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Gazette Times

Merry Christmas

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Change in plans bring couple to Heppner

New youth pastor and nurse begin work

By Autumn Morgan

As children we all have dreams of what we will become when we grow up. Along the way those dreams can change. But as you look back on those childhood dreams you realize that it really wasn't the dreams that changed, but God changing you. The same is true for Willow Creek Baptist Church's new youth pastor Mike Ehrsam and his wife Rachel, a new nurse with the Morrow County Health District.

Mike and Rachel Ehrsam

Raised in Oklahoma, Mike grew up wanting to become a veterinarian. And, for many years, he worked at a veterinary clinic. But, when he began college at Oklahoma Baptist University, he found himself working on a degree in family psychology. In 2008 he earned his bachelor's degree in family psychology with a minor in education.

In 2007 Mike contacted the director for the Columbia Basin Baptist Association about a summer internship. The director suggested missions work as an intern with various churches in Morrow and Umatilla counties. That summer he rotated between churches in Heppner, Hermiston, Pilot Rock, and Pendleton. In 2008, he was contacted by Keith Price of Willow Creek Baptist Church about interning exclusively with the church that summer.

It was during his time at Oklahoma Baptist that he met Rachel.

Growing up in Tri-Cities, Rachel always had an interest in and a heart for foreign missions. At the age of 12 she committed to follow God's call on her life. When she began college at Oklahoma Baptist University, she decided that nursing would be a good platform for missions. In 2008 she earned her bachelor's of science degree in nursing.

After college, Rachel began working for Kadlec Regional Medical Center. In March of this year, she and Mike were married in Tri-Cities.

During the summer of 2009 Willow Creek Baptist Church began its search for a youth pastor and one name kept coming up... Mike Ehrsam. In October, the decision was made to hire Mike and he immediately began transitioning into the job. But there were two problems remaining, finding a nursing job for Rachel and a house to rent. But those problems turned out to be minor because Rachel was quickly offered a job with Morrow County Health District and the couple found a house to rent.

Rachel began working as a nurse at Pioneer Memorial Hospital in November. She currently works with in-hospital patients, outpatient services, emergency room, and long-term care. "I have always wanted to work with people in a close setting," said Rachel. "I love the job and everyone has been helpful and kind."

As a youth pastor, Mike's goals with the youth group include helping students learn to develop a strong relationship with Christ and how they can come to know Him if they don't. He also wants the group to be more involved with the community and become good examples to their peers. In addition to being the youth pastor at Willow Creek Baptist Church, Mike is also a basketball coach for Heppner's junior high boys' team.

The couple is enjoying Heppner and having fun meeting new people.

Sheriff's deputies arrest Irrigon man on sex abuse charges

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office has arrested Reynaldo Vicente Mestizo, 19, on two counts of Rape I, two counts of Sex Abuse I, two counts of Contributing to the Sexual Delinquency of a Minor, two counts of Sexual Misconduct, and Public Indecency.

Deputies responded to a report of a suspicious vehicle parked in the middle of a field in the Irrigon area and made contact with Mestizo and a young female who stated her age was 16. According to the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, the female admitted to be having a sexual relationship with Mestizo and upon further investigation it was determined that the female was a 12 year old juvenile.

Mestizo was lodged at the Umatilla County Jail.

According to Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard, on Friday a grand jury returned a true bill, meaning enough evidence was found to go forward with charges of Rape in the second degree and other charges.

Two men arrested after vandalism spree

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office arrested Patrick Michael Schiller and Jason William Wainwright during the course of a vandalism investigation.

On December 13, the sheriff's office received a report of vandalism to several gates on Little Butter Creek Road east of Heppner. Properties owned by Lisa Irwin of Pendleton and David and Jennifer Jaca of Heppner had been damaged by someone ramming and tearing down locked gates onto their property with a vehicle.

On December 17, Morrow County Sheriff's Office deputies arrested Schiller, 23, of Echo for two counts of failure to perform duties of a driver, property damage, and two counts of criminal mischief in the second degree. He was lodged at the Umatilla County Jail with $24,000 bail. Wainwright, 20, of Heppner was arrested at the sheriff's office for two counts of criminal mischief in the second degree. He was lodged at the Umatilla County Jail with $12,000 bail.

Citizens with information regarding crimes are urged to call the Morrow County Sheriff's Office at 676-5317.

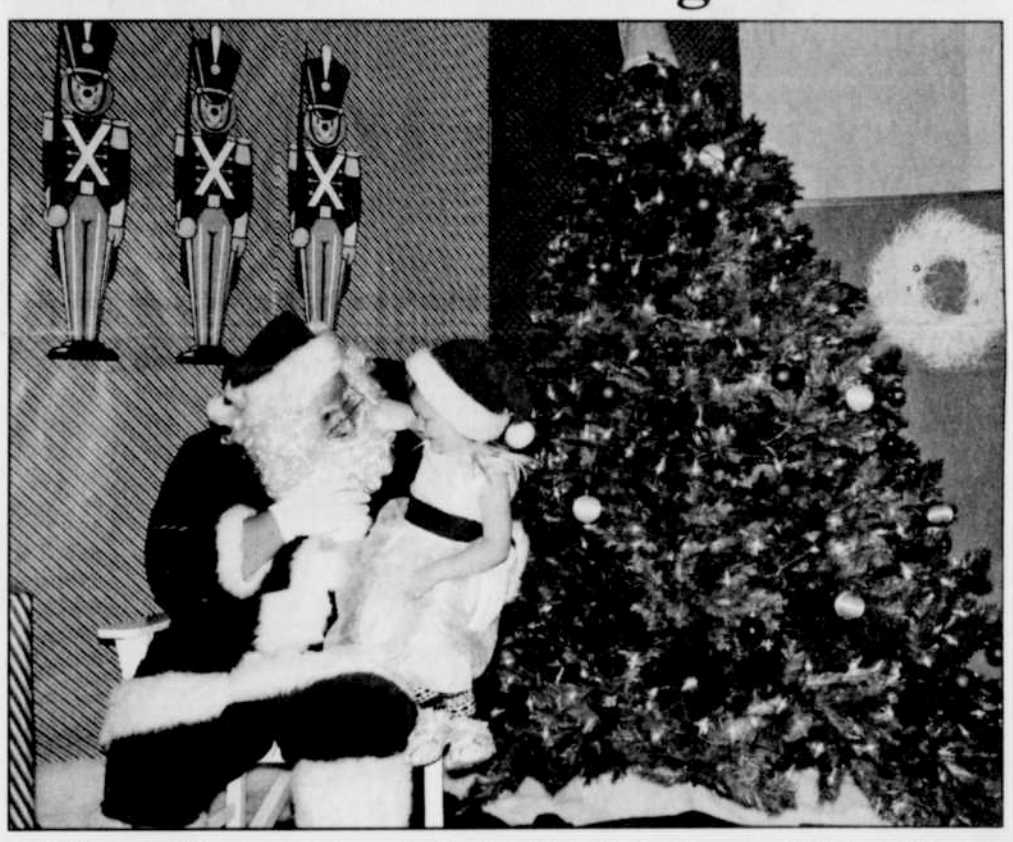
Gazette-Times closed Thursday and Friday

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed on Thursday and Friday, December 24 and 25, in observance of Christmas. We will re-open on Monday, December 28, at 9 a.m.

Devin Oil holds drawing for giant gift-filled stocking

Abby Arnspiger of Devin Oil presents Jordan and Caitlynn Bailey with a giant stocking stuffed with gifts. Devin Oil held a drawing for the stocking. *–Photo by David Sykes*

Santa Claus is coming to town



Faith Futter told Santa what she wanted for Christmas during the annual Celebrate Heppner Christmas Event held last Thursday night, December 17, at the Elks Lodge. *–Photo by David Sykes*

Hickerson appears in court for attempted murder

Russ Hickerson appeared in court on Thursday, December 17, where his lawyer, John Ballard requested more time before making a plea. During the pre-trial, Judge Ron Pahl granted a request by Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard, and ordered Hickerson to avoid firearms and ammunition for the duration of his case.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office arrested Russ John Hickerson, 52, of Heppner for Attempted Aggravated Murder, Attempted Assault I, and Menacing on December 7.

According to the sheriff's department, deputies responded after receiving a report of a disturbance at a residence in Lexington and an investigation revealed that Michael Stahl of Lexington had been attacked by a suspect who had thrown gasoline on him and threatened to light it. The sheriff's office reported that the suspect had also threatened to kill the victim with a handgun. A scuffle ensued and Stahl was able to prevent the gun from being fired and called 911 for assistance and deputies responded to the scene.

A trial date was set for February 4.

New pre-trial date set for Cannin

At a pretrial hearing for former Heppner High School teacher Wendy Cannin on Thursday, December 17, defense attorney Kittee Custer and Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard exchanged more discovery. Custer also stated that she intended to file a motion for protective order.

Custer also stated on the record, as she had in past pre-trial hearings, that she did not believe there would be a trial.

Cannin was arrested August 31 and charged with multiple sex crimes involving underage students.

A new pre-trial date has been set for January 14 at the Morrow County Courthouse.