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## Eric Schonbachler returns home from Iraq

Eric Schonbachler, son of Gary and Donna Schonbachler of Heppner, has returned home after 11 months in Iraq. Glad to be back home, Schonbachler is enjoying the last week of his 30-day leave before heading back to Ft. Bragg, N.C.

Once back at Ft. Bragg, Schonbachler, a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the Army, will take command of a scout platoon, which he will train for about eight to nine months. After that he said he doesn't know if and where they will be deployed.

Schonbachler said that early living conditions in Iraq were not good and the soldiers went from tents in Kuwait and dirt ditches once they arrived in Iraq, to beat-up compounds in Baghdad, where just having a roof over their heads was something to be grateful for. The conditions have improved over the last five months, heating and air-conditioning were brought in and safety was relatively achieved, he said.

While in Iraq Schonbachler had quite a bit of interaction with the Iraqi people, most of whom showed great support for the work being done. Now that the initial takeover has been completed, Schonbachler said the goal has been to stabilize



Children of St. Patrick's Catholic Parish display welcome home sign they made for returning soldier Eric Schonbachler. see story on page 2

the country and bring in sewage systems, water, electricity, schools and government.

Another part of life in Iraq that made it more bearable was all the support from back home in the form of mail. Once the troops reached Baghdad they finally began receiving mail from home on a weekly basis. Schonbachler said he appreciated the mail he got from friends and those he didn't even know. "The mail keeps the guys attached to home," he said.

On ending the conversation with Schonbachler, he said he



Eric Schonbachler with his mom, Donna.

wanted to remind people that, "Even though they may not agree [with the war], it's not the troops' decision to go and we need to remember to continue to support our boys."

HEPPNER

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## McCabe charged with 221 counts of embezzlement

Sonja Rae McCabe, 40, of Heppner, was arrested Sunday, Feb. 22 at her home in Heppner on two counts of Aggravated Theft, 48 counts of Theft in the First Degree, 90 counts of Theft in the Second Degree, 25 counts of Forgery in the First Degree and 56 counts of Official Misconduct after being indicted Feb. 20 by the Morrow County Grand Jury. It is alleged that McCabe embezzled over \$100,000 from four Morrow County organizations.

At her arraignment on Feb. 23, McCabe was released on her own recognizance and received a continuance on her plea declaration. A hearing will be held on March 11 in which she will enter a plea.

For the past two weeks, McCabe has been living in Redmond with her sister and working in her company as a receptionist. As part of the release agreement, McCabe is being released to her sister and will return to

Redmond. McCabe is not allowed to deal with any accounts or funds except her own and may not receive money for any volunteer or government institutions. She is also to keep the court apprised of her whereabouts and to immediately notify the court when she is no longer employed. McCabe must also remain on her current medications for depression and anxiety and maintain contact with a mental health counselor. She is also to maintain weekly contact with her attorney.

The charges stem from allegations McCabe stole funds and forged checks from the Heppner Cemetery Maintenance District, the Heppner Rural Fire Protection District, the Willow Creek Country Club and the Heppner Junior/Senior High Booster Club from 2000 until June of 2003. McCabe was an elected director of the Heppner Cemetery Maintenance District and

performed the bookkeeping functions for all four entities.

Morrow County District Attorney David C. Allen said, "These crimes have had an enormous impact on the community of Heppner. Mrs. McCabe's actions were a distressing breach of the small-town trust Heppner citizens placed in Mrs. McCabe."

The 66-page indictment alleges a pattern of conduct with all four victims that included forging checks and making unauthorized withdrawals from government funds and volunteer donations.

Allen went on to say this was a complex and time consuming case to prepare. "There has been considerable public interest in this case. I know people were anxious to see something happen. With 221 counts filed, it took some extra time to piece together all of the various transactions. I am satisfied the charges we filed today can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt."

## Blakes Ranch residents fight for postal service

Blakes Ranch residents, who have been trying to get mail delivery extended to their mountain community for over a year, are meeting little success for their efforts.

Richard and Evelyn Ramso live at Blakes ranch round and have been leading the efforts to get mail delivery to the development. So far the Ramsos' efforts have generated 18 correspondences, a petition drive and a visit to the area by post office officials to inspect the Blakes Ranch road. Federal representative Greg Walden and Senator Smith have also become involved.

At issue is whether the rural route drive will leave the paved highway four miles from Blakes and travel the gravel road to deliver mail at a "cluster" of mail boxes at the entrance to Blakes Ranch.

Post office officials say the road is not in good enough condition, or maintained well enough, to be safe for mail delivery. The postal service offered to put a cluster of mail boxes on the paved highway at the Blakes turnout. The decision was made by Post Office District Manager Dallas Keck, and Manger Post Office Operations David Ellis both of Portland.

Ellis visited the Blakes Ranch area to inspect the road April 28 of last year, and in a letter to Morrow County Judge Terry Tallman (who also wrote letters asking the service be extended) said his inspection revealed the following:

1. The highway from the last delivery point on the route to the turn-off road is an excellent road suitable for the delivery of mail. I have no opposition to the

extension of the route to this point.

2. On the road to the "Ranch", I did not see any posted speed limit signage. It would be my assumption that the speed limit reverts to the Oregon State basic rule. For this road, that could be very dangerous.
3. This road has both stretches that are very wide and in good condition and areas that are very narrow with questionable maintenance. Some parts go down to a single lane of traffic and require passing on the shoulder of the road.
4. It would be a stretch to call the roadbed in many locations a gravel road. Due to wear and tear, many locations have little

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## City looks at land swap and bank building purchase

The Heppner City Council last Tuesday voted to continue investigating the purchase of the former Klamath First Bank building for use as a city hall. The city is also negotiating with the Heppner Gazette-Times newspaper for a possible property trade involving the present city hall and the Gazette property. If completed the Gazette would own, and occupy the present city hall building. The fire department, which is located next to the newspaper, would then have room for expansion. The city would move to the Klamath First building.

No decision has been made, and the city council asked for more costs and figures, and the relative values of the Heppner Gazette and city hall buildings, before moving forward.

The city has been considering remodeling its present building and only recently began to look at buying the former Klamath First Building from the Bank of Eastern Oregon as one alternative. The Bank of Eastern Oregon is asking \$325,000 for the building.

Support for the city move was voiced by several community leaders at the city council meeting. Victor Vander

Does, president of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce, and Nancy Snider a local main street businessperson both spoke in favor of the project saying it was important city government present a positive face to the public.

David Sykes owner and publisher of the Heppner Gazette and president of the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group also spoke in favor. "We are not asking you to be fiscally irresponsible," Sykes told the city council. "We are just saying that we think you should move forward with taking a good look at this

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## Bryn Browning named lone school district superintendent

Bryn Browning, 28, an administrative intern in the 22,000-student Vancouver, WA School District, has been named superintendent/principal of the Lone School District. She has worked as an intern, teacher, and reading specialist at Hazel Dell Elementary School in Vancouver for the past six years. Most recently, she has been called upon to fill in as principal at three different Vancouver elementary schools.

While this will be her first superintendency, she is no stranger to school administration. In fact, she will be a fourth generation school superintendent. Her great-great-uncle Charles Tellier was superintendent of schools in Emmitsburg, Iowa. Her grandfather, George Murdock, was superintendent in the Toledo, WA Public Schools. Her father, George

Murdock, is superintendent of the Umatilla-Morrow ESD and acting superintendent of both the Lone District and the Morrow County School District. Her mother, Donna Murdock, is a teacher in Milton-Freewater.

She was one of four finalists chosen from the 18 candidates who applied for the lone position. One of the finalists later withdrew to become superintendent in Fossil. Browning will officially begin her duties on July 1, although she plans to spend time in the Lone District prior to that time.

Browning was a

unanimous choice of the Board following the interview process. Dr. Dennis Ray, president of Northwest Leadership Associates in Spokane, worked with the Board to coordinate the interviews and the final selection decision. Browning will become the first permanent superintendent of the Lone School District, which was officially formed in July of 2003.

The new superintendent/principal received a masters' degree from Washington State University/Vancouver in May of 2003. She is also completing her administrative credentials through WSU and plans to begin a doctoral program through Lewis and Clark. She received her bachelors' degree in elementary education from Eastern Washington University

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Bryn Browning

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