectiveness of our schools and what is good for the students. (Or at least that is what we should be thinking about.) I have taken a little survey of teachers and aides in the Heppner schools and they all agree that they don't prefer the cuts and of course no one would; but surprisingly they have been suggesting things to make the recent problems better. When I asked the question, "What do you think that the state of Oregon should do to change the current situation?" I just expected to hear things like, "Get a better budget," or "Stop sending money to a war effort," but I can tell you I got nothing of the sort. Most teachers and aides told me that the state should find a better tax base for education and other state needs. Some even suggested to have a sales tax, which I think is a good idea.

While doing my research, I found out other states support their schools with a constant tax. For instance, Arizona uses a tax on automobile owners. I think that they pay something like 40 percent tax on their car. It sounds like a good plan but I don't think that Oregon residents are willing to pay that much for a constant tax for schools.

Then there is a fact that our school district is no longer supporting the outdoor school program. In other areas of Oregon, the students have lost outdoor school opportunities completely, but here, we are lucky enough to have a supportive community. Our Heppner Parent's Club has now vowed that there will be a Tupper outdoor school program whether the school will support it or not.

The other thing is that we will lose a lot of our learning quality. The people on the survey agreed with me on that fact. They agree that with larger classes and fewer opportunities for electives it will greatly affect the students of our small town. I am sorry for the elementary students who may not have a chance to have band or a music program next year. Or the library that will not be as well kept and shelved as it is now because there may not be even an aide in there to make sure everything is in the right order. I am also sorry that these children can't experiment with art already. All kids will do in the a few years is sit in a room and occasionally go out to the playground. They may read about culture, but never be able to experience it. They may have feelings that would be wonderfully expressed through art or music that may never be discovered. Not all children succeed through sports activities; students have many different gifts and talents. As I said, I feel sorry for the children of the elementary school who will be hurt the most.

Then there are the students of the high school who will only lose opportunities for new learning. We will now learn more through a television than from a human. Now understand, I do think this is a wonderful opportunity but I think that if a student has a question, it is hard to ask a camera. We have also been lead to believe that we could get the chance to have more electives than we have at the moment. I've seen the principal asking the students of the high school what electives we would like to have in the school next year and the students I saw rattled off about 20 different electives and Mr. Smith said that they were all possible. Now this boggles my mind; if we are having to take aides and teachers from our schools, how in the world are more electives possible? How can we have a drama class when we barely have a drama club?

But my largest question is, are you taking money from younger students and giving it to older students when younger students learn more and need more? And can the community do anything about it? Remember today's student is tomorrow's future.

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. (Any letters expressing thanks

City Council to hold meeting to discuss Heppner water project

To the Editor:

Next Monday evening the City Council will hold a public hearing to hear input on the proposed Water System Project for Heppner. After the hearing, the Council is expected to take action on whether to proceed with the project and related loans and water rate increases. I believe the project is sorely needed. I believe the water system infrastructure in Heppner is in deplorable condition. Stop by City Hall and examine the various chunks of pipe taken from repairs made in various parts of our city. I believe the financing package the City has arranged is as good a "deal" as we can possible get. The majority of the value will be a loan at one percent interest. A \$1.25 million grant and a \$900,000 standard R.U.S. loan will round out the package. If we are going to do the project, I believe this is the best way to pay for it. The big question is "do we do the project?" On the down side, the grants and low interest loans require that we increase our water rates to a level acceptable to some state agency. For most people, this will double, to almost triple, the water portion of their current city utility cost (for sure during the summer months). (The city

has promised that all revenues generated by the increase will be earmarked for project debt retirement.) Gratis water provided to churches, ball fields and other taxing districts will have to stop. Every service will have to be on a meter. The City Council has discussed ways to continue to provide gratis water to our ball fields, and some arrangement will probably be reached. The low cost financing also requires some minor ADA upgrades be installed at City Hall itself. It is easy to ignore the improvements needed when one turns on their faucet and pure, clean, water spouts forth. I believe our water system is a house of cards waiting to fall. I urge the residents of Heppner to visit City Hall and inspect the pipe sections there. Read the project flyer received in your mail on last Friday. Consider the costs of not fixing the problems with inexpensive money, and waiting until the main lines collapse entirely. Consider the impact on your personal budget by doubled water rates. Come to an informed opinion. Call your City Councilors and discuss the project with them. This is our city. We need to maintain it, and we must also be able to afford to live here.

(s) Tom Wolff
Heppner City Councilperson

Help lone on its way out

To the Editor:

Since my early high school years I've become acquainted with many folk in the lone community. They are a quality of people who I would have to give a "10." When they get together to get something done, they do a first rate job.

The people of lone have decided to leave the Morrow County School District and form a district of their own. On the back page of the Feb. 26 issue of the Heppner Gazette-Times is the story. Read it for yourself and see what you think. Read Senate Bill 372. It's all right there. No one needs a California attorney to figure it out.

Self-determination is about lone's parents and community deciding what is best for lone's children. These people represent credibility, integrity and are honest, fair and trustworthy. They would not take one penny that belonged to someone else. They only want to get out and start a new district as soon as possible. They have been pushed into this and they have decided to get out.

I am asking the Morrow County School District and School Board to

help them on their way. You pushed them, and quit poking around with a sharp stick trying to be big shots. Bury the hatchet in the ground, not in your neighbor's skull; understand and try to be decent.

There is a moral to this story and I just love morals, "It's impossible to plug a round hole with a square peg no matter how big the hammer."

(s) Mel Piper
Chief consultant and executive director of Fuller Canyon

Former Heppner couple leaves bequest to local Elks Lodge

The Heppner Elks Lodge recently received a bequest of about \$59,000 from former Heppner residents Conley and Violet Lanham. The Lanhams designated the Heppner Elks Lodge as one of the beneficiaries of their combined estate, and requested the funds be managed to provide scholarships for area high school seniors. The lodge trustees and scholarship committee members will manage the funds.

Vi Lanham, a former teacher and councilor at Heppner High School, died in early 2002. She was involved with the local Soroptimist Club. Conley, a past Exalted Ruler of the local lodge, owned and operated the Western Auto Hardware store in Heppner for many years and later owned a ranch in the lone area. He had died earlier. The Lanhams named many beneficiaries in their wills, including former colleges and professional organizations.

DA's Report

Christopher Jones pled guilty to Harassment-violation. Jones was sentenced to pay \$199 in fines.

Expertise adds to success of St. Pat's Senior Center

Volunteers who lend their time and energy to activities at St. Patrick's Senior Center in Heppner have been described in previous issues. There are also several key persons whose expertise adds to the success and friendly atmosphere of the center.

Mike Amato is the Case Manager for the use of grant monies allocated to Morrow County through CAPECO (Community Action Programs of East Central Oregon). He is a paid employee of the agency. At the center, he primarily oversees the smooth running of the Wednesday lunches - menu planning, working with the cooks, delivery of Meals on Wheels, working with the maintenance personnel for the kitchen and dining room, and being the liaison between the Board of Directors of St. Patrick's Center and CAPECO.

Armato's total job description covers much more. His office is shared space in the Veteran's Affairs office, on the first floor in the back of Heppner Hardware. His responsibilities include other services to assist senior citizens in all areas of Morrow County with heating, household labor, transportation and other acute needs. He maintains a close cooperation with other agencies (such as the Extension Service), merchants who offer assistance (Red Apple frequently gives food supplies), and other business people.

"Mine is very much a one to one, 'hands on job' of helping people with everyday needs," says Armato.

April Wilson is another paid employee, who is head cook for the Wednesday noon meal. She works directly with Armato on meal planning and purchasing orders. She supervises the Meals on Wheels, which go out each week and the preparation of extra frozen meals for those who find meal preparation difficult. She often circulates and visits with the diners.

Barbara Struthers is a volunteer who is the coordinator for the RSVP people in dining room on Wednesday. She and Dorothy Odell work together to be sure every one signs in, as an accurate count is needed. A personal touch she adds is providing cards to persons who are ill, bereaved, or celebrating an event of note. All guests are invited to sign the card, which she sends or delivers. Barbara is a member of the community welcoming committee. As such, she prepares and delivers a basket of fruit to each new resident in the St. Patrick's apartments. From observation, she can be named the gracious hostess of the event when many eat together on Wednesday. She is also a resident who, with Ralph, her late husband, was, and is an ever-present volunteer to assist in many places of need at the center.

Marian Murchison, resident, is also apartment manager. She is also a member of the Heppner City Council. In a future issue, her job will be discussed.

A familiar group of seniors are busy planning their annual St. Patrick's parade float. Be watching for them - they are a riotous bunch.

CHAMBER CHATTER

By Claudia Hughes, Executive Director

Reality. We are up against some very big challenges that seriously effect our way of life, be it educating our students, taking care of our seniors, our safety, the economy, and the list goes on. All this comes right in the midst of a possible war. Placing blame solves nothing; communicating with the legislature and each other can help.

So, what do we do? We look at the glass half full instead of half empty. We count our blessings. And we continue to hope the Willow Creek Valley, consisting of Heppner, Lexington and lone will continue to be the best that we can be under the present circumstances. We respect each other as we strive for what is best for each community. We work at being honest and above board. We make sure facts are known and rumors squelched. Become detectives: make sure fiction isn't leading the parade. Count to ten.

More than ever we need to remember that old saying, "Never judge another until you have walked a mile in his moccasins." Willow Creek Valley shares in and supports each other's activities, be it Town and Country, St. Pat's, Fourth of July, Fair and Rodeo, or Christmas events; we work together on trying to bring new industry and jobs to the area. We promote each other; we attend church together; we drive from town to town to work and for meetings. Our communities overlap in so many ways and we are all too small to stand alone. We need to respect each community's wishes, working both separately and together when appropriate. We need to squelch rumors that arise out of fear and share every positive story we hear. Bottom line, we need each other, and we need to set a fine example for the youth we are trying to help. Whatever the outcome, wherever each community goes from here, is still unknown. But, together we can all make the best of tough situations and grow from the experience.

On Tuesday, March 11, the Chamber program will be a conference call with Representative Greg Smith and Senator David Nelson. Legislature needs direction. They need to hear from people who care.

And with that, may the luck o' the Irish shine down on one and all during next week's celebration when we all come together for food, fun, and shenanigans. A bit laughter is the best medicine under any circumstances.

Highway litter pickup date announced

The St. Patrick's Annual Celebration will be happening in just a few days, so it's time to do the Chamber of Commerce sponsored litter pickup on the state highways through town.

Your assistance with this effort to prepare Heppner for the St. Patrick's Celebration is appreciated.

Contact John Edmundson, Chamber litter pickup coordinator, 676-5177, if you have any questions or you need flagging to mark hazardous material.

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