

Health district takes a look at financials

Morrow County Health District Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney presented a projected financial picture for the district at the MCHD's regular board meeting Monday night in Heppner.

Mahoney's projections indicated a slightly more positive future for the district than had been previously believed. In light of the current situation, MCHD CEO Victor Vander Does recommended, and the board concurred, that the district wait until the general election in November to put a health district tax increase before the voters. If a levy were put before the voters in the November, however, the district would not receive the monies until late the following year.

The board had earlier considered placing a levy before the voters in May because of the district's financial condition, fearing that if they waited until November, the district would run out of cash. A May levy, however, would face the "double majority" requirements and board members were uncertain if a majority of voters would turn out for a primary election.

In painting a more optimistic outlook, Mahoney said that the recent sale of the district's Boardman clinic would help the financial picture by around \$140,000. She also said that closure of the nursing home, which occurred last year, would eventually increase the rate of federal payments such as Medicare and Medicaid to the district. A new plan to create a "swing bed" program, if approved, would further increase Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement. The swing bed program would allow some long-term nursing care. Also, if a plan to establish a federal migrant clinic in Boardman were successful, the contract between Dr. Robert Boss and the district would be dissolved because Dr. Boss would no longer be associated with the district. The district currently pays Dr. Boss over \$140,000 towards operation of his private medical clinic.

While the financial situation appears to be looking up, Board Chair Larry Mills, Heppner, cautioned the board that the plans which would improve the district's financial outlook are not concrete and reminded them that bad situations could also occur. "What if we need to buy a new ambulance?" asked Mills. "What if the x-ray machine goes bad?" He also questioned the viability of the Oregon Health Plan, which reimburses medical costs for those under a certain income who qualify.

Morrow County Museum now open

The Morrow County Museum opened on Feb. 3 for the 2004 season. It's time to get ready for St. Patrick's weekend, the mural committee's art gallery opening in our Katherine Bisbee Gallery and planning the June 12 Dinner/Theater at the Cemetery.

The Ag Museum will open in May. The Ag Museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday. Volunteers are always welcomed to help in keeping both museums open.

A new idea this year is "Adopt a Room" at the museum. There are 11 rooms: the military room, the Native American and wildlife room, the Flood room, the Doctor's office, Master bedroom, children's nursery, dining room, music room, kitchen,

Mills indicated that he is still in support of putting a tax levy before the voters, while board member Ed Glenn, Boardman, who has not been in favor of the levy, questioned if it was still necessary. Previously Glenn had said that he did not believe such a levy would pass.

Mahoney's report included an actual cash balance of \$703,116 for January and projected cash balances through November 2005. The projected cash balances vary from a low of \$412,667 projected for October 2005, to a high of \$1,024,571 projected for November 2004, after the district receives its tax payments. Mills said after the meeting that the district's goal is to maintain around \$1 million in cash balance to ensure that the district can meet its financial obligations. The district's cash balance dipped to a record low of \$60,000 in June 2000, Mahoney reported.

The administration and board will continue to explore the district's financial situation.

Glenn lead the board in commending Mahoney for her work in presenting the district's financial picture.

Vander Does also said he had met with an expert on the federal migrant health program and had learned that the application for the program must be turned in by May. He says that MCHD's role is to be supportive for the vital program, but, as per program requirements, the district will not take any active part in the operation of the clinic.

In other business, the board:

-learned from Vander Does that the district has received the go-ahead to use a nurse practitioner in the emergency room and will still be able to retain its trauma level status. The use of a nurse practitioner, rather than a physician, will reduce costs for the district. Vander Does said that he has scheduled an interview with a nurse practitioner from Louisiana next week.

-learned from Vander Does that he has completed two searches for a supervisor for the Willow Creek Valley Assisted Living Center with little success. He said that he had one interview scheduled this week. The board discussed expanding the search and the possibility of needing to increase the supervisor's salary, which may limit applicants. The salary is currently \$27,030 annually.

-learned from Vander Does and Mahoney of the implementation of a new fee collection plan for district patients with bad credit histories. Mahoney said that

the district has started to collect 50 percent of the fee up front from some patients who have habitually not paid their bills. Mahoney said that the move would generate some additional revenue, but added, "We're not talking about a lot of people here."

-heard that MCHD maintenance head Rusty Estes is still recovering from a broken ankle after falling while shoveling snow off the hospital roof.

-learned that the district lost only \$11,719 for January, compared to \$45,514 for the previous month and \$300,358 for the year.

-received a report from Dr. Boss indicating that he had 206 patient visits for January, while his physician's assistant had 269 patient visits. Dr. Boss reported that he had the following charges for the month: \$8,766 in private pay; \$26,887 in commercial insurance; \$10,643 in Medicare; \$1,576 in Medicaid; \$6,119 from the Oregon Health Plan; and provided \$1,303 in charity care for a total of around \$55,295.

-received a report from the Irrigon Clinic which showed that it had 152 patients for the month of January, with 21 of those new patients. An additional 33 patients were seen by a nurse.

-received a report from Pioneer Memorial Clinic which showed that it had 357 patients in January with 13 of those new patients and an additional 36 patients seen by a nurse.

-received a report from Pioneer Memorial Hospital which showed 14 in-patient admissions for January and another 12 patients admitted for observation.

-received the monthly ambulance report which shows 11 runs for Heppner, 21 for Boardman and nine for Irrigon for a total of 41, with three of those flights. The report showed 563 total runs for 2003, with 171 runs for Heppner, 241 for Boardman and 151 for Irrigon.

-received the board meeting calendar as follows: April 26-School District Office, Lexington; May 24-Pioneer Memorial Home Health Office, Heppner; June 28-Morrow County Annex, Irrigon; July 26-Ione (location to be determined); August 30-PM Home Health Office, Heppner; Sept. 27-Ambulance Hall, Boardman; Oct. 25-School District Office, Lexington; Nov. 29-PM Home Health Office, Heppner; Dec. 27-Morrow County Annex, Irrigon. All meetings are on Mondays at 7 p.m.

schoolhouse in the park and the bridal area. The museum is looking for volunteers to adopt a room and be responsible each month for dusting, mopping, cleaning glassware and completing an inventory sheet on the room. Volunteers can also rearrange, add to, or create new exhibits and make suggestions. This can also be done on the volunteer's schedule, whether, it be mornings, days off, evenings, or during museum hours. The museum hopes to get a dozen or so active volunteers to help keep everything running smoothly.

For those that aren't able to do physical work, the museum is also looking for volunteer hosts who would greet people.

High school students are also more than welcomed

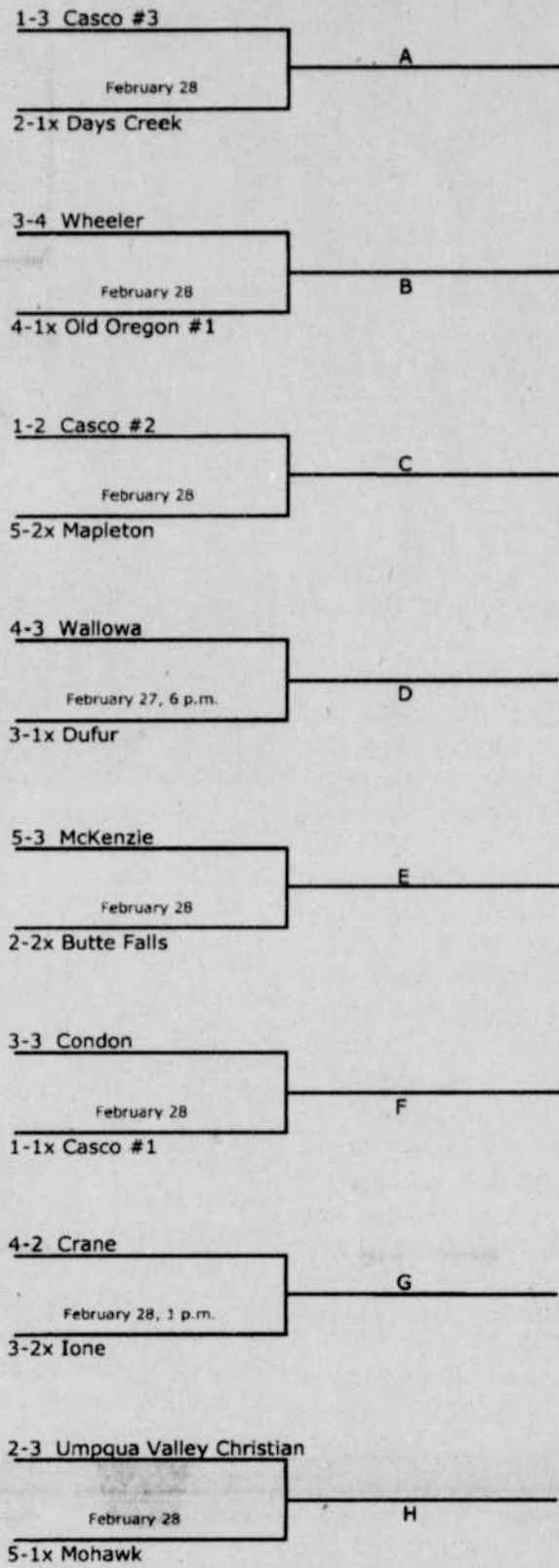
to volunteer. This is a great opportunity to build community service hours for scholarship applications.

The Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday from 1-5 p.m., and Saturday from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. The Museum is closed Sundays and Mondays. On holiday weekends the Museum may be open for a few hours on Sundays.

For more information stop at the Morrow County Museum or call 676-5524.

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2004 1A Girls Basketball State Championships



2004 2A Boys Basketball State Championships



Deirdre Allen to join Hair Expressions team

Deirdre Allen, of Heppner, is joining Hair Expressions as a women's only hairdresser specializing in color and hair design. Allen will be working the first Saturday of the month, beginning March 6.



Deirdre Allen

Allen studied at the Edward Wadsworth School in Portland and has been in practice for 14 years. Even after moving to Heppner, Allen commuted back to Portland for three years before deciding to take time off with the birth of her third child.

Allen is excited about getting back into the hair business and is looking forward to helping women create new and exciting looks for themselves. She will provide free consultations, by appointment, to help clients decide what will work best for them. She said though that she does not do perms, and will not be working with men or children.

Allen says one of her favorite parts about being a hairdresser is the interaction with a wide range of people. She enjoys getting to know new people and is looking forward to growing a strong clientele base. If her base grows, she also said she would consider increasing her hours.

Allen, and her family, husband David and children Alexandra, 6 1/2, Rachel, 4, and Max, who's almost 2, have lived in Heppner for a little over five years.

To make an appointment with Allen, contact Hair Expressions at 676-5271.

Marriage Licenses

Feb. 3: David William Evans, 49, Heppner and Deborah Lavon Wells, 40, Heppner.

Feb. 6: Joseph William Palmer, 23, Irrigon and Gloria Longoria, 28, Boardman.

Feb. 10: James Sherman Dupuis, 52, Pendleton and Paula Hernandez Tobar, 40, Pendleton.

Feb. 11: Juan Manuel Zuniga, 54, Boardman and Maria Esther Alvarez, 51, Boardman.

St. Pat's button now on sale

This year's St. Patrick's Celebration button is now on sale at Murray's Drug, Bank of Eastern Oregon, Heppner TV, Inc. and Gardner's Men's Wear. The purchased button has three chances of winning \$100 the weekend of the celebration, March 13-14. Drawings will be held at the Friday Night Auction, the KUMA Coffee Hour on Saturday, and at the Trail Band Concert Saturday evening.

The button designed for 2004 is commemorating Lewis and Clark Expedition for Heppner's 22nd Annual Celebration. The little leprechaun seems to be spotting the new trail right along with Lewis and Clark. Purchase your button to help fund activities that are carried on for the weekend- all the proceeds go to the St. Patrick's Day Celebration Committee.