

# Public meeting held on proposed mental facility for Heppner

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University of Oregon  
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By David Sykes

A town meeting to learn more about the proposed mental facility wishing to locate in Heppner drew about 95 people last Wednesday evening at the St. Patrick's Senior Center.

Representatives from the company that would build the facility, and the local mental health

agency that would administer it, were in attendance to both explain the facility and answer questions from the public.

One of the most frequent questions asked was where the eight-bed residential treatment facility used to house and treat mentally ill persons convicted of crimes and found "guilty except for insanity" would be located.

Rod Estes, a regional residential development specialist from Lifeways Company, which would build the facility, said that no site has been selected yet, and that he has "only begun the site selection process." In fact, he said that no decision has been made to locate in Heppner. "We do not know if it is going to be located here or not," Estes said.

The Heppner City Council, which discussed the facility at its last monthly meeting July 14, and also had some members tour the facility a week later, has given its tentative approval, but only if people were willing to accept it.

Although there were questions and skepticism at last Wednesday's town meeting, there did not seem to be overwhelming opposition as there was years ago when a youth boot camp-type facility was proposed for Heppner.

City manager Steve Bogart mediated the meeting and limited discussion to questions and answers with limited "statements" from the public. The city council is planning on continuing the discussion about the facility at its next meeting on Monday, August 11, at 7 p.m. at city hall. City council meetings are always open to the public.

Estes said the facility would be different from the one recently proposed for Fossil, which caused a great deal of community upheaval and animosity and was eventually abandoned, in that the proposed Heppner facility would not house sexual offenders. It "could" house any type of criminal but the type allowed here would be determined by the administrator of the facility, which would be the Community Counseling Solutions (CCS), formerly Morrow/Wheeler Behavioral Health.

The facility would give an economic boost to the area, Estes explained, providing 20 to 24 full time positions paying \$30,000 to \$65,000 in wages for annual salaries of \$720,000. The annual operating budget would be around \$960,000, and construction costs of the facility would be \$1.2 million, he said.

In addition most supplies for the facility would be purchased locally, including food, medications, and transportation and general supplies. It would also strengthen the local mental health services, increase local school populations with more students of workers, and generally strengthen the local economy, he has said.

Kimberly Lindsay of Lexington is the head of CCS and would be the administrator of the facility. She said the mental facility would not accept "predatory sexual offenders. Can I change that?" she said. "No, our commitment to you is that it will not happen." Lindsay said some



Staff of McNary place show members of the Heppner City Council and other community members the central control room during a recent tour of the mental facility. -Photo by David Sykes

residents of the facility will be allowed out for trips around town, but always under escort. In response to questions, she said the average stay is five years and, although many of the residents would move from this secure facility to a less secure facility before being released, they normally go back to the communities they came from and would not stay here.

In response to questions about the safety of the facility Lindsay said, "I live in this community. What you think about me matters," Lindsay told the crowd. "I do business here, my kids go to school and we go to church here." She said she would feel safe if the facility were located here.

Other questions from the public were:

**Q. Could the population of the facility be limited to those who committed non-violent crimes?**

**A.** There would be no mass murderers, but there will be some which have committed violent acts. Both Lindsay and Estes have said that the residents are controlled by medications, and that they want to stay in the facility, which limits the amount of problems.

**Q. How long has Oregon had these type of facilities?**

**A.** 20 to 30 years said Estes

**Q. For economic activity, why can't we get beds for elders instead, like geriatric patients?**

**A.** We are already providing facilities such as assisted living and a recent upgrade of the hospital for long term care.

**Q. Do friends and family come with the resi-**

**dents and stay in the community?**

**A.** No one at Columbia River Ranch in Boardman (a similar facility) has moved there, said Lindsay. Families do not relocate for this kind of patient. They visit but they do not move there, she said.

**Q. Why did Fossil and Boardman turn down this facility?**

**A.** It was a painful and horrible process, said Lindsay. The state has since said that sexually deviant individuals remain in state facility. The Boardman and Fossil facilities would have accepted these people.

**Q. What about the recent escape at the similar facility in Umatilla, McNary Place?**

**A.** The resident that escaped was not permanently there, Estes said. He came from LaGrande and was there voluntarily. He was not a dangerous criminal on the attack.

**Q. What happens to people who misbehave?**

**A.** They go right back to the state facility. People want to be in the residential facility and behave themselves to stay there.

**Q. Will property values decrease if the facility is built here?**

**A.** Estes said studies have shown that property values actually increase in the communities where these are built.

**Q. Could the people who go outside into the community be fitted with an ankle bracelet?**

**A.** No.

**Q. Is the 8-foot fence adequate to keep them in?**

**A.** Because of the

-Continued on Page Four

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## A princess who loves to meet new people

By Autumn Morgan

Cheyenne Ward loves meeting new people. That is why she decided to apply to be a Morrow County Fair and Rodeo princess.

Cheyenne was born in Grant and was raised in the Pilot Rock/Ukiah area. She is the daughter of Nancy Porter and Curtis Ward, both of Pilot Rock.

Since being named a princess, Cheyenne has had the opportunity to travel and enjoys interacting with and meeting new people.

Cheyenne is a self-proclaimed "ranch kid" who likes to ride. "It has been a change to work with the hair and makeup portion of the job," says Ward. "I have to clean up to be in parades but I have a great time."

Since the court was announced, Cheyenne has participated in 15-20 events. "I love the rush of the run-ins," she said. Ward is also looking forward to getting to walk around at the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo and interact with the kids and see the 4-H projects. She has enjoyed promoting the fair and rodeo.

Cheyenne's favorite outfit to wear during events is the official riding outfit of the court that consists of ultra-suede gaucho pants. "This outfit is different than what other courts wear," she said. "We get a lot of compliments."

During the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo



Princess Cheyenne Ward with her horse Dollar.

Cheyenne will be riding her sorrel gelding named Dollar. 16-year old quarter horse

## Heppner baby dies from accidental drowning

A one-year-old baby died from a possible drowning at his home in Heppner July 29.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call from the residence of Steven and Sarah Monahan Rollis reporting the possible drowning of their son,

Timothy Hunter Monahan-Rollis at 7:40 p.m. The baby was transported by Heppner Ambulance to Pioneer Memorial Hospital where resuscitation efforts were unsuccessful. The baby was declared dead at 8:22 p.m.

An autopsy performed by the Oregon State

Medical Examiners Office at Clackamas on July 30 determined that the cause of death was accidental drowning.

The results of the death investigation were presented to the Morrow County District Attorney's office for review.

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

## Special fair & rodeo section in this week's paper

A special fair & rodeo section is included in this week's Gazette-Times. It includes articles and other information about the fair which opens at the Morrow County Fairgrounds in Heppner next week.

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