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Gazette Times

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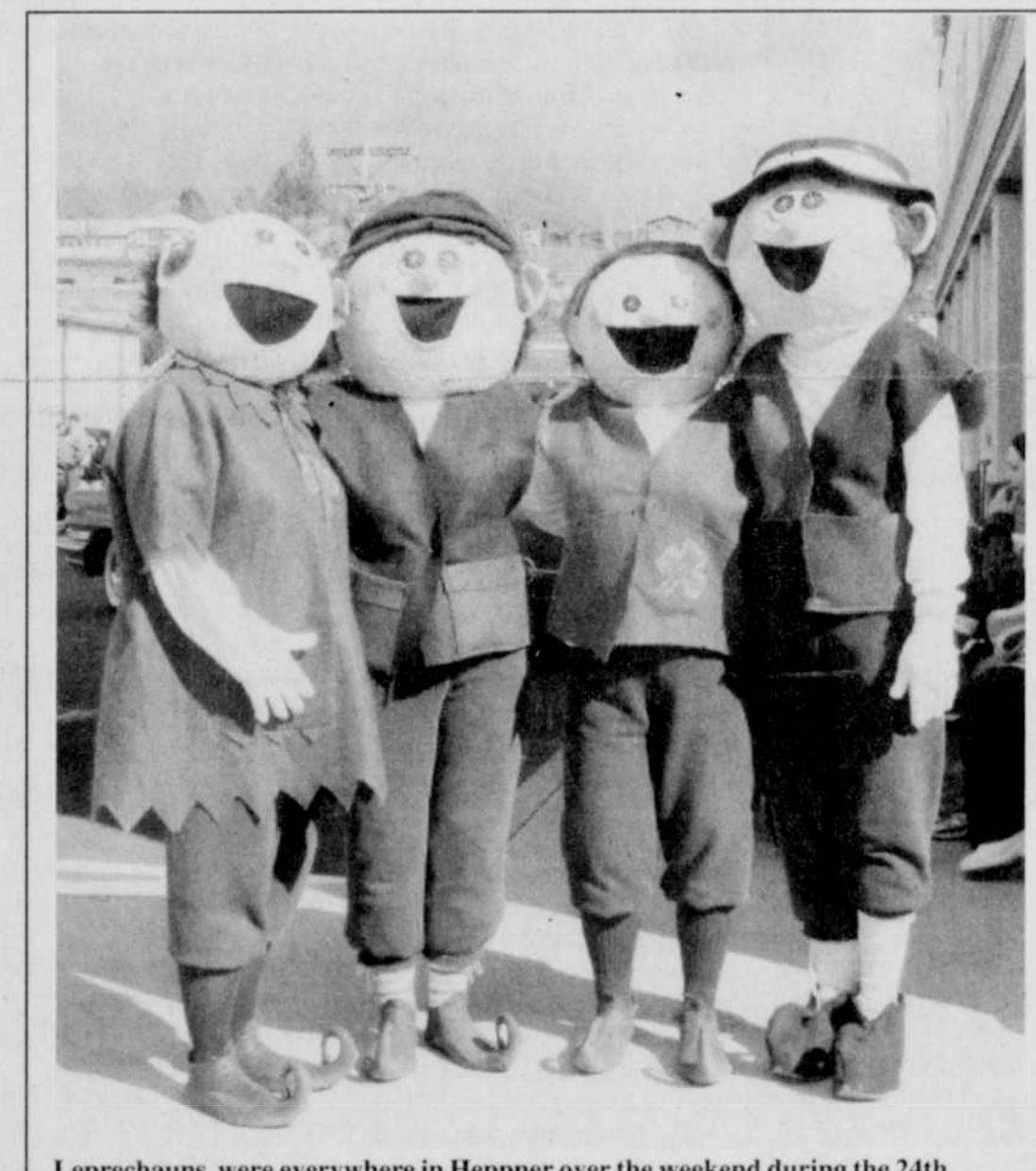

Leprechauns were everywhere in Heppner over the weekend during the 24th Annual St. Patrick's Day in Heppner Celebration. More pictures and stories inside.

City defers log truck decision to committee

The Heppner City Council put off a vote on an amendment to an ordinance which would officially allow truck owners to park their trucks at their residences and instead opted to form a committee to attempt to settle a dispute between log truck owners and their neighbors.

The city had attempted to revise the ordinance to bring it in line with current practice. Law enforcement had declined to take action because the ordinance had been routinely ignored.

Differences between the truck drivers and some neighbors became apparent when Mike Bergstrom of 20 Canyon Drive in Heppner complained to the city about early morning noise in his neighborhood caused by a log truck owner who parks his vehicle at his home in the vicinity. Bergstrom presented a letter to the council asking that the city not change the ordinance regarding trucks in residential neighborhoods. He said that the noise created by the trucks "disrupts the quality of life as well as the sleep of residents" and added that many streets are "substandard" or in "poor repair" and many are too narrow for trucks. He suggested that the truck owners park their vehicles in other areas, such as the grain elevator on Riverside Street. He also said that his property has had some landscaping damage as a result of the truck.

Bergstrom's letter was signed by around 20 people, however, according to Heppner Mayor Tim Van Cleave, several called to have their names removed from the list prior to the meeting.

Bergstrom said that his complaint was "never meant to be personal" and added, "I'm sorry it's gotten this far out of hand."

Truck owner Donna Ball, 240 Summit Drive, said that she had asked numerous families in her neighborhood prior to establishing the trucking business that she and her husband, Gary, own. She said that they try to be considerate of their neighbors and most of their neighbors told her that they

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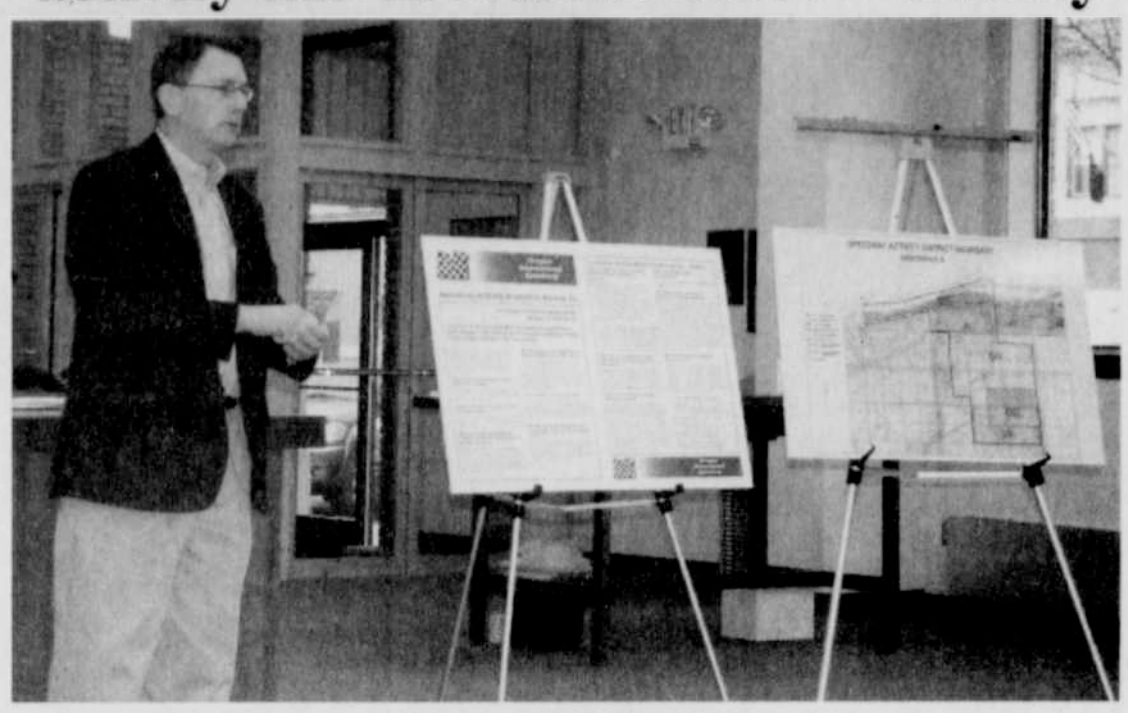
Speedway developers begin push for 'activity tax' in North Morrow County



Steve Brucker, Sr. Vice President of Oregon International Speedway, gives a presentation to the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group and members of the public on March 1.OIS is proposing to build a NASCAR style speedway near Boardman.

On May 16 Morrow County voters will be asked to approve a sales tax that will be used to pay for road and utility improvements at a proposed speedway to be built near Boardman.

Only people attending events at the speedway would pay the tax, which would be levied on goods and services purchased within the speedway activity district, a 4,000-acre parcel west of Boardman adjacent to the Tower Road exit on I-84 where the racetrack would be built.

Developers say the speedway will be a motor sports complex designed to accommodate major league racing, including NASCAR, drag racing, truck and other types of motor racing.

The tax would be 8 percent levied on certain goods and services, with .5 percent of the tax going to Morrow County to pay for collection costs, and the other 7.5 percent being used to pay off bonds sold by the development company to construct roads and other infrastructure. Neither the taxing area or the amount of the tax could be changed without voter approval.

Morrow County Commissioner John Wenholz said several weeks ago that if voters turn down the tax, the speedway would not be built, however Bill Gardner of DiGard Racing, an investor in the racetrack, said it would "make it more difficult" to locate the speedway in Morrow County if the tax were not approved. Gardner said other sites are under consideration for the speedway, and incentives are being offered by those locations.

Oregon International Speedway (OIS) is the corporation building the speedway, and representatives have been attending meetings in Morrow County to explain the speedway and proposed tax. Steve Brucker, sr. vice president of OIS, along with Bill Gardner of DiGard Racing, both principals in OIS, attended the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group meeting March 1, putting on a program and answering questions about the raceway and the proposed tax.

Oregon International Speedway is a group of motor sports industry investors led by Gardner, former NASCAR team owner and owner of DiGard Racing. Gardner's NASCAR career include his 1983 NASCAR Winston Cup Champion win with Bobby Allison as his driver, his 43 NASCAR Cup Series wins and his 1982 Daytona 500 win. DiGard lists its offices at 4040 Galt Ocean Drive in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

OIS has entered into an agreement with the Port of Morrow for OIS to either purchase or lease several parcels of land in the Tower Road area of Boardman. The land would be used to develop not only the raceway, but other possible developments including restaurants and hotels.

Developers of the race track say the facility will benefit Morrow County by providing new jobs. OIS says phase one of the project will add between 100 and 200 full time family wage jobs in the county area for operation of the facility, and will also create 750 construction jobs for three years when construction starts. OIS also says the speedway will attract a variety of related businesses, such as motor sport-related manufacturing, retail outlets, tourist attractions and motor sport-related entertainment.

OIS says that phase one of the project will include an 81,500 seat grandstand with 60 luxury suites, a 1.2 mile banked speedway, a 5/8 mile oval race track, 2.5 mile road course, drag strip, go kart track, RV park and campground, space for retail stores and restaurants, plus utilities, infrastructure and road development needed to support the speedway. They estimate that the facilities would be used approximately 200 days a year.

OIS believes the first phase of the project would be completed in late 2008.

John Ballard announces DA candidacy

John Ballard

John L. Ballard, Attorney at Law, has entered the three-way political race for the position of Morrow County District Attorney. Ballard has been an attorney since 1997, bringing with him nine years of experience. Ballard presently is in private practice in the firm of Ballard and Gushwa, LLP. He has experience in criminal and family law.

Ballard received his Juris Doctor (with distinction) from University of North Dakota School of Law and his bachelor of arts (summa cum laude) from Buena Vista College, Iowa.

Ballard is seeking the position of District Attorney for Morrow County because he feels there is a desperately needed change of administration. Ballard has seen the last eight years increase in problems with Methamphetamine in the smaller Eastern Oregon towns. He feels the police are doing the job, the prosecutors there were not. Ballard wants the citizens of Morrow County treated equally and fairly, bringing strength back to the district attorney's office.

Ballard is known in the legal community for his straight talk, down to earth presence. He will stand up for the community and citizens of Morrow County.

If elected district attorney, Ballard stated he plans to work closely with schools and senior citizens to help protect the county's most vulnerable citizens. "I will place a special emphasis upon vigorous prosecution of drug crimes, burglaries, identity thefts and will protect the rights of crime victims. My work in the legal field has ranged from traffic violations to Measure 11 crimes," said Ballard.

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