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HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

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Helping kids make gingerbread houses

Heppner High Honor Society members Whitney Matthews (left) and Justin Delveaux (far right) assist Heppner Chamber Manager Terry Baker and Kathy Marick in helping kids make gingerbread houses at the chamber-sponsored activity at the Willow Creek Diner Sunday and Monday.

Health district receives good audit report

The Morrow County Health District received glowing reports from Konrad Capeller, accountant with the Michael R. Bell & Company, PLLC, accounting firm at the district's regular meeting held Monday night in Heppner.

According to Capeller, the current audit was one of the best the district has received and he credited CEO Victor Vander Does and Chief Financial Auditor Nichole Mahoney with "immaculately kept" records. He also said the district is "getting better fiscally," "has stabilized and is getting healthier and healthier." He attributed the district's health partially to Pioneer Memorial Hospital's designation as a critical access hospital, which allows the district to receive cost-based reimbursement from Medicare, rather than a set amount the government entity previously dictated, and the passage of the district's three-year bond measure.

Michael R. Bell & Company did not present an official audit report that evening, however, because the district was surprised recently by an obscure clause in a loan covenant which required a $530,000 payment to the Bank of Eastern Oregon. The bank worked with the district to resolve the issue, but the payment was mandated by regulations. The district will not be required to pay taxes or penalties. Board Chair Larry Mills credited BEO for "bending over backwards to help resolve the issue." "We appreciate the cooperation from the bank," said Mills. "George Koffler was very cooperative," said Mahoney, who added that the $530,000 obligation has since been paid. Capeller said the final audit will be presented shortly.

Capeller also presented a program on "swing beds" which would enable Pioneer Memorial to use hospital beds for long-term as well as acute care. The swing bed designation would improve the reimbursement rate for long-term care dramatically. When the hospital previously operated the nursing home, the Medicare reimbursement rate was around $90 below cost per nursing home patient per day, which the district could not sustain. "It would be a help for the community (if the swing bed program was in effect)," said physician's assistant, Sheridan Tarnasky. The swing bed program has to be approved through changes in administrative rules by the Oregon Legislature. Capeller stressed that Oregon's portion of the reimbursement would remain the same. "Oregon pays really stingy," says Capeller. "(If the program was in effect) The state of Oregon won't pay more, but it will be a hero for saving nursing homes."

Also at the meeting, Mahoney reported that the district saw a $43,000 gain for October.

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Health district hires nurse practitioner

Nurse practitioner Sue Peeples has been hired by the Morrow County Health District as a mid-level provider.

Peeples will take over as provider at the Irrigon Clinic in January, following the resignation of physician's assistant Terry Anderson. In the meantime, she is filling in and seeing patients at the Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner.

Sue Peeples

Peeples, 52, has been employed at the Oregon Health Sciences School of Nursing at Eastern Oregon University at LaGrande for the past 13 years. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing and is certified as a family nurse practitioner and in midwifery.

As a nurse practitioner, Peeples can operate independently from a physician and can diagnose and treat illnesses, order lab tests, order x-rays and other procedures, prescribe medications and refer patients to other physicians. Especially interested in prevention and community assessment programs, Peeples says that one of her goals is to help patients be more healthy.

Originally from Pennsylvania, Peeples comes to Morrow County from Union and says she especially enjoys "rural health and rural health promotions". She recently returned from a trip to South Africa where she served as a consultant to an HIV/AIDS project. "It was very sobering," says Peeples, who added that as many as 29 percent of the South African people are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.

Heppner residential lighting contest announced

Heppner Chamber of Commerce is once again encouraging residents to light up for the Christmas Lighting Contest. Columbia Basin Electric is sponsoring the contest again this year.

Categories are "Best Outdoor Lighting," "Best Indoor Decorations," as viewed from the outside, and "Judges' Favorite." Judging will occur between Dec. 17-20, so participants are encouraged to keep their lights twinkling.

The winners will receive $30 each. Last year's winners are not eligible for prize money.

The Chamber hopes to encourage everyone to get in the Christmas spirit and have the town sparkle for the holiday season, says Terry Baker, Chamber executive director.

Lexington considers moving city hall and fire department

Town of Lexington officials discussed moving the town hall and fire department at a special public hearing held Monday night.

The discussion was part of the town council's efforts to adopt a pre-disaster plan formulated by the county planning department.

Monday's discussion focused around an idea to apply for federal grants to purchase another building for city hall and buy land for construction of a new fire hall.

A household survey asking for citizen input on the disaster plan has been circulating in Lexington. The front page of the survey states, "...we received a report and revised maps from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) ...that show our Town Hall/Fire Dept. is not only in the floodplain, but is in the floodway- and is in an area designated as a 'Special Flood Hazard Area'. So the handwriting is on the wall; sooner or later Lexington will be forced to deal with this – and the council thinks that dealing with it will be a whole lot less painful if we can obtain some federal aid."

Lexington Mayor Val Doherty, who lead the meeting Monday, said federal money would be available to move city hall/fire department out of the flood area. She proposed that the former Kingdom Hall in Lexington may be available for purchase, and the Morrow County Grain Growers would be approached about selling the lots behind the hall on which to build a new four-bay fire department.

Doherty said if the town's grant were approved, the federal government would pay up to 75 percent of the expense, and the city would have to come up with 25 percent. She said the city's contribution could be donations of property, labor, materials, equipment usage

City looks at former Kingdom Hall for new town hall

or other in-kind services. Doherty also mentioned that the city had $10,000 in a savings account that might be available.

Doherty urged the town to move quickly with the revised county plan since grant applications for the 2007 fiscal year must be into the state by Jan. 16. "This means we have to have our plan adopted by Nov. 28," she wrote in the town survey.

The town council was set to meet Tuesday, Nov. 28, (after G-T deadline) and consider finalizing the new disaster plan, which better reflects the needs of Lexington. The council did not adopt the original county plan presented at the Nov. 14 meeting. "...the county wanted us to pass a resolution adopting it at our November 14 council meeting. The 'Lexington Annex' section of the plan is woefully inadequate – and in some respects inaccurate," the mayor told town residents.

The distributed survey and Monday's public hearing would help change the county prepared disaster plan. The plan is instrumental when applying for federal pre-disaster plans. Input from the survey and hearing would be presented to the town council Tuesday night.

Doherty said the county pre-disaster plan said Lexington was most susceptible to five types of disaster: flood, wildfire, winter storm, wind and drought. She said federal grant money could be available to help prevent or mitigate any of these disasters, not just floods.

Tree auction to be held after Parade of Lights

Heppner's fourth Annual Christmas tree (and basket) auction and raffle will be held Thursday, Nov. 30, after the Parade of Lights.

The Heppner Chamber of Commerce is again joining forces with Pioneer Memorial Hospice to sponsor this event. Everyone is invited to vote on his favorite decorated Christmas tree and maybe even making the winning bid to take it home.

To donate a tree, decorate an artificial tree (usually between 3-5 ft.), and bring it to Heppner City Hall between Nov. 24-30, from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. After-hours deliveries can be arranged with prior notice. Fill out a registration form and submit it before or with tree. The tree judged "People's Choice" will be awarded a special plaque.

Fifty percent of the value of a donated tree is tax-deductible. Receive your tax voucher when you register the tree.

To donate a basket, fill a gift basket with your choice of goodies, and bring it to City Hall between Nov. 24-30, from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. After-hours deliveries can be arranged with prior notice. Fill out a registration form and submit it before or with basket.

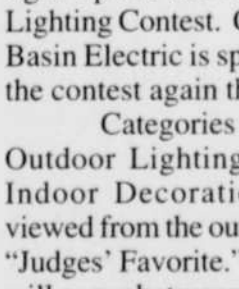
Fifty percent of the value of a donated basket is also tax-deductible. Receive your tax voucher when you register the basket.

Entry forms may be picked up at the Chamber office.

Activities on Saturday, December 2, will include a sleigh ride with horses and an antique wagon by Jack Meligan, a live nativity and carolers.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

MCGG GREEN FEED STORE in Heppner:



Christmas trees are in!
We also have Christmas tree stands, lights, and Christmas tree permits

Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed & Seed
242 W. Linden Way, Heppner • 676-9422 • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)