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HEPPNER Gazette Times

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DeMayo returns from year-long deployment to Iraq

Public open house to be held

By Autumn Morgan

Heppner City Manager Dave DeMayo returned to Heppner on November 26 following a year-long tour of duty in Iraq.

While in Iraq DeMayo served as a liaison between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Provincial Reconstruction Team of the Maysan Province. The Provincial Reconstruction Team is run by the Department of State. Projects that were worked on were infrastructure projects including water purifiers and small schools.

DeMayo says that troop morale in the Maysan Province is very high and that soldiers are treated very well by the Iraqis. "They have a good working relationship," stated DeMayo. "The Iraqi people are no different than we are. They have families and love their kids."

DeMayo says he wants people that are upset because they think that the U.S. is Iraq solely for oil to understand that "our way of life cannot exist without a fuel supply. We depend on automobiles for transportation."

Pictured is Dave DeMayo with a local Iraqi sheikh. *–Contributed Photo*

The typical tour length for troops serving in the Army is one year. DeMayo says that he will probably not be going again as he will soon be turning 62.

The City of Heppner will be hosting a public welcome back celebration for DeMayo on Thursday, December 11, from 3-5 p.m. at City Hall.

Undercover narcotics team spends time in Heppner

The Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team (BENT) spent time in Heppner last month making drug buys, meeting with informants and doing surveillance on drug buys, it was announced at Monday's city council meeting.

The exact number of buys or arrests made was not disclosed, but the Morrow County Sheriff's Department says BENT spent eight and one half hours in Heppner in November. "Last week one suspect was arrested. We are getting results," Deputy Randy Rayburn told the council.

State economy prompts school district to cut at least $180,000 from current budget

By April Sykes

Morrow County School District Superintendent Mark Burrows outlined a plan Monday evening at the district's regular meeting at Irrigon Elementary School to trim at least $180,000 from the current 2008-09 fiscal year budget. Burrows said the district must cut the funds based on the latest numbers released by Governor Ted Kulongoski. "If we can get to $180,000 in savings, I anticipate we'll end the year okay," said Burrows. He added that the district has budgeted "very conservatively."

He also said that state school funding figures look better for the 2009-10 fiscal year, with $6.55 billion in the governor's budget for education funding. "The only question is, "will the economy support the governor's budget?"" queried Burrows. He said that a budget of $6.2 billion would sustain services, "although we'd like to have more." He added that district administrators have been looking at "what ifs" considering the district's budget in light of the current economy

To make up for the shortfall in the current budget, Burrows asked the teachers union to cut one half day of a non-student day at the end of the 08-09 contract year. Morrow County Education Association representative Marilyn Post responded, saying, "Before anything can be bargained, I have to have more information. How many staff would be giving up a day, giving up salaries? Who else is taking a pay cut besides us? I just need to know if we've taken the gravy out of the budget." She added, "I hate to say this, but is everyone taking a pay cut?"

Burrows responded by saying the points she made were all "well taken."

He told the board that cut of one half day in the teachers' contract would save the district around $23,000 if the teachers' union approves.

Burrows also recommended cutting:

-$57,000 from the staffing budget for four vacant classified positions. These positions, an aide at Sam Boardman Elementary, an aide at Riverside High School and two aides in Irrigon, have not been filled.

-$100,000 from the fuel budget. Burrows said that because of the high fuel prices, the district had "budgeted aggressively" for fuel costs, however, if the fuel prices remain low, the additional budgeted amount will not be required. He stressed that the recommended fuel budget cuts were hinged on the current low fuel prices.

-$15,000 from the maintenance budget.

-$5,000 from the administrator's travel costs to attend the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators annual meeting.

-$5,000 in business software for the school district office.

-$10,000 from the field trip budget. Burrows said that after the cuts, funding for some field trips will still remain.

In other business, the board:

-heard from the Education Service District representative, who commended that ESD will be facing the same budget cutting issues as the school district.

-commended Heppner High School Principal Daye Stone for the Veteran's Day remembrance ceremony at the school.

-recognized students who won the Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District poster contest. Board member Nancy Vander Does said that a child from each community in the school district won first in the state competition.

-approved appointment of Greg Baron and Susie Frederickson to the budget committee.

-adopted the following budget calendar: March 6-budgets due from buildings and departments; April 8-publication of notice of budget meeting; April 15-second notice of budget meeting; April 20- distribute budget document to committee; May 4-first budget meeting/budget message; May 11-regular board meeting, second budget meeting if needed (additional meeting dates to be set by committee if needed); May 18-deadline for budget approval; May 27-publication of notice of budget hearing; June 8-budget hearing/adopt budget and make appropriations; June 8-regular board meeting; July 1-beginning of 2009-10 fiscal year; July 15-deadline to certify levy to assessor.

-rescinded board member conflicts of interest policy and adopted board member ethics and conflicts of interest policy and board member ethics and nepotism policy.

-heard the first reading of head lice policies.

-rescinded policies on staff ethics and gifts and solicitations and heard the first readings of new policies on ethics and gifts and solicitations.

-heard a presentation from Irrigon High School FFA members for six to 12 students to attend the National FFA convention in the fall of 2009. The board approved their request. Students plan to raise monies themselves to be able to attend the convention.

-held an executive session prior to the meeting to discuss the superintendent's evaluation.

-approved a resolution for adoption of a 403(b) plan. (The federal government passed new rules concerning investment vehicles.)

-approved an atten-

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Area pastors invited to submit Christmas messages

All area pastors are invited to submit Christmas messages to be run in the December 24 edition of the Heppner Gazette-Times. Messages can be dropped off at the GT office, faxed to 676-9211, or emailed to editor@rapidserve.net no later that Friday, December 19.

New two-county communications taxing district proposed

By David Sykes

A communications system that links police, fire and ambulance departments together throughout most of Morrow and Umatilla Counties, could be dismantled in a few years if a new taxing district is not approved to continue funding the system, the Heppner City Council was told Monday night.

The communications system, which allows many different emergency agencies to talk directly with each other, was installed when the Umatilla Army Depot began destroying chemical weapons several years ago. The chemical destruction facility was completed in 2001, and the Army began weapons disposal in 2004. As part of the disposal a new communications system was installed by the Federal Government. The new 450 MHz radio system allowed all local emergency agencies in Morrow and Umatilla counties to talk to one another, so that in the event of an accident at the Depot, emergency services could be coordinated.

Chemical disposal is scheduled to end in several years, at which time the federal government will discontinue funding the advanced system, which leaves emergency services with several options, says Chief Mike Roxbury of Umatilla, chairman of the 450 MHz system board. Roxbury said one option would be to do nothing and revert back to the old VHF systems, which were a patch work of different communications that did not function very well. "You are going to pay for a new system one way or another," he told the council. "The federal government has been paying for it so far, but we are not going to get any more money from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). When that last munitions is destroyed that is the end of FEMA's involvement," Roxbury said.

Another option would be to have each entity that uses the system pay for its usage. He said this would have the possibility of overwhelming the small users, and he gave an example of the Morrow County Sheriff Dept. having to spend $80,000 per year. "This option is what caused smaller agencies to declare that they would go back to VHF rather than pay fees that they could not afford," Roxbury said in his report.

The best option he said is to form a new district to cover the cost of

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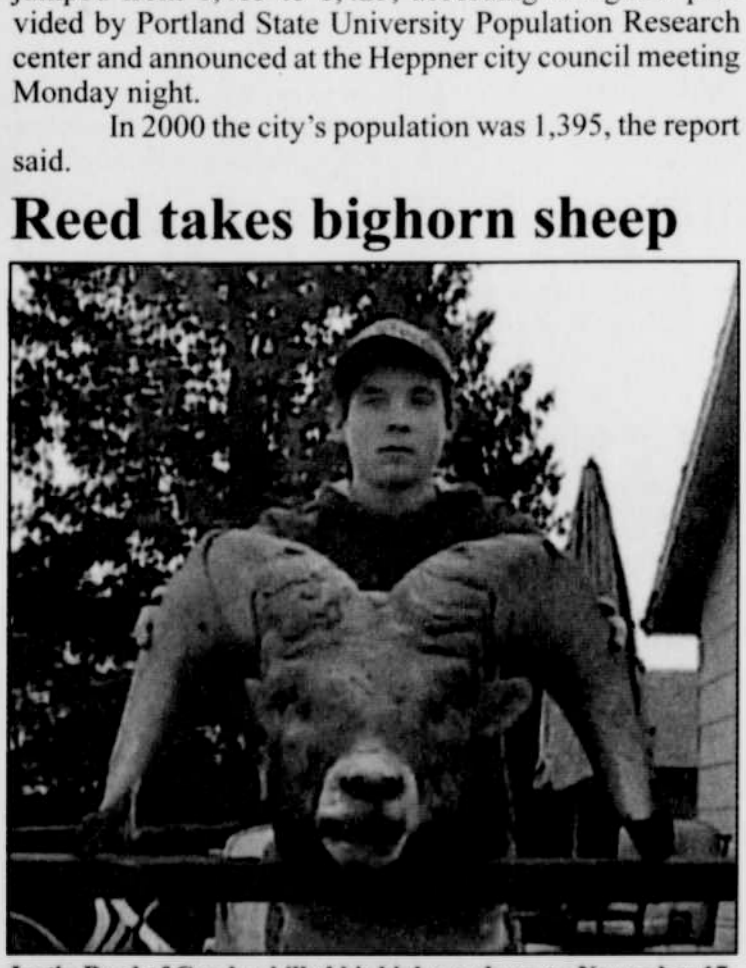
Heppner population up (by 10)

Heppner's population is up by 10 people over the past year, preliminary census figures recently released show. From July 2007 to July of 2008 the population jumped from 1,415 to 1,425, according to figures provided by Portland State University Population Research center and announced at the Heppner city council meeting Monday night.

In 2000 the city's population was 1,395, the report said.

Reed takes bighorn sheep



Justin Reed of Condon killed his bighorn sheep on November 17. The sheep measured 162 inches. Justin is the nephew of Roscoe and Kayrene Qualls of Heppner. *–Contributed Photo*

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

ENTER FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN A NAPA CUSTOM BMX BIKE!

Entries due by Dec 15 20008

Morrow County Grain Growers
Lexington 989-8221 • 1-800-452-7396 For farm equipment, visit our web site at www.mcgg.net