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HEPPNER 50¢ Gazette Times

VOL. 127 NO. 18 10 Pages Wednesday, April 30, 2008 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Commissioner candidates voice their opinions on Morrow County issues

Editor's Note: Voters will soon be receiving their ballots for the May election in the mail. There are two democratic candidates who have filed for the position of County Commissioner Position 1. The Heppner Gazette-Times asked the candidates, John Wenholz and Leann Rea, about their views for Morrow County. The questions and the candidate's answers are listed below.

HG-T: What are the most important issues facing Morrow County today?

John Wenholz

Wenholz: Some of the most important issues I see facing Morrow County today are: attracting family wage jobs to the County, on-going issues in regards to Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP), and creating car pooling/van pooling opportunities for South Morrow County residents.

Rea: I think we have several major issues: The need of family wage jobs; the lack of communication; affordable transportation to jobs; improvement of county road system.

HG-T: As a county commissioner what do you plan on doing about these issues?

Wenholz: If re-elected, I will continue, (along with the other members of the court), to work closely with the Port of Morrow to attract businesses that have family wage jobs. For CSEPP, I am chair of the Oregon CSEPP Governing Board and also on a National Integrated Process Team that is looking at how to deal with the issues of closeout of the CSEPP program once the chemical weapons are through being incinerated at the Depot. I have been instrumental in ensuring and will continue to ensure that the Army and FEMA provide the resources necessary to ensure the safety of the citizens of our communities. I have arranged for State Public Transit employees to meet with members of the Willow Creek Economic Development Committee to look at starting a car pool/van pool program.

Rea: I think that while we are and will continue to be an agriculture based county we also need to encourage the development of more family wage jobs that are not dependent on agriculture. This can be done by working closely with the Port of Morrow, Willow Creek Valley Economic Development group and ICABO. I would plan on attending their monthly meeting in an effort to stay appraised of their activities and any potential developments. I feel today there is a lack of communication between the various county departments as well as a lack of communication between the county court and the public at large. I would encourage regular meetings among all department heads. We can only improve our county if we all working towards the same goals. I would request that all commissioner meeting minutes be posted on the county web-site. If the minutes were made available, I would hope that the local newspapers would then publish a brief recap. We need to continue working to resolve transportation issues, especially with the rising fuel prices. I commend the road department for the job they have done with limited resources. Now with the increase in funds with the recommended transfer from Tippage fees, I am sure more improvement to our roads will be forthcoming.

Leann Rea

HG-T: What is your opinion on the current distribution of Tippage money?

Wenholz: I am a strong supporter of the Needs and Issues process to disperse Tippage fees. In 2007 we increased Tippage fees to be dispersed by Needs and Issues from $135,000.00 to $235,000.00. In 2008 we have appropriated $500,000.00 to be dispersed through the Needs and Issues process. The remaining Tippage fees are being spent on programs to benefit the county as a whole.

Rea: As the income from this fund continues to grow, I think we need to address more of our citizens concerns and the county does not need to retain as large a reserve as has been held in the past.

HG-T: Do you plan on changing anything about the distribution? Please explain.

Wenholz: As the process of dispersing the Tippage Fees evolves over time I am interested in forming a committee to look at the types of projects/programs that are eligible to receive funds through the Needs and Issues process.

Rea: Yes, I want to see some changes. As a member of the budget committee, we suggested to the current county court that they develop a new criteria for the disbursement of funds through the Needs and Issues process. We also suggested a sizable increase in the amount of money that is placed into the Needs and Issues process. I would also like to see a plan developed so that if a community or an entity requesting funds for a large project, a designated reserve fund could be developed and held until adequate funds have accumulated to complete the project.

HG-T: What is your opinion on the OHV Park and the county's involvement in the park?

Wenholz: The OHV Park is only one the three county parks and I am a strong supporter of the County Park System. The OHV Park has been predominately funded through state funds. All of our parks have helped increase tourism in the county.

Rea: I think this is a perfect example of lack of communication. The park was purchased and operates on grants and donated labor and funds. Yes, there are times when county employees are working there. At these times their wages and benefits are being reimbursed by grants. There are also times when the employees are donating their time. This facility which brings lots of people into our county for recreational purposes is not costing our taxpayers anything. I am sure the grocery store in Heppner as well as the service stations will tell you they have seen an increase in their businesses because of this activity. There was a time when deer and elk hunting drew large crowds into our local mountains, however, that is not the case anymore. I would like to see more recreational sites and activities developed in our county.

HG-T: What is your opinion/prediction on the financial situation at the county? Do you expect surpluses, shortages or the status quo in the years ahead?

Wenholz: At this time our staff predicts a shortfall for this next fiscal year and after that become more stable as projects in the Enterprise Zone start coming on the tax rolls.

Rea: I believe that through continued hard work to bring new and varied industries into our county, some of the larger companies coming out of the enterprise status and onto the tax roll, and the continued excellent work from the various departments in the county to keep a close check on their spending, that the

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Health district approves nearly $9 million for 2008-09 proposed budget

By April Sykes

The Morrow County Health District Board approved a proposed budget of nearly $9 million for the 2008-09 year at their regular meeting in Monday night in Lexington. The district anticipates $8,312,446 in resources, not including property taxes. Anticipated property taxes in the amount of $634,542 would bring total resources up to $8,946,988.

Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney told the board that she had based the anticipated tax revenues on information received from Morrow County Assessor Greg Sweek, however, board Chair Larry Mills said that the anticipated tax revenues may be revised upwards, according to the latest information he had received. The budget will be revised prior to adoption if necessary.

Mahoney's tax information was based on an estimated county assessed value of $1,115,776,180 billed at a rate of .0006050 per thousand. The gross collectible amount of $675,045 is expected to be reduced by $40,503 because of tax compression, discounts and collectibles, resulting in $634,542 in estimated collectible taxes.

Total expenditures for 2008-09 are anticipated at $9,097,331 which leaves the district in the red by $150,343.

The district anticipates nearly $5.1 million in revenue from Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner with around $4.5 million in expenditures. They anticipate $1.1 million in revenue from the Heppner clinic, with $867,754 in expenditures; $586,326 in Home Health and Hospice revenue with $595,666 in expenditures; $332,320 in revenue from the Irrigon Clinic with $293,358 in expenditures; $220,735 in revenue from the Boardman Ambulance with $244,602 in expenditures; $127,066 in revenue from the Irrigon Ambulance with $140,972 in expenditures.

The Boardman clinic, Columbia River Community Health Services, which is separate from the district and the recipient of federal funds, does not contribute any revenue to the district. Instead, the district has in previous years made a contribution to that clinic.

The district also expects nearly $1 million in revenue deductions and bad debts and around $1.2 million in capital purchases for 08-09

In 2007-08 the district adopted a $6,490,427 budget with $6,516,384 in expenditures for a $25,957 loss for the year. That year the district received $914,000 in tax monies, up considerably from next year's tax revenue expectations. In 2006-07, the district adopted a $6,651,245 budget with $941,456 received in taxes and $6,388,226 in total expenditures for a $263,019 gain for the year. In 2005-06, the district adopted a $6,265,797 budget with $913,987 received in taxes and $5,801,966 in expenditures for a $463,831 gain. In 2004-05, however,

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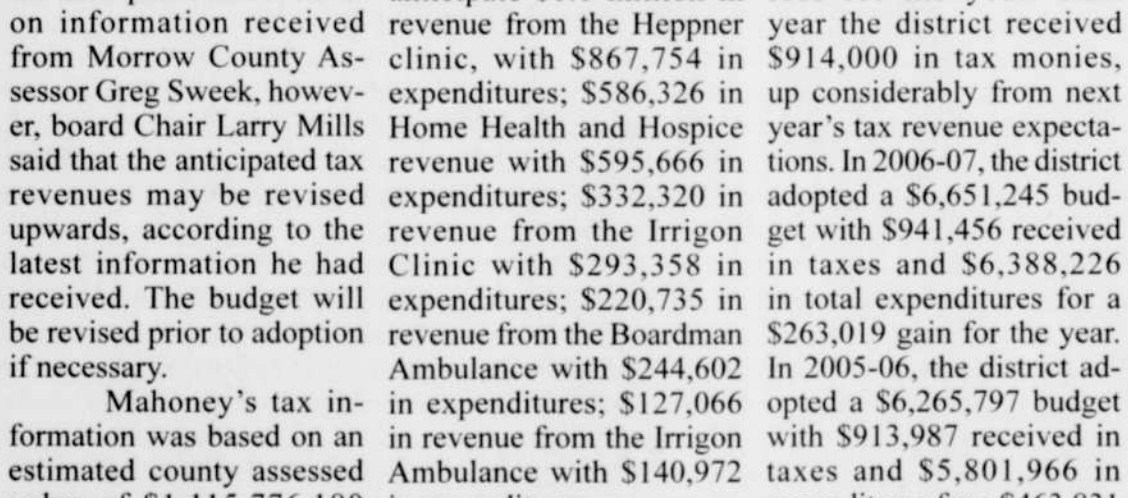
A beautiful day for Little League

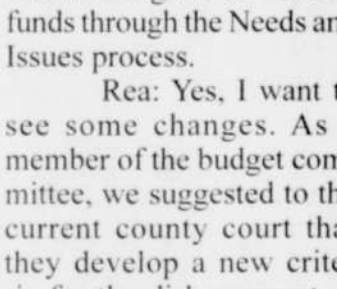


Saturday, April 26, was the opening day of the Little League season. Teams gathered in Heppner for a beautiful day of games. The opening pitch was thrown out by Bob Kilkenny on behalf of his son, Pat Kilkenny. Pat Kilkenny donated funds to the Heppner Little League program. Little League used the funds to purchase a new mower, new uniforms, and other much needed items.
–Photo by David Sykes

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

Ione principal/superintendent recommended for Hermiston job

Bryn Browning, Ione Community School principal/superintendent, was recently recommended by Hermiston School Superintendent Fred Maiocco for the job of assistant superintendent for educational services. Browning has been the principal/superintendent of Ione Community School for the past four years.

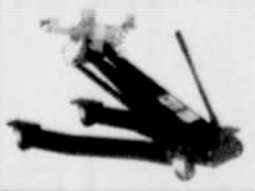


Bryn Browning

The position of Hermiston School District assistant superintendent for educational services is currently held by Dr. Mark Mulvihill who will be leaving to take the job of superintendent of the Umatilla-Morrow Education Service District on July 1. The search for a replacement for Mulvihill's position has taken place over the past three months.

The Hermiston School Board will consider the Maiocco's recommendation of Browning at its meeting on May 6.

1200 lb. Low-Profile Hydraulic Transmission Jack



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