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HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 125 NO. 1 8 Pages Wednesday, January 4, 2006 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Spike strips stop wrong-way driver

Units from the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Boardman Police Department, Umatilla Police Department, Stanfield Police Department and Oregon State Police responded regarding a wrong-way driver who was driving eastbound in the westbound lanes of Interstate 84 down the middle of both lanes at speeds between 70 and 85 miles per hour at approximately 8:58 p.m., Dec. 29.

John Blackwell, 59, of Deer Park, Washington, reportedly got on the freeway going the wrong way at Boardman. An Oregon State Trooper was able to get in position ahead of the suspect and place a spike strip that successfully flattened one of the tires on the vehicle. The suspect pulled to a stop at milepost 184 where he was taken into custody without incident. He was lodged at Umatilla County jail for Attempting to Elude a Police Officer, Reckless Driving and Driving under the Influence of Intoxicants.

4-H Rocket Club plans launch

The 4-H Rocket Club will meet Thursday, Jan. 5, at 6:30 p.m. at Ione High School. Items on the agenda include a safety quiz, campaign speeches and elections, appointment of a fund raising chairperson, a Team America Rocketry Challenge report from Thomas Holland, discussion of the next launch and a demonstration of the RockSim, a rocket design and simulation program that the TARC team will be using to construct their competition design. A work session is also planned. After the regular meeting, the TARC team will have a short organizational meeting.

Members of the club need donations of items such as materials for rocket construction, glue, tools, fabric and sewing expertise for parachutes, tables and portable fencing. For more information please call Pat Struthers.

Farmers Insurance to sponsor 'Student of the Month'

Brenda Sherrell and Farmers Insurance Group will implement "Student of the Month" recognition for outstanding students attending Heppner High School. The student will be someone that the school and community can be proud of, says Sherrell.

The student will be selected for his academic performance, but the selection will not be based solely on grades, but also on individual ability, athletics and community service.

Students will receive a gift certificate for lunch at a Heppner business and a plaque. Each student of the month will be featured in the Gazette-Times with an article and picture. Heppner TV will also feature the student.

Public invited to ICABO monthly meeting

ICABO will hold their monthly meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 11, at 6:30 p.m. at Taylor's Restaurant in Ione. Area businesses will update the public on upcoming projects they will be working on during the year.

Taylor's Restaurant will serve a no-host lasagna dinner, including green salad, garlic bread and dessert.

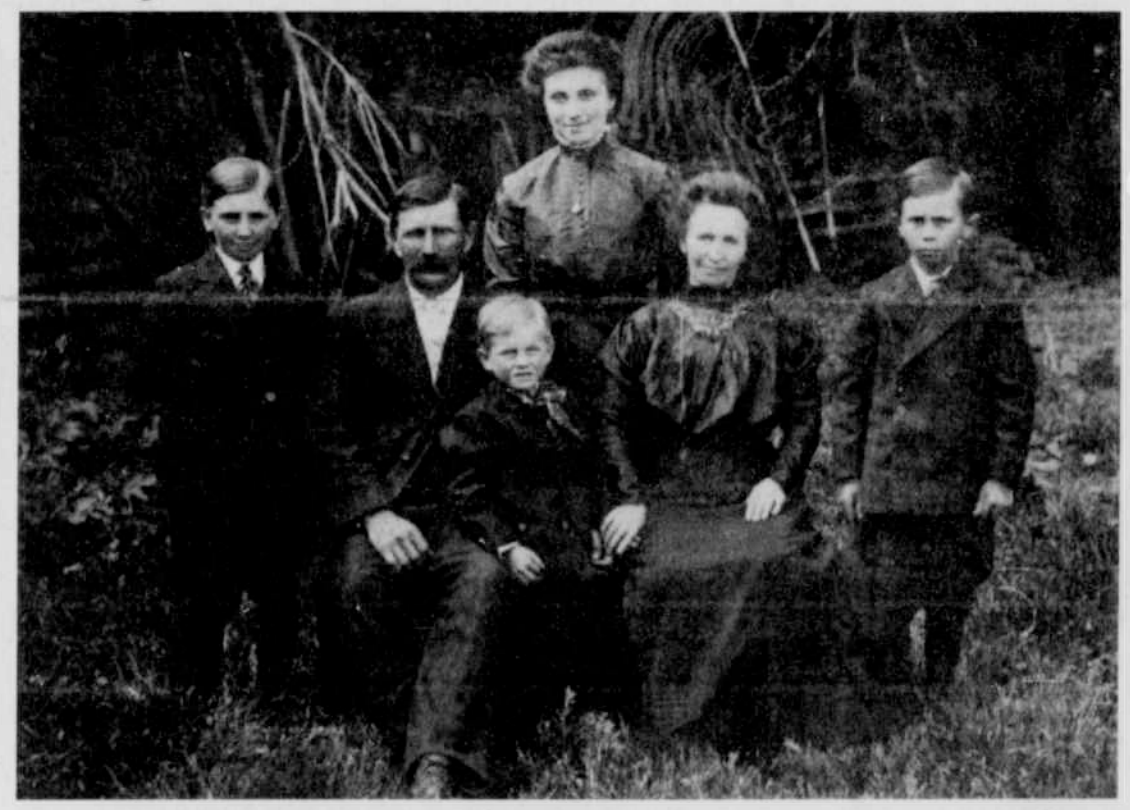
Everyone is invited to attend.

Holly Rebekahs to host card party

Holly Rebekah Lodge in Lexington will hold their regular card party Saturday, January 7, at 7 p.m. Cost to play is $5. Prizes will be awarded and snacks will be served.

Former Rhea Creek rancher Mary West at home in Nevada

Mary West. This picture taken by her oldest daughter Katy.



The old photo was taken in early 1900 at the Butter Creek/Vinson ranch, and shows, left to right, Jack French (Mary's grandfather), Dillard French, Jesse French, Agnes French, Susan French and Herbert French.

By Peg Willis

Mary West, former Morrow County resident, is a fifth generation rancher. Although she spent many of her growing up years on a ranch in the Puget Sound area, her roots are deep in Umatilla/Morrow County. Her early years were spent on the family ranch near Vinson.

West's father, Pete French, owned one of the best ranches in Oregon located in Umatilla and Morrow counties. Beginning as a sheep ranch at the time of West's Irish great grandmother, Susan Mary Doherty, it was a "complete" ranch that didn't require any trucking of the livestock. They could be trailed from the winter pasture near Butter Creek to the summer pasture in Ukiah.

West remembers "the coffee boiling, roast beef, bread and butter and red beans on the table, a kitchen full of cowboys getting their fill and KUMA Coffee Hour on the radio. That kitchen was so full of warmth and bright characters."

But ranching is not just fond memories or a sense of family pride. It's hard work. West's father-in-law, Jim West, who, along with his wife, Carleen, has owned a ranch in Morrow County many years, puts it this way. "Sheep, cattle and horses dominate our working days. Haying, paperwork, and daily duties take a lot of effort but are all pointed to caring for livestock. They eat, drink and need protection every day. We accept that challenge daily. Actually, they own us."

Although she grew up in ranching, West didn't realize until her late teen years that it was to become her future. She learned that she truly values working together as a family, the freedom and isolation, seeing nature at its best – things that are a common part of the ranching lifestyle. Ranching became her focus.

After returning from Puget Sound in the late 1980's Mary served on the Pendleton Round-up Court in 1989. It was a defining experience for her.

"I remember our chaperone, Bob Miller, saying, "I don't want you to look back on this experience 20 years from now and say, 'I sure wish I would have ...' or 'why didn't I just try ...' That statement has made a huge impact on my life. Being on the Round-Up Court really brought me out of my shell and threw me into life."

Janet Miller would agree. She says West "was very shy to start with – not much of a public speaker. But by the end of her year on the court, she was right up there with the best of them."

"I am living the way my family did several generations ago. How cool is that?" she asks.

West and her husband, Clay, ranched for several years on Rhea Creek near Heppner. They ran cattle and sheep on leased property and raised horses at the ranch. "Our 'claim to fame' came from a horse called Drifts Chip that we sold to the famous Four Sixes Ranch in Texas. He is standing at stud there still."

One of the tragedies that can accompany the "freedom and isolation" of ranching life hit hard in the spring of 1995 when the West's house, and all its contents burned to the ground. Katy, their first child, was less than a year old at the time.

How does a person handle something like that? You pick up the pieces and move on. "The first night as we prepared to go stay with Clay's parents, I was thinking about what I would need to take – pajamas, toothbrush, clothes for tomorrow, Katy's baby things. Then I remembered that I didn't have any of those things." Friends from nearby Heppner and Ione were more than generous, bringing the family "everything we could need." But West still mourns the loss of her beloved little dog and the few family heirlooms she had.

Such a devastating fire would be enough to cause many people to give up and move into town. But the Wests chose to stay on the ranch and rebuild. Soon Katy was joined by sister, Betsy, and then brother, James. But something was still missing. Mary and Clay kept coming back to the dream of owning a ranch of their own. It's not a decision to be made hastily. From the time they made the commitment and began looking for the right place till they actually loaded up their belongings and drove to their new ranch in Nevada in June of 2004, five years passed.

The Nevada ranch is 100 miles from the nearest town, Elko – a two-hour drive, one hour of which is on a dirt/gravel road. Bob Miller says the Wests live "so far from her nearest neighbor, they have to have their own tom cat." No running into town for a quick trip to McDonalds.

Did the Wests have any fears or doubts about setting out to find a new life in far away Nevada? Absolutely. "Not only the financial investment," says Mary, "but leaving family and friends. And the fear of failure. That is really scary.

"I guess mine is a lifestyle choice; it doesn't have to do with making millions. Ranching is a tough business. It is not a steady paycheck. Unexpected quirks in the market, price of feed, weather and unexpected complications are always affecting the budget."

The West's ranch in Nevada can run 600 head of

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MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

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