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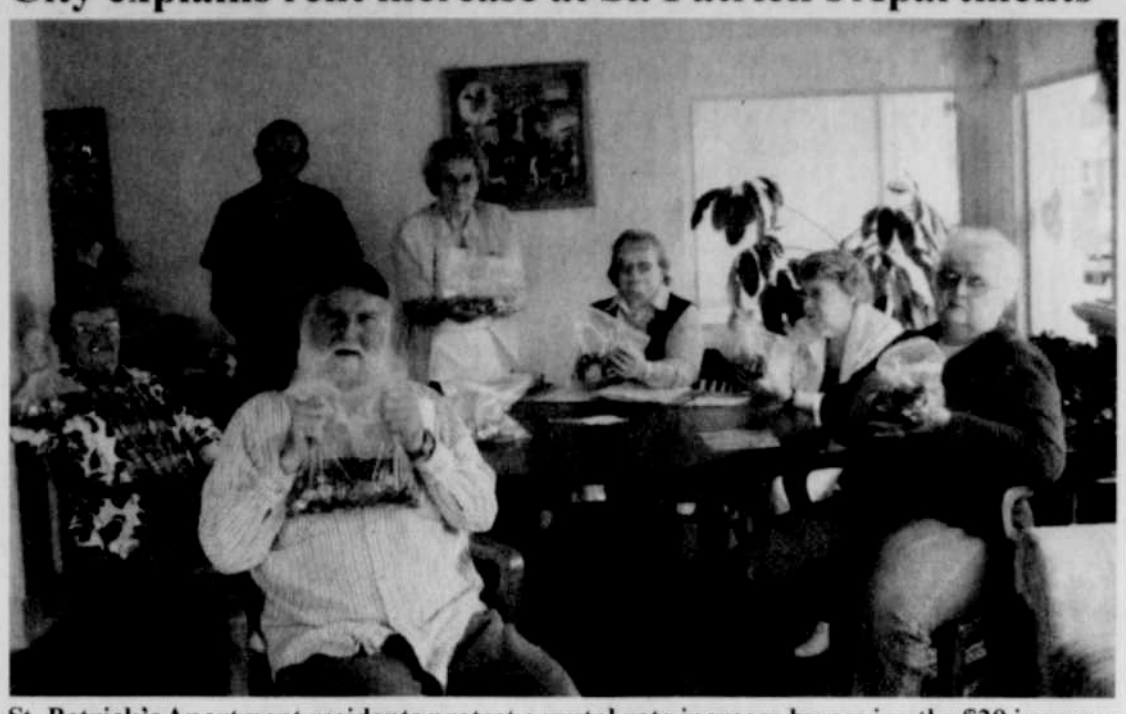
City explains rent increase at St. Patrick's Apartments



St. Patrick's Apartment residents protest a rental rate increase by paying the $20 increase in pennies. (Clockwise from front): Residents include Bill French, Velma Wight, Ellis McRoberts, Mabel Heath, Dorris Graves, Bonnie Gates and Ruby Steers.

A proposed rent increase at the St. Patrick's senior apartments in Heppner has caused hard feelings between residents, the city of Heppner, and the Heppner Housing Authority, and created a protest where some residents are paying their rent increase with pennies.

The controversy began when the housing authority, which operates the non-profit apartment complex, proposed a rent increase to cover increased operating costs.

According to City Manager Jerry Breazeale the Housing Authority authorized three successive rate increases of $20 each at six-month intervals for residents of St. Patrick's Apartments. The rate increase was decided upon due to increased operational costs of the apartments.

After each six-month period, the Housing Authority will review their financial condition and if the outlook is positive they will defer further increases, Breazeale said. The first increase took effect June 1.

The Housing Authority is a non-profit organization unaffiliated with any government agency.

Breazeale also explained that the rent the tenants pay for also includes water, sewer, garbage, electricity and building maintenance. Cable and telephone services are the responsibility of the tenant. The Housing Authority also provides a window unit air conditioner for each of the apartments. These units are installed and removed at the tenants' request.

As for building maintenance, Breazeale said that the only thing the tenants are responsible for is changing the light bulbs in the apartments. However, for those unable to change the florescent lighting in their kitchens, the Housing Authority provides assistance.

Besides the apartments' proximity to the downtown businesses, another nice thing about them is that the Senior Center is in the same building, added Breazeale. Having the Senior Center so close allows for tenants to take an active part in senior activities.

Some residents of the St. Patrick's Apartments, especially those with fixed incomes, are worried that they cannot afford the $20 a month rent increase and will be forced to move. They are also concerned that they have been left out of the information loop and fault the Housing Authority and City of Heppner for a failure to communicate. Many are still unsure about the amount of the increase and say that the Housing Authority originally had said the increase could eventually amount to an additional $60 to $80 per month.

In protest to the rate increase, the residents decided to pay the first rent increase in pennies. The all gathered June 3 to pay their rents, including their normal rent payment with the pennies.

Lexington Volunteer Fire Depart. receives $20,000 grant

Nicki Clement (right), recorder for the Town of Lexington, is presented with a check for $22,142 by Clayton D. Zeeb of Salem, trustee of the Neil R. Macdonald Charitable Foundation on Wednesday, May 25 at Lexington Town Hall.

The Lexington Volunteer Fire Department received a grant in the amount of $22,142 from the Neil R. Macdonald Charitable Foundation. This is the largest grant the foundation has ever given out.

Neil R. Macdonald, an owner of several saw mills, was impressed at how a volunteer fire department on the Oregon coast helped his son and treated him with friendliness and dignity in a bad situation. He decided to set up the Charitable Foundation to help rural volunteer fire departments with needs that they might not otherwise be able to fund. Clayton D. Zeeb and Stanley M. Zeeb, both of Salem, are trustees for the foundation and were instrumental in setting up the account and its distribution to rural volunteer fire departments.

Assistant Fire Chief Glenn Anderson of Lexington had just finished writing a grant for the department when he got a call from Zeeb to apply for a grant from the foundation. Anderson decided to apply for the grant in order to buy a Patriot Air Compressor to fill the department's self-contained breathing apparatus tanks at a cost of $11,650. This is a special compressor made for filling the department's air tanks and can be used by Heppner and Ione's volunteer fire departments. Zeeb called Anderson and discussed the application since it was for more than they usually give one department, but he was impressed that several departments would benefit from the grant. Other items listed on the grant were for safety equipment and clothing and a generator. Shortly after their discussion, Anderson was called with the news that the grant had been accepted and the money would be delivered by Zeeb to the department. Unfortunately, the early afternoon hour for Zeeb's arrival found all of the volunteers at their day jobs and he was unable to meet them.

Volunteer fire departments are grateful for people like Macdonald and the Zeebs, who realize the importance of volunteers who work hard to help others without any financial gain. Specialized equipment needed by departments is very costly today, so foundations such as these are very helpful for small departments.

Glenn Anderson- Lexington Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Fire Chief.

The Lexington Volunteer Fire Department is fortunate to have Anderson in the department. He has devoted much time and effort to upgrading the department. Over the past several years, he has applied for and received close to $80,000 in grant for training and updated equipment and clothing for 14 volunteers.

Morrow County crop tour and potluck dinner to be held

The Morrow County crop tour, social hour and potluck dinner will be held Friday, June 17. The tour will begin at 2 p.m., at Bill Jepsen's place and end at the Turner Ranch with the social hour and potluck to begin at 5 p.m.

Participants may attend the whole day or just the dinner. Families are encouraged to attend. For the potluck, those whose last name ends in A-M are asked to bring a salad and those whose name ends in N-Z are asked to bring a dessert. Please RSVP for the event, by calling the Morrow County Extension Office at 676-9642.

For those who wish to follow someone to the first stop, you can meet at the School District Office parking lot in Lexington (across from Shell Station). The group will depart promptly at 1:30 p.m.

A schedule of events is as follows:

2-2:45 p.m.- Meet at Bill Jepsen's Place- weed-seeker sprayer demonstration- chemical fallow field (near house), just east of mailbox.

2:45-3:30 p.m.- Proceed to next stop at Tad, Mark, and Corey Miller's Place. [Directions: From Lexington: Travel 4 miles N/NE on Hwy. 207. Turn east on Turner Lane (at the old Lovgren Place). Drive 1.5 miles to variety trials. Site is on the north side of the road and is clearly marked.] Refreshments courtesy of MCGG.

3:30-4 p.m.- View large-plot variety trials. Plots include traditional wheat varieties and ORCF-101, ORCF-102, and Tubbs.

4-4:30 p.m.- Travel to stop at the Turner Ranch. [Directions: From large-plot variety trials: Travel 0.7 miles east on Turner Lane. Turn north on Nichols Lane and continue on for two miles. Turn east on Baseline Road and travel just beyond the Miller's shop (1.2 miles). There is a "Y" in the road- bear left onto Kilkenny Road and drive north for another 2.1 miles. Turn east on Kemp Lane and continue on for 2.5 miles. Turn south on Sand Hollow North Road- travel another 0.7 miles to the final stop of the crop tour.]

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Mills hired as interim city manager

Long-time Heppner resident Larry Mills has been hired by the city council as interim city manager following the resignation of Jerry Breazeale two weeks ago.

Larry Mills

Mills, who managed the Morrow County Grain Growers for 29 years, and also has served on the school board and as chairman of the health district, will fill in until a new city manager can be hired. "I want to make sure the council has the proper time to get the best possible person for the job," Mills, who came out of retirement to accept the position, told the Gazette Tuesday.

The council voted unanimously at a special meeting last Thursday night to hire Mills, who will work until the end of the year, or until the council is able to hire a new manager. His salary will be $4,000 per month.

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