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HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

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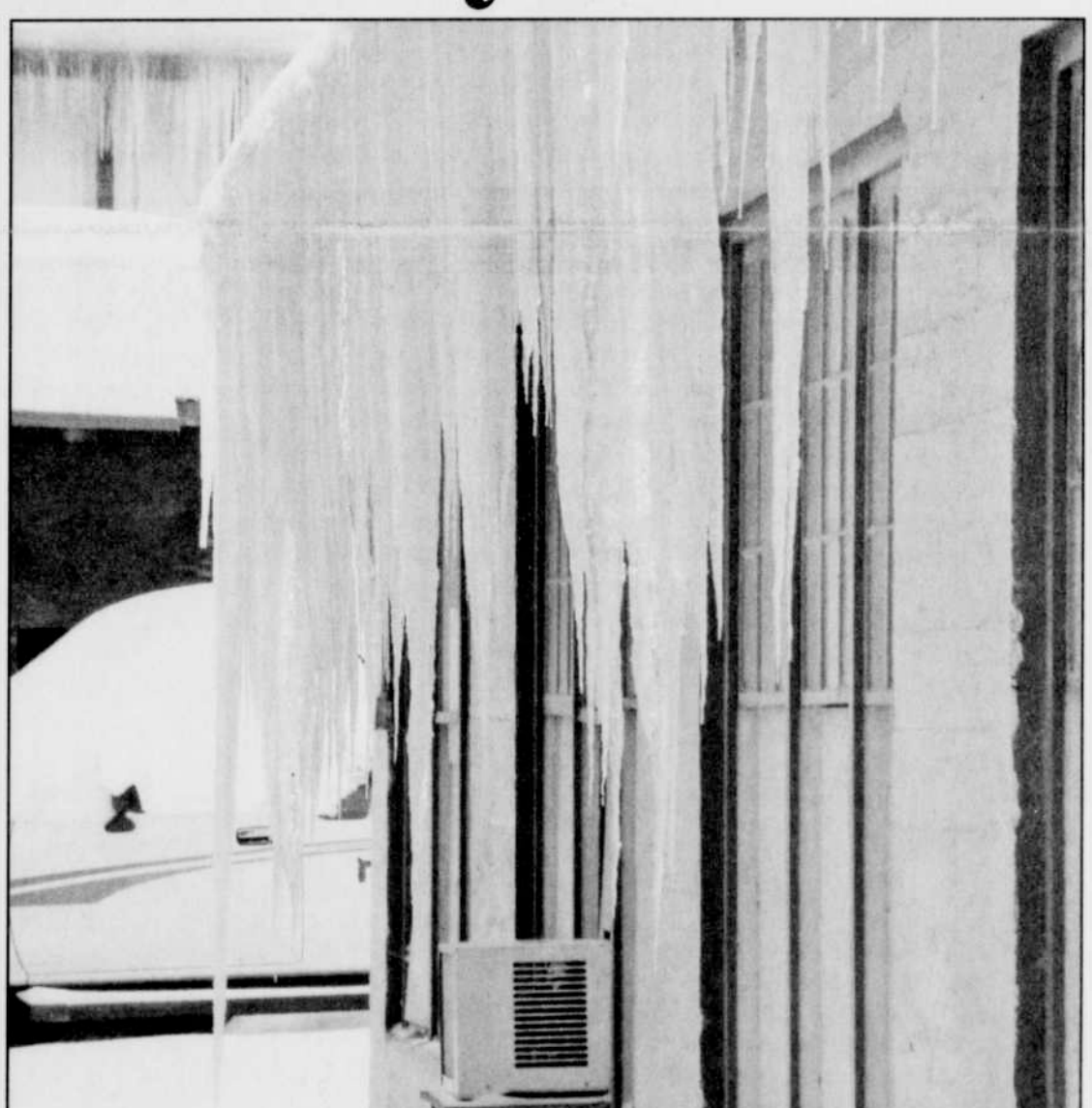
Goodbye snow



Icicles like these have disappeared from Heppner as the city has thawed over the last week. This month Heppner saw one of its largest snow falls in recent years. Please see Page Three for a look back at 2007. *–Photo by David Sykes.*

Morrow County Health District to go tobacco-free

Morrow County Health District recently announced the adoption of policy prohibiting the use of tobacco products on all of its properties, including Pioneer Memorial Hospital, Pioneer Memorial Clinic, home health and hospice services in Heppner as well as Irrigon Medical Clinic and emergency medical services throughout the county.

The policy will become effective January 5, 2009, and will apply to the entire campus of each of these facilities including the buildings, parking lots and grounds.

The tobacco-free policy aligns with the District's mission to provide care for the community. By going tobacco-free, Morrow County Health District leadership hopes to not only create a healthier environment for staff and patients, but to also serve as a model for area businesses considering similar policies. In conjunction with the tobacco policy, the Morrow County Health District is providing tobacco cessation workshops and will pay cessation therapy costs for any of its 78 employees for up to six

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Lexington mayor hospitalized after stroke

According to Dee Burch at Lexington City Hall, Lexington Mayor Val Doherty is currently in Kadlec Medical Center in Richland, WA after suffering a "major" stroke last week.

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

Swanson retires from Wheatland Insurance in Ione

By Autumn Morgan

After 29 years working in the insurance business in Ione Jim Swanson has retired.

Originally from Ione, Swanson graduated in 1969 from Ione School. He later graduated from Oregon State University in 1974. He and his wife Monica were married in 1974 and then took over the family farm in Ione. They quickly realized that the few acres that they were farming would not support the family any more. No extra land was available to expand because many other farming families were having the same problems and expanding their farms.

It was at this time, in 1979, that Jim and Monica were approached by Charlie O'Conner of O'Conner Insurance with a proposal of working in insurance. The insurance company happened to have been purchased by O'Conner from Swanson's father in the mid 40's. After many years in the business, O'Conner had decided he wanted out and came to the Swansons to see if they were interested in taking over the company.

The Swansons originally thought their new business, which they named Swanson Insurance after it was purchased in 1980, would be a tiny business that they had on the side. They couple ran both the farm and the insurance company for approximately five years before leasing the farm out so they could run the insurance agency.

Swanson quickly realized that it would be difficult to keep a small insurance business in a small town afloat with all of the competition from the large insurance corporations. In 1983, Swanson and three other insurance agencies in Pendleton joined together to form Wheatland. "When I started Swanson Insurance, I saw that not only insurance, but the gas stations and grocery stores were hard to keep as mom and pop operations," said Swanson. "If I had not joined Wheatland I would have to sell. I would not have been able to keep the (insurance) business.

Pictured is Jim Swanson in his Wheatland Insureance office in Ione. *-Photo by David Sykes*

Swanson's first insurance office was located in Collier's Market where the pop machine is now. Swanson and Loyal Burns built the current Wheatland building in 2002.

Throughout the years, Swanson has brought in approximately 20 students to work in the office through the work study program. "Tremendous kids have worked (here) part-time," said Swanson. "Some have gone on and began careers in the insurance business."

A constant in the Swanson's office has been the cereal drawer he has always kept available for children. Swanson said that when someone came into the office with a child, the child would immediately run to the cereal drawer for a snack. "Now those kids are bringing in their kids and they now know about the cereal drawer."

Over the years Swanson has been able to insure multiple generations in different families. Most all of the families with Swanson have been insured through two generations. One family has even been insured four generations.

Because he was a farmer himself, Swanson said "I can't begin to explain the value of the customers, especially the farmers. They have had lousy years but we have been able to pay them on the loss." Though Swanson gave up full ownership to become a partial owner of the Wheatland Corporation, he gives credit to Wheatland because through them he was able to keep the insurance agency in town.

Though he is retiring from the business, Swanson stresses that nothing will change. "I have had tremendous people work here over the years," said Swanson. Stacie Miller and Karen Padberg will be running the office and it will be "business as usual." There will be no new "owner" coming in. Swanson has simply sold his stock back to Wheatland. He and Burns still own the building that houses Wheatland.

Because of his back-

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Health district to begin seeking new CEO

By April Sykes

The Morrow County Health District Board, at their regular meeting in Irrigon Monday night, began work to find a replacement for current CEO Victor Vander Does.

Vander Does, who came on board with the district in September of 1999, is credited for bringing the district out of a dire situation into a viable, progressive health care system. When he came on board in 1999, the district's financial outlook was bleak and the district was near closure.

Vander Does said that he will remain with the district until after the Fourth of July to ensure a smooth transition to a new CEO. The district plans to undertake the CEO search internally, rather than hiring a recruiter, and has outlined a six-member screening committee consisting of one board member, one provider (physician/physician's assistant/nurse practitioner), the director of nursing, Home Health and Hospice, one member of the administrative team, the human resources director and a citizen at large. Vander Does and the board set a February 15 closing day for applications with the final selection to be made by the end of April, so that Vander Does can have sufficient time with the new administrator.

The district now includes a 21-bed hospital, which includes a new long-term care facility, a 16-unit assisted living center and two primary care clinics-one in Heppner and one in Irrigon. MCHD also provides Home Health and Hospice care throughout the county and operates ambulance service in each community in the county, Boardman, Irrigon, Heppner, Ione and Lexington. The district also contributes financially to Columbia River Health Care, a federally funded clinic in Boardman,

Also at the meeting the board gave their support to a radio taxing district which will enable county entities, such as hospital and ambulance, fire, sheriff and police departments to communicate via radio. Currently these entities cannot coordinate their radio systems. The district will encompass Morrow and Umatilla counties. The issue of establishing such a district is to come before the voters as will a tax rate to support the district.

In other business, the district:

-approved an x-ray maintenance contract.

-heard concerns from Vander Does about "life safety" issues resulting from roads becoming impassable because of bad weather.

-learned that the district lost $165,048 in November with a year-to-date loss of $120,930 for the year, resulting in an average monthly year-to-date loss of $24,186. Gross patient revenue was $440,201 for the month with $104,032 in total revenue deductions for bad debt and contractual adjustments (Medicare and Medicaid deductions) and $52,878 in tax revenue. Total operating revenue was $391,547. Last month the district showed $588,569 in gross patient revenue and only $37,681 in bad debt and contractual adjustments.

-received the following report: the Irrigon Clinic had 190 patient visits with 35 new patients, 94 seen by a nurse and 13 no-shows; Pioneer Memorial Clinic had 422 patient visits with 27 new patients, 97 seen by a nurse and eight no-shows; Pioneer Memorial Hospital had six admissions, two swing bed admissions, seven admitted for observation, 452 outpatients with 61 emergency room encounters, 1398 lab tests, 74 x-ray procedures, 21 CT scans, 13 EKG tests, one treadmill procedure, three colonoscopy procedures, four endoscopy procedures, 18 respiratory therapy procedures; Boardman Ambulance had 19 page-outs with 13 transports for $14,225 in revenue; Irrigon Ambulance had 13 page-outs with 11 transports for $10,064 in revenue; Heppner Ambulance had 12 page-outs with 12 transports for $13,631 in revenue; Home Health had 134 patient visits; Hospice had two admissions; and Pharmacy had 1305 drug doses for $46,956 in drug revenue.

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