



## Irrigon High School could open this fall

The Morrow County School District may open the new Irrigon High School this fall, as per recommendations from principals Dirk Dirksen of Riverside High School in Boardman and Ron Anthony of Columbia Middle School. Dirksen and Anthony told the school board at a rescheduled regular meeting Wednesday night that previous staffing concerns have been resolved with a "minimum" of staff transfers, which paves the way for a fall 2004 opening. Anthony said that only three staff members would have to change schools.

The board tabled a decision on the issue until further study.

With the opening of the new school either in the fall of 2004 or 2005, students living in Irrigon who are now attending Riverside High School in Boardman will begin attending school at the new Irrigon High School. The Columbia Middle School site will then become a seven-12 school, housing both junior high and high school students. The facility will be called Irrigon Junior/Senior High School. Some projects still remain at Columbia Middle School to retrofit the school to accommodate high school requirements, such as installing football field lighting, installing bleachers, remodeling for a shop, enlarging the library, remodeling the office and installation of security cameras.

Riverside High School will also become a seven-12 facility when the Irrigon High School opens and will be called Riverside Junior/Senior High School.

If the Irrigon High School opens this fall, students living in Irrigon who will be juniors and seniors will be given the option of attending Riverside High School or the new Irrigon High School. In that case, only Irrigon seniors may opt to attend Riverside in 2005-06. Anthony and

Dirksen told the board that when students from the two schools are combined for athletic contests, during the 2004-05 year, they would remain at the 3A league level. However, separately, the schools will fall in the 2A category, which means that they will eventually compete against Heppner and other schools in that league. Dirksen and Anthony said that varsity sports will not be an option at Irrigon High School until the fall of 2005, however a JV athletic program will be offered at Irrigon for 2004-05. They said that Irrigon students younger than juniors or seniors must petition the board to play at a varsity level. In the event of a 2004 opening, Riverside High School will continue to have both varsity and JV sports and beginning 2005, Irrigon High School will have a varsity sports program.

MCSD was criticized by several Boardman and Irrigon residents who said that the board failed to live up to the criteria it established before it would allow the establishment of a high school in Irrigon. Concerns were raised at the Wednesday night meeting about loss of curriculum and members of the audience pointed out that the board earlier said it would not split the school if curriculum were lost. Dirksen said that "everything will be offered," but added that the number of classes would be reduced. Board member John Renfro explained to a concerned parent after the meeting that while scheduling may become more difficult for students because of a reduced number of offerings, requirements would still be satisfied, much as they are at Heppner High School.

Additional concerns were raised about seventh graders attending school with high schoolers.

The establishment of an additional high school in Morrow County has not only

created potential funding issues for the district, but a possibility of impacting the Morrow County Unified Recreation District's budget, resulting in a perceived disparity in funding between MCSD and the Lone School District and perhaps among schools within MCSD. (MCURD is the entity that funds athletic programs and other extracurricular activities for all schools in Morrow County.) Renfro commented during the meeting about a breakdown in communication between the district and MCURD. Renfro said that MCURD funded athletics for students attending Lone Schools, which recently broke from Morrow County School District, at a higher rate per student than students attending Morrow County schools. Renfro said that ISD received \$94,000, which amounts to \$640 per student while MCSD received only \$318,000, which amounts to \$140 per student. Renfro said that the MCURD Board also wanted to dictate what sports the schools offer. Renfro said that if the revenues and expenses are the same next year, MCSD will be short approximately \$40,000. He also said that if it were up to him, he would turn the whole athletic program over to MCURD, which would then not just provide funding, but supervise the entire program. In that event, athletics would no longer be offered through the schools, but rather privately, much like the European system. "I think we have hit just a snag," said Kuhn. "I believe harmony will prevail." He suggested that the district meet with MCURD concerning the issue.

MCURD Chair Cyde Estes told the Gazette-Times last week that MCURD wants to have a harmonious relationship with MCSD. She said that MCURD did not want to micromanage the

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## Health district explores tax levy

The Morrow County Health District Board is exploring placing a tax levy before the voters either in May or November.

A measure in the May election would require a double majority to pass, however, if the district chooses to wait until November, the financially strapped district would not get the money until the following year.

Board Chair Larry Mills, Heppner, and board member Linda LaRue, Lone, said that they supported the move, while board member Ed Glenn, Boardman, said that he didn't think the measure would pass. Board member Ken Matlack, Irrigon, also expressed doubts about its success.

"My view is that it's a call for the voters," said Mills. Glenn said that the district should be making cuts instead of trying to float a levy. "What we ought to be doing is figuring how we can live within our means," said Glenn. "I don't find anyone in Boardman who would support it," he added. But later he said, "It's a major decision. Before we start cutting and slashing services, we've got to ask the voters how they feel... as soon as possible."

If the financials don't improve and a levy fails, the board discussed options such as closing the Irrigon Clinic

and terminating payments of around \$140,000 annually to Dr. Robert Boss of Boardman to subsidize his private clinic. Cutting emergency services in the communities of Boardman, Irrigon, Heppner and Lone was not considered an option. However, the board decided to research the subject further before deciding what direction to take.

The district recently closed Pioneer Memorial Nursing Home as a means to pare the district's budget, as government reimbursements were not keeping up with the real costs of operating the nursing home.

The district has also made staffing cuts. In addition to cutting staff directly involved in providing nursing home care, the district cut one full-time position in the business office/medical records, which leaves two full-time employees, one employee at 90 percent and two half-time employees. In administration, two full-time employees have been reduced to 70 percent and the CEO, chief financial officer and personnel director have each taken a five percent reduction in pay since this past summer and staff at Pioneer Memorial Clinic have also taken a five-percent cut.

Dr. Sam Datta, a physician employed with the district at PMC and Pioneer Memorial Hospital, recently

volunteered to also take a five-percent cut in his salary when he learned that his staff had taken a cut. "We really feel fortunate to have him," said LaRue, and the remainder of the board concurred.

CFO Nicole Mahoney said that employees whose time is reduced also take a proportionate cut in benefits, i.e., half-time workers receive half benefits.

Despite the nursing home closure and additional cuts, the district's bottom line was still over \$45,000 in the red for December. However, figures for that month might have been fairly healthy if the district had not endured an unusually large (over \$42,000) write-off for bad debts. The district's loss for the year to date is \$288,638.

CEO Victor Vander Does reported that the district should hear about its application for the "swing bed" program within one or two weeks. MCHD has asked that all 25 beds be classified swing beds, but anticipate that fewer beds will be granted. If the application is successful, the district may be allowed to provide long-term care once again. However, this program would allow the district to receive greater reimbursements than it was able to receive when it

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## Chamber of Commerce elects 2004 officers



The Heppner Chamber of Commerce recently installed new board members and officers for the year 2004. Left to right: Bert Houweling, Larry Lucher, John Murray, Brenda Sherrell (vice president), Nancy Gochbauer (2nd vice president), Victor Vander Does (president), Nancy Snider, Barbara Hayes (treasurer), and David Sykes.

Also honored at the annual Chamber luncheon January 13 was Bonnie Wenberg, owner of Artisan Village. Wenberg was honored for her efforts to better her Heppner business, both locally and on the Internet.

## Measure 30 ballots due Feb. 3

Ballots for Measure 30 are due in by Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 8 p.m. The vote on Measure 30 will determine whether a tax increase will go into effect.

Ballots may be mailed, but must be to the Morrow County Courthouse by 8 p.m. Tuesday, or can be hand delivered at several locations in Morrow County. All locations except Lone Bank of Eastern Oregon are open until 8 p.m. on Election Day. Locations include: Morrow County Courthouse-Heppner; Bank of Eastern Oregon- Lone Branch, open until 4 p.m.; Lexington Public Works; Irrigon Justice Court Lobby; and the Boardman Behavioral Health Building.

## Structure fire hits Hardman

There was a fire in Hardman, Saturday, Jan. 24 that totally destroyed extra living quarters and a pump house on Lauren Allen's property. The fire was thought to be started by a wood stove,

said Heppner Fire Chief Rusty Estes.

The living quarters were used to house family of the Allen's. The main house on the property, however, was not damaged.

## Fair Board announces 2004 theme

The Fair Board has picked a theme for the 2004 Fair. The theme is "Come Experience the History of the Morrow County Fair."

The winner is Jack Yocom of Heppner. Yocom will receive a \$25 gift certificate for his winning entry.

## Additional flu vaccines available at Heppner Clinic

The Morrow County Health Department has received an additional supply of flu vaccines. The vaccine is

available in the Heppner Clinic, Thursday, from 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-4:30 p.m.

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