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HEPPNER Gazette Times

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VOL. 127 NO. 15 12 Pages Wednesday, April 9, 2008 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

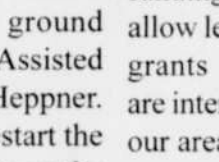
County Commissioner candidates visit economic development group

By David Sykes

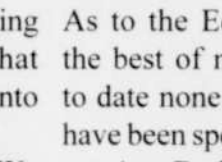
The Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) invited the two candidates for Morrow County Commissioner, John Wenholz and Leann Rea, to attend their monthly meeting April 2 for discussion about the candidates' thoughts on economic development in South Morrow County.

Following are questions asked by WCVEDG and the responses from the two candidates.

***WCVEDG**: Please tell us your thoughts/ position on economic development efforts in Morrow Co. Do you differentiate Community Development from Economic Development i.e. community infrastructure and services from job creation?*



Leann Rea



John Wenholz

REA: The Port of Morrow is and has taken the lead on Economic Development. Particularly in North Morrow Co., but that is not to say they have ignored South Morrow County. Examples of their efforts are 1) The installation of the water system for the Emert Addition in lone. 2) The installation of a large amount of the water system upgrade in Lexington. 3) The transfer of ownership and ground preparation for the Assisted Living Facility in Heppner. 4) The attempt to restart the Co-Generation Plant at the old Kinzua Mill Site, as well as the numerous attempts to site other businesses at the site. Currently, the site is being used by OSU Extension, OSP and DMV as well as at least four other entities.

Having said that, I could and would support an individual that was partly funded by the County and partly funded by the Willow Creek Valley communities, to work for the economic development of Heppner, lone, and Lexington. I believe that if such a person were to be hired, they would need to answer directly to the Chair/President of the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group and not to the County Court.

Part 2) Yes, I differentiate Community Development from Economic Development. Although, I believe Economic Development can not occur if adequate infrastructure is not in place. During the time, I worked in Irrigon the city was under a restraint from further construction until the new sewer system was in place and fully functional. During that time I had numerous individuals come into the office seeking to subdivide their property, only to learn that no additional homes could be sited until the infrastructure was in place. So while I see the difference, I feel they also go hand in hand.

WENHOLZ: Without development our communities cannot survive. We need family wage jobs. The Port of Morrow is the economic engine in the county and they are moving away from agriculture type jobs to other businesses that need higher skill sets. I have been working on van pooling and car pooling plans to help workers get from the South end of the county to the jobs in the North end.

WCVEDG: *What role should the County Commissioners play in economic development and/ or community development efforts?*

REA: I believe the County Commissioners should always be on the lookout for new businesses that are interested in coming to our communities. That would include while attending meetings with other Counties, they talk up the assets of our communities. I further believe that the County should be willing to step forward and offer funding (loans or grants) to allow leverage for obtaining grants for companies that are interested in coming into our area.

WENHOLZ: We need to find a little money to support an economic development person. There are four people in this room that our on the budget committee so we should be able to accomplish that.

WCVEDG: *There are a number of county revenue sources that are identified for economic development purposes, at least one (Video Lottery) that is restricted for economic development exclusively. Other dedicated county revenue sources are more broadly interpreted to be used for "community benefit", (Tippage fees). There is also a fund that is used as a revolving loan fund (Equity Fund). Are you aware how those dollars are currently being spent? What portion of the revenue do you feel should be expended each year? For what types of projects or activities?*

REA: While I haven't reviewed the budget decisions since last April, when we last met, I believe some of the Lottery Money is used to finance the County Fair, and some goes to the Planning Office and if I remember correctly, some of those funds went to OSU experiment station for crop science research. All of these funds should be expended each year.

Tippage fees were used for the (needs and issues) program, OSU Extension, the Neighborhood Center in Heppner, the Irrigon Boardman Emergency Center, the Wildlife control unit, the Soil and Conservation Department, the Watermaster, the fund that the County retains for special requests, and to back fill the budget. I am sure there are some other Departments that received these funds, but I can't recall them at this time. I think that all funds that are not needed to backfill the budget, and assure a reasonable ending fund balance should be made available for worthwhile projects county wide. I think that within the next two or three years there should be enough of the larger projects that are currently in the Enterprise Zones going on to the tax roll that the County will not require any of these funds to assure an ending fund balance. At that time, I feel the bulk of the money from tippage fees should be going to the communities. I further feel we need to tweak the way the funds are divided and allocated.

As to the Equity Fund, to the best of my knowledge, to date none of these funds have been spent on any project. As a Budget Committee Member, I can state that we (the citizen members) of the budget committee have strongly urged the County Court to get some of this money out to prospective businesses. While I do not believe fly by night projects should be funded, I do believe that financially sound projects should be able to access these funds without begging.

WENHOLZ: I believe the video lottery (the county receives money from the state from video lottery) needs to go to an economic development person. I have been helping with a van pooling program. Gas is expensive and people would be able to get to jobs in the north. We are not going to use county funds to keep it going, but only seed money to get it underway. As far as the equity fund $150,000 has been used from the fund. It is not a grant program. Morrow Development needed $50,000 to leverage one half million dollars. We loaned them that a no interest to get those funds. The Tippage fee had a $1 million carryover this year, but next year you will not see that. There could be a short term increase in the amount of garbage coming into Finley Buttes Landfill. It will not double, but there could be a lot more coming in.

WCVEDG: *Should the County Commission be more or less pro-active in local development activities? For example helping lone, Lexington, and Heppner capitalize on the wind farm construction projects or the potential internet*

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Heppner Sewer Treatment Plant project completed

By Autumn Morgan

"The project is complete," stated Heppner Mayor Les Paustian. The Heppner Sewer Treatment Plant project, which came to an official end on Monday, April 7, has been in the works since October 2007.

The old propane backup power generator was replaced with a new diesel generator. The new generator will allow the sewer treatment plant to operator for a lengthy period of time if the power is out.

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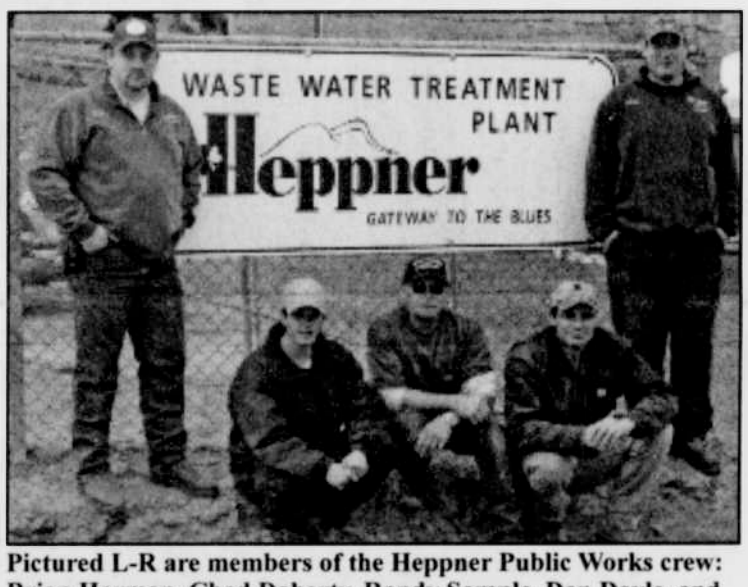

Pictured L-R are members of the Heppner Public Works crew: Brian Harmon, Chad Doherty, Randy Sample, Dan Doyle, and Robert Whalen. *-Photo by Autumn Morgan*

Health district to put levy before voters in November; awards low bid for long-term care remodel at hospital

By April Sykes

The Morrow County Health District Board, at their regular meeting in Heppner Monday night, voted to send a bond issue to the voters this November. Board members agreed that the bond was necessary to keep the district viable and to continue to provide up-to-date medical care for district patrons.

"We need the levy to maintain services," said board Chair Larry Mills. District CEO Victor Vander Does added that he was concerned that the district would have to look at possibly reducing staffing if the bond does not pass.

The board approved a 39 cent per thousand bond proposal over five years, which would cost a home owner with a $100,000 home $39 per year, for example.

The district has formulated a wish list of items to be funded by the proposed levy in fiscal years 2010-2014, but Vander Does and Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney stress that not everything on the list will be able to be funded, even if the levy passes.

Possible items to be funded over the length of the levy include: a $350,000 subsidy for the Boardman clinic, Columbia River Community Health Services, which a federally subsidized clinic not affiliated with MCHD; a one-and-a-half time paramedic and a full-time EMT with salary and benefits for Boardman, estimated at $761,966; a half-time paramedic and full-time EMT with salary and benefits for Irrigon at $416,192; a building expansion and a digital x-ray for the Irrigon Clinic, which is operated by the district, for $272,500; electronic medical records software and hardware for the district for $50,000; a CT scanner replacement for $100,000 for a used machine; and the

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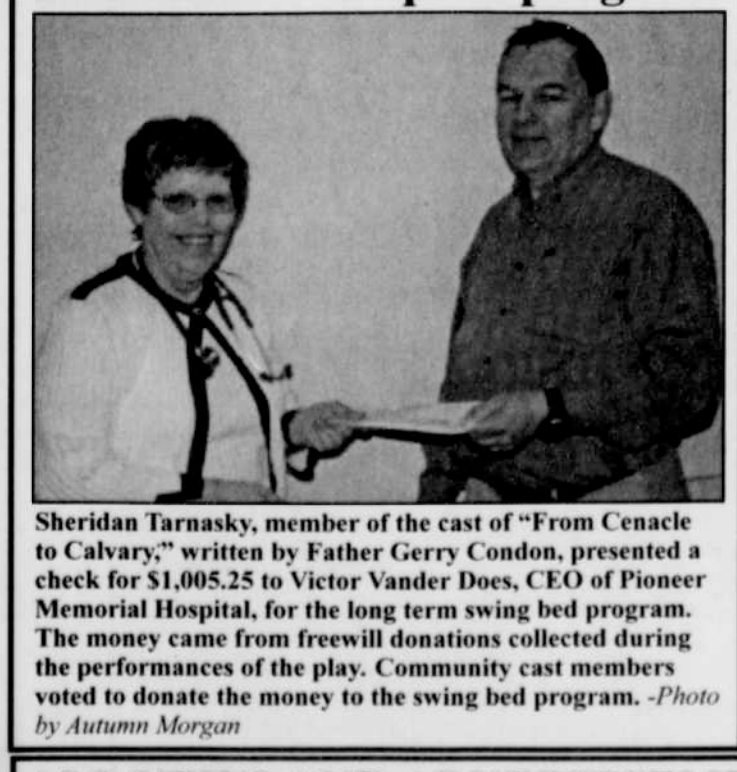
Cast members vote to give donations to hospital program



Sheridan Tarnasky, member of the cast of "From Cenacle to Calvary," written by Father Gerry Condon, presented a check for $1,005.25 to Victor Vander Does, CEO of Pioneer Memorial Hospital, for the long term swing bed program. The money came from freewill donations collected during the performances of the play. Community cast members voted to donate the money to the swing bed program. *-Photo by Autumn Morgan*

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MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

AT THE GREEN FEED & SEED IN HEPPNER:
Super Sandals & Muck Clogs Clearance Sale!
Buy one pair, get second pair 1/2 price
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