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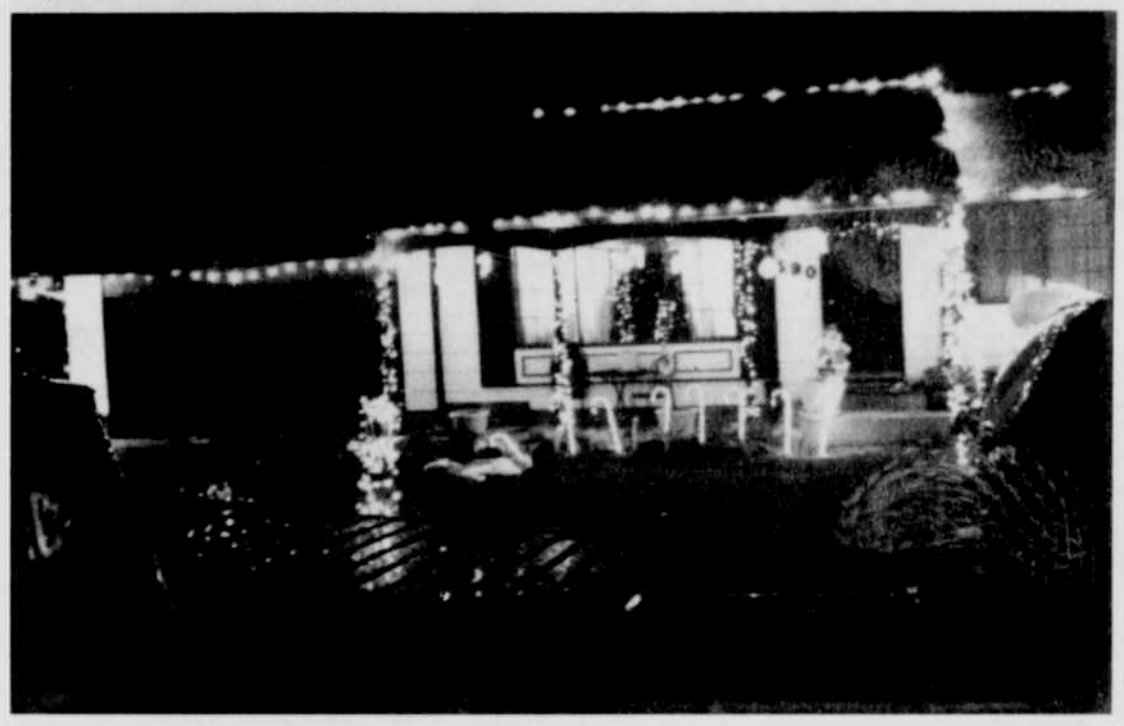
HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 125 NO. 52 8 Pages Wednesday, December 27, 2006 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Heppner lighting contest winners announced

Wight home



Smith home

Heppner TV took first place in the best use of lighting category in the 2006 Heppner merchants' decorations contest. The Victorian Rose was the best in indoor decorations and Murrays' Drug received honorable mention.

The Larry and Betty Mills' residence on Chase Street took first in outdoor lighting. The Greg and Sherry Smith home on Rock Street had the best indoor decorations (as seen from outside). The Gary and Jerene Wight home on Chase Street was the judge's all-around favorite.

Successful OHV Park looks to expand by 2,000 acres

The Morrow County Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park is considering purchasing an additional 2,000 acres to add to its 6,000 acres of land on Hwy. 207 east of Heppner.

Last Thursday the Morrow County Public Works Department held a meeting of the park steering committee go over the proposed purchase and review the improvements and progress made at the park since its opening over four years ago.

"Since we opened the Morrow County OHV Park in May of 2002 we have seen a lot of changes. We have gone from a facility that was new to everyone to a facility that is known not only statewide but throughout the Pacific Northwest," public works director Burk O'Brien told the steering committee.

Morrow County Judge Terry Tallman, who, along with O'Brien, Karen Wolff and others, worked hard to make the park a reality and build it up, said the facility has been a model of county and state cooperation and how to "do these things right".

The new land purchase is approximately 2,000 acres that adjoins the national forest and connects with the existing park on two sides. The land is in Grant County, but O'Brien said the Grant County commissioners have agreed to support the project and are encouraging Morrow County to move forward with the purchase. Under the proposed plan Morrow County will operate all phases of the park, but ownership of the property will be in Grant County's name.

The park currently has 150 miles of trails for OHV riding, and the 2,000-acre purchase will allow the park to expand the miles of trail available. "We would like to see more visitors and more dollars spent here in our region," O'Brien said of the economic benefit of the park to the area.

The purchase price for the property is $1.5 million, and the county is working on obtaining a 100-percent no-match state grant to purchase the property. An appraiser is currently working to determine the value of the property, which is offered for sale by one landowner.

Ian Caldwell from Oregon State Parks was in attendance at the meeting and praised Morrow County for its dedication to making the OHV park a reality over the past four years. Caldwell says the state wants a 20-percent match of commitment when making a land acquisition this large, and he said Morrow County has already shown commitment. O'Brien said the county, through grant writer April Miller, is working to get operational grants to pay for additional labor costs. He was hopeful to get the additional land deal done by spring 2007.

Local rancher Mark Rietmann, a member of the steering committee who also grazes cattle on the park property, said he has had a good relationship with the county over the lease. Rietmann owns property in the area and he has worked with the park to move cattle around if there is some big even happening at the park.

O'Brien gave the following account of improvement to both to the infrastructure and operation of the park:

"We began with 50 miles of trail, most of that old logging roads, to a total today of close to 150 miles of trail. We have gone from 12 very primitive camp sites to close to 45 usable camp sites. We have added water to close to 50 percent of those sites. We have added some power hook ups with more soon to come. We have a sewer system that should be operational this summer that will service any future development we may have. We host poker runs and dirt bike races, senior citizen tours, tours by forestry and rangeland people from Oregon State University, tours by the Oregon State Parks Commission as well as staff of Oregon State Parks. We support local youth activities including little league firewood drives, and the Morrow County Youth hunt program. We furnish a youth track for younger riders to learn while mom and dad supervise. We support club activities and events. We have crowds in the hundreds on large weekends like Memorial Day. We have developed springs and ponds and added fishing to our list of amenities. We have created one full time job and two part-time jobs at the park. We have added cabins helping create another business. We have a park host as well as a concessionaire that operated a small business on site throughout the season serving anything from hot dogs to chicken-fried steaks to the smoothest smoothie around. We have a new wash-down facility that will open this spring, a 30' X 60' storage facility for equipment. The shop is totally functional. And the maintenance yard is fenced. We have a full fleet of equipment for trail work. The property fences have been rebuilt and relocated. We have a grazing plan that has worked well for the past four years and we hope will continue to work. The sheriff has two part-time deputies that work the park and help to ensure safety throughout the trail system. They have been equipped with ATVs, pickups and other equipment as well. We have an EMT program that has treated numerous accidents in a timely manner. This program has also added support with the acquisition of equipment and supplies for medical treatment. Our user numbers have gone from 4000 to over 11,000 in four years. We have a weed program in place as well as a sprayer and seeder to do projects with. We have completed one major thinning project and are in the process of beginning another. We have built two training faculties for ATV and dirt bike training. We will be constructing a building to serve these sites this summer. We are in the process of constructing a building to house the EMT services as well as to use for meetings and office space. We have upgraded with the cooperation of Columbia Basin rural electric seven miles of primary electrical service to the park and the surrounding areas. We have a web site in place as well as satellite internet services at the park including wireless internet through out the campground itself. We have firefighting equipment on site that includes two 1000-gallon trucks one 400-gallon pull-behind pumper, one 80-gallon slide-in pumper and one 300-gallon slide-in pumper. These have been used to assist ODF on fires in the past as well as to attack one fire within the park boundaries caused by lightning," he told the steering committee.

One of new A frames at OHV park

Both O'Brien and Tallman pointed out the economic benefit of the park and the visitors it brings who will spend money in the area. David Sykes, vice president of the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group and also a steering committee member, praised the public works team who made the park possible, and on behalf of local businesses thanked them for their past efforts and the work they are currently doing for expansion.

O'Brien pointed out the current public works employees that have "stepped up to the plate" to work on the park including April Miller who has worked hard on the grant writing...Betty Gray has been part of the new group and has worked hard on our master plan," he said. Others are Sandi Putman who handles the budget, and Simon Winters, the park maintenance manager.

HHS Softball team to host alumni game

The 2007 Heppner High softball team will be hosting an alumni game on March 16, at noon. Anyone interested in playing who has not received a letter in the mail may contact Petra Payne at 541-676-9138 ext. 2518 or email her at paynep@morrow.k12.or.us.

Chamber cancelled this week

There will be no Chamber of Commerce meeting on Thursday, December 28.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE
for JANUARY 3, 2007 issue:
FRIDAY, DEC. 29 at 5:00 P.M.

Heppner and Lexington MCGG Stores

We Will Be CLOSED
Monday, January 1st
Have a Happy New Year!

Morrow County Grain Growers
676-9422 (MCGG Green Feed) • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)