

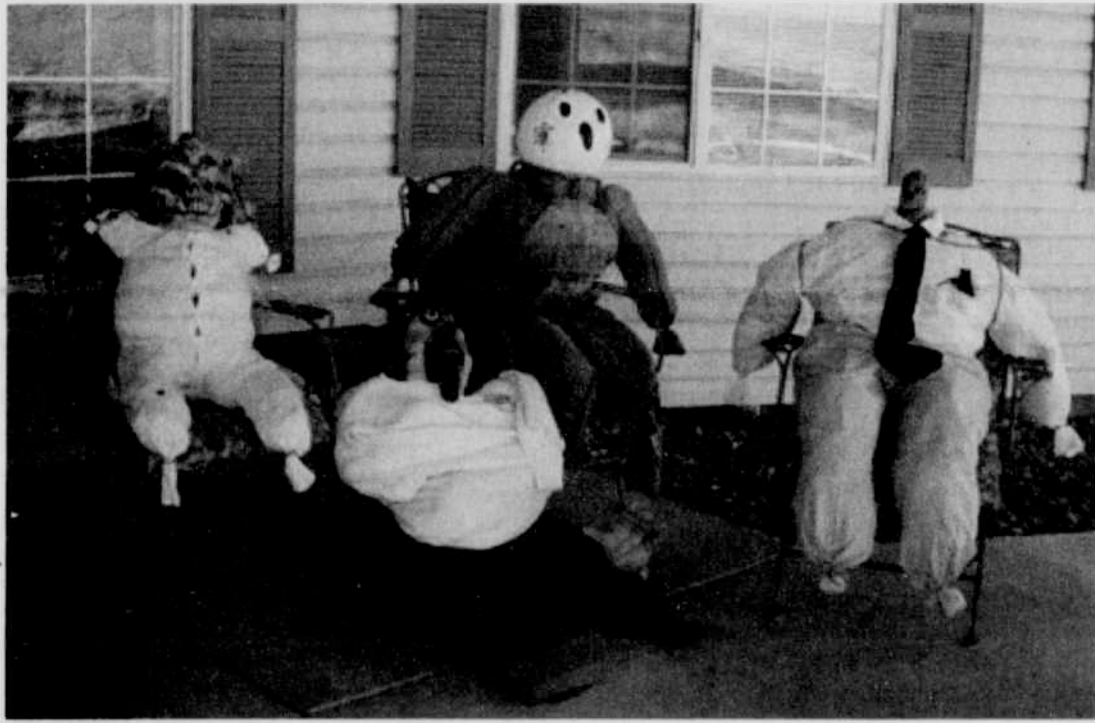
HEPPNER

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VOL. 122 NO. 44 8 Pages Wednesday, October 29, 2003 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Willow Creek Terrace alive with activity



Four of the scarecrows created by Willow Creek Terrace residents pose for the camera.

by Doris Brosnan

Willow Creek Terrace has been a hive of activity for several weeks, and the residents now seem prepared for Halloween.

Inside and outside, the assisted living facility is festooned with common and not-so-common decorations that are meant to entertain young trick-or-treaters who "have the nerve" to come to visit and have a treat. At least nine of the eleven residents and all the staff members plan to be in costumes on Halloween, adding another delight to their visitors' experiences.

The Terrace took Judge's Choice in the Scarecrow Contest sponsored by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce. Manager Nancy Vander Does encourages friends and neighbors enjoying the spirit of Halloween to have a look at 400 Frank Gilliam Drive. Among the "community of scarecrows" at the front door are a one-eyed purple people-eater, one loser of a battle with the ghost-busters, a haven for spiders and their assorted companions, all created by imaginative residents.

When Halloween has come and gone and the

residents have put aside the scary stuff for another year, they will not be putting aside their schedule of activities. On an ongoing basis, the residents have opportunities to participate in a variety of entertainment and pastimes, and most of them also are involved members of the Willow Creek Valley community-at-large.

On Monday afternoons, the Nazarene Church sponsors Bingo games at the Terrace. Vander Does notes that guests are welcome to join the residents for these games, at which they might win prizes. She adds that donations of prizes for the games are gladly received, suggesting books, puzzles, stamps, note cards, decorator items and tasty treats as some ideas for prizes.

On Tuesday afternoons, residents and their guests can find a pinochle game in the common area of Willow Creek Terrace. The usual one table of cards can swell to two and three whenever other friends in the valley want to make a party of the weekly session. A standing invitation has been issued by the residents and staff will help set up for the party and serve refreshments.

On at least one Thursday each month, Eve Ironhawk, a frequent visitor and volunteer at Willow Creek Terrace, is offering residents instruction in crafts. Presently, the participants are creating Christmas boxes. Also once monthly, Meredith Walters accompanies young ladies of her church group on a visit to the Terrace.

Vander Does reports that the return of the fall season brings another monthly delight, practice sessions of Shenanigans. The fiddle music is a special pleasure for the residents, and they have also invited the local women's singing group to return at least once a month for their practices. "And, speaking of music," Vander Does adds, "we have a piano now, just begging for someone to tickle its keys."

Individuals wishing to play that piano, sponsor an activity, or participate in visitations at Willow Creek Terrace are encouraged to speak to Vander Does by stopping in or by calling 676-0004. She observes that the residents are eager for interesting experiences and visitors... And, they are eager to scare a few trick-or-treaters on Halloween.

Health District CEO explains nursing home shut down

"Well, we came away with answers, but not the ones we wanted," said Carolyn McDaniel, organizer of a meeting Monday night in Heppner that was designed to find ways to keep Pioneer Memorial Nursing Home operating. At the beginning of the meeting, she commented, "I don't feel from what I've read that those are the full options."

The nursing home is scheduled to close Nov. 10. Morrow County Health District CEO Victor Vander Does told an audience of around 50 people at the meeting, mainly seniors, that the nursing home is not financially viable. He said that a combination of issues—low census, a small population from which to draw, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements that are below costs, and a discontinuation of a federal program that subsidized the nursing home—contributed to its demise. "Things change," he said, adding nursing homes are losing residents and numerous small nursing homes have closed. He said that generally the elderly population is healthier longer and now only an estimated five percent end up in a nursing home or assisted living facility. "Did we have to sacrifice the nursing home? Yes," said Vander Does. "It's very sad."

Vander Does told the audience that PMNH is losing over \$450,000 a year and MCHD could not continue to

sustain those losses. Vander Does said that the MCHD Board voted to close the nursing home so that the other services provided by the district—Pioneer Memorial Hospital, emergency services, Pioneer Memorial Clinic, Irrigon Clinic and a subsidy to the Boardman clinic, operated by a private physician—could be saved. He said that if the nursing home remained open, the entire district would go broke.

When a member of the audience inquired as to why the district had not cut physicians or their salaries, Vander Does replied that each physician brings in approximately \$900,000 annually to the district, compared to an average salary of around \$140,000 per physician. He also stressed that if Pioneer Memorial Clinic were closed, the hospital would also suffer, because the clinic "feeds the hospital" with patients as well as for services such as x-ray and laboratory. He said that emergency services are subsidized by around \$50,000 a year, but if the hospital were closed, providing those services could cost as much as \$100,000. The hospital's critical access designation helps the district financially, he said.

Vander Does also touched briefly on a plan which could possibly bring some long-term patients back under the "swing bed program".

Concerning the status of the Irrigon Clinic, Vander Does said that the Irrigon Clinic had previously been losing around \$10,000 per month, but added, "It's a lot less than that now and it could potentially make money."

In response to a question about cutting administration costs, Vander Does responded that he and most of his staff took a five percent cut. He said that a raise for nurses was required because a nursing shortage left the hospital unable to compete with other facilities, which resulted in the hospital having to hire more expensive substitute nurses. He and Molly Rhea, Pioneer Memorial Home Health and Hospice Director, said that wages are still below those in more urban areas.

Concern about the expense of buying district cars was also expressed. Rhea replied that purchasing the vehicles ended up being less expensive than paying mileage for employees to use their own vehicles at 36 cents per mile. "By purchasing these little cars, we have been saving money right since we got them," said Rhea. Her department travels extensively throughout Morrow and Gilliam counties to provide in-home care.

Vander Does told the assembly that people would not support the amount of tax increase—around 86 cents per thousand—that it would take to support the nursing home.

"No one asked us," countered Gary Richards, a member of the audience. "What's wrong with supporting our hospital with tax dollars?" added Ed Dick.

Rhea replied that the nursing home cannot garner voter support in Boardman or Irrigon, towns included in the health district, because the people there do not use the services.

Vander Does also expressed doubt that even south Morrow County voters would be willing to support the nursing home with a tax increase of over 80 cents per thousand. Rhea pointed out, for example, that while individuals say they support the Morrow County Schools, district-wide, only voters in the cities of Irrigon and Ione passed the latest school bond levy. The school bond levy went down in Heppner, Lexington and Boardman. And health district officials fear the same fate for the health district levy. Vander Does said, however, that with hard public relations work, voters might be willing to support a 26 cents per thousand tax increase to maintain current services. He said that the district plans to go for the levy in May. He reminded Heppner voters that a vote for the health district levy would not cost them any additional money, because of compression. People living in the Heppner city limits, for example, would not pay additional taxes because they have already reached their taxing limit. People living within the Boardman city limits would pay some additional taxes because they have not reached their taxing limit.

Scarecrow Contest winners announced



Nancy Gochnauer poses with the People's Choice Scarecrows Lulu and Gertie Mae.

Seventeen businesses/individuals took the opportunity to create works of art in the form of scarecrows during the Heppner Chamber of Commerce Scarecrow Contest 2003.

Winner of this year's People's Choice was John's Place. John's Place also took the prize for Most Elaborate. Judge's Choice went to Willow Creek Terrace.

Other winners included: Funniest—Willow Creek Clinic; Most Welcoming—Bank of Eastern Oregon; Most Patriotic—Hair Expressions; and Natural Materials—Artisan Village.

The Chamber encourages everyone to be thinking of great ideas for next year's contest.

Kids invited to Trunk or Treat at HHS game

"Trunk or Treat" will be featured during half time at the Heppner High School football game versus Stanfield on Friday, Oct. 31. Game time is 7 p.m.

Everyone is asked to bring candy and kids are invited to go from car to car trunk or treating.

For more information contact Lizz Green at 676-5425.

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