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Gazette Times

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# Mental facility changes location

*Property acquired across from Lakeview Heights*

**By David Sykes**

A proposed 6,200 square foot, eight-bed secure residential mental facility for Heppner has changed locations from a site above Rock Street on the east side of town, to a 15 acre parcel across the highway from Lakeview Heights on the Willow Creek Highway.

The parcel is owned by Larry Angell of Tygh Valley who has apparently reached an agreement with the developers of the site on sale conditions.

**The mental facility planned for Heppner will now be located across from Lakeview Heights.**

The change of location for the facility was necessitated by a disagreement with the previous site's landowner and the city of Heppner over who would pay for a portion of water line to the proposed new development.

The new location is located outside the city limits and according to Rod Estes, a regional residential development specialist with Lifeways, a nonprofit corporation that will develop the mental facility, is a good location, especially since the facility is considering adding "horse therapy" or horse riding for the residents, to the facility.

Talks between Kyle Robinson, owner of the first property, and the city of Heppner broke down when the two could not agree on who would pay $30,000 to have water lines extended to the edge of Robinson's property.

In a meeting last week between Robinson, Mayor Les Paustian, Estes and others, to try and hammer out the differences, Paustian said city ordinance would not allow the city to pay the cost of extending utilities to a new development. Robinson said former interim city manager Steve Bogart had told him the city would help with those costs. Robinson said absorbing the extra $30,000 in estimated costs would cause him to lose money on the project and that he already had $10,000 in engineering and other fees wrapped up in the project. Robinson also said the city was unable to tell him exactly where the city water mains were located, and ended up giving him three different locations where he would be connecting.

With the city and Robinson unable to come to agreement Lifeways began looking at the alternate site, and Tuesday wrapped up the last details to obtaining the property.

Adding to the pressure was a deadline to either have an agreement in hand within two weeks, or lose all funding for the facility, Estes said. "We need to have a letter of understanding or something in two weeks or the funding goes away," he said on Monday before the second site was secured.

The secure mental facility has been in the planning stages since last summer, when it was the subject of public meetings and approval by the Heppner City Council.

Residential treatment facilities are used to house and treat mentally ill persons convicted of crimes and found "guilty except for insanity," and community leaders wanted to make sure the city would accept such a facility before moving forward on planning. Later a joint meeting of the city and county planning commissions was held to approve the necessary land partitions.

Developers say the facility will give an economic boost to the area providing 15 to 20 full time positions paying $30,000 to $65,000 in wages. The annual operating budget would be around $960,000 and construction costs of the facility would be $1.2 million. In addition, most supplies for the facility would be purchased locally, including food, medications, transportation and general supplies.

As an additional benefit Estes said that as part of the project a two-bed crisis respite unite will be part the facility. This unit will be open to local people experiencing a mental health crisis

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# School superintendent testifies at McKinnis pre-trial

**By David Sykes**

Morrow County School Superintendent Mark Burrows testified last Thursday at the pre-trial conference for former teacher Forrest McKinnis, who is charged with first degree theft, a felony, and 43 counts of official misconduct for stealing 43 text books and selling them on e-bay.

**Forrest McKinnis**

Burrows was called to the stand by McKinnis' attorney Brent Smith and asked if money for the books had been repaid. Burrows said that McKinnis had paid the district back $2,600, the retail value of the books.

The defense had asked Circuit Court Judge Daniel Hill that the criminal charges against McKinnis be dropped in favor of a civil compromise satisfied by repayment of the stolen books.

Burrows said that he had worked with McKinnis, who was teacher of the year in 2006 and worked in Irrigon, for four years and that he held no "ill will" toward him as a result of the theft. Burrow also said the Morrow County School Board had met in executive session to discuss the arrest and the board held a consensus that McKinnis should not be criminally prosecuted, and that the repayment and civil compromise were acceptable.

Under cross examination Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard asked Burrows if it would surprise him that she had called several members of the board to verify, and had been told by the board members they would not be satisfied with a civil compromise. "Yes it would," Burrows said. He said the discussion was held in executive session so there was no vote on the issue, but that it would be reflected in the minutes of the executive session meeting.

Ballard also said Burrows' opinion of whether McKinnis should face civil compromise or criminal charges was not relevant because the taxpayers of the Morrow County School District were the victims and not Burrows or the school board. The people of Morrow County deserve justice," Ballard said. "Mr. McKinnis was a role model to 110 at risk youth in alternative school. He was 2006 teacher of the year. This (reducing the charges) would show children Mr. McKinnis does not have to be accountable and they do," she added.

Smith also asked that the 43 counts of official misconduct be reduced to two since McKinnis had removed books from the school building on only two occasions. Ballard argued against the reduction saying "this defendant made 43 conscious decisions to take taxpayer books to sell."

Judge Hill said he would rule on the request to reduce charges in a couple of weeks and that in the meantime "I ask that the parties work it out amongst themselves."

## Sheriff's deputies bust big MIP party near Heppner

Information received from intercepted text messages and word of mouth led Morrow County Sheriff's Deputies to the Social Ridge area near Heppner where they discovered a MIP party on Friday, January 30. MCSO issued 27 citations in connection with the party.

According to MCSO, deputies were patrolling the area when they located a number of vehicles parked near the intersection of Social Ridge Rd. and Clarks Canyon Rd. Investigation at that location led to multiple citations and the location of the MIP party.

MCSO cited four people with furnishing alcohol to a minor: Malcolm A. Stanton, Jr., 24, Lexington; Jake W. VanDoorn, 19, Lexington; Aaron P. Henshaw, 21, Heppner; and Rebecca Schiller, 20, Echo. One, Trevor S. Prow, 20, Salem, was cited for possession of less than one ounce of marijuana.

MCSO cited the following for MIP: Rosa L. Panouro, 18, Pendleton; Shaun E. Hascall, 18, Pilot Rock; Robert McMorris, 19, Salem; Katie M. Britt, 20, Heppner; Brandon C. Davis, 20, Heppner; Samuel F. King, 18, Heppner; Robert H. Smith III, 19, Heppner; Trevor S. Prow, 20, Salem; Matthew S. Allen, 19, Pilot Rock; Jason W. Wainwright, 19, Heppner; Braden L. Britt, 18, Heppner; Justin K. Gregory, 19, Portland; Latosha Bowles, 18, Portland; Colton J. Hanson, 20, Heppner; Matthew M. Mulcare, 19, Pilot Rock; Rebecca L. Schiller, 20, Echo; Brittany N. DeDios, 20, Pilot Rock; Edgar Ramirez, 18, Pendleton; and Icy Roe, 18, Pilot Rock.

A16-year-old male, Heppner, and a 17-year-old female from Pilot Rock were also cited for MIP and a 15-year-old female, Pendleton, was cited for no-operator's license.

MCSO said that the investigation into the incident is still ongoing and more citations are possible.

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

# 15 teams to participate in BEO Invitational Wrestling Tournament this weekend

Beginning this Friday, approximately 150-200 fans will descend on Heppner for Bank of Eastern Oregon's Invitational Wrestling Tournament on Saturday, February 7. This is the first full-on bracketed varsity wrestling tournament to be held in Heppner.

Fifteen teams, including Heppner, will have approximately 173 wrestlers competing in the all day event. Wrestlers will begin their weigh-ins at 8 a.m. with matches beginning at 10 a.m.

There will be an expanded concessions stand throughout the day. Heppner Mustang wrestling t-shirts, as well as tournament t-shirts, will be available for purchase during the tournament. Proceeds from the sale of the t-shirts will go to Heppner High School.

The entrance fee is $4 for adults and $3 for children.

The Chamber of Commerce will be providing a map of local businesses and restaurants that will be handed out with the programs.

Schools that will be participating in the tournament include: Adrian, Joseph, Pine Eagle, Imbler, Umatilla, Baker, Irrigon, Crane, Colton, Elgin, Enterprise, Riverside, Union, and Wallowa.

As of Tuesday, the Northwestern Hotel is completely booked for the weekend and there are very few RV slots available for fans that will be coming into town for the tournament. If anyone has spaces for RVs to park, or RVs or homes that they are willing to rent out for the weekend, contact Sheryll Bates at the Heppner Chamber of Commerce at 676-5536.

The community invited to attend.

# Town of Lexington names new mayor

The Lexington Town Council voted to name Samuel Martin as the new city mayor. Martin will finish serving out a two year term that was begun by Valerie Doherty who died in December. The term will end in 2010.

Martin's appointment to mayor leaves an open vacancy on the town council. All of the new council members will vote to appoint a new councilor to fill the position.

The new mayor and city councilors were sworn into office at a ceremony at Lexington City Hall on Tuesday, January 27.

**OPEN HOUSE**
**Saturday, February 14**
NAPA TOOL & FILTER SALE
February 9th -20th
• Lots of In-store specials
• Door Prizes
• BBQ Lunch 11:30
**Morrow County Grain Growers**
Lexington 989-8221 • 1-800-452-7396 For farm equipment, visit our web site at www.mcgg.net