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Port of Morrow marches forward despite recession

By David Sykes

While business activity has slowed during the recession, Port of Morrow General Manager Gary Neal says the Port of Morrow is moving ahead with major infrastructure projects that will position the port when business does pick up.

Neal told the Heppner Chamber of Commerce luncheon meeting last Thursday about rail, road and airport improvements that are all scheduled to be done at the port.

Neal said 20,000 feet of rail track is scheduled to be added at a cost of about \$10 million. He said railroad improvements will be paid for with an \$8 million grant from the state of Oregon and \$2 million in federal funds. He also said the port will receive \$10.7 million from the state of Oregon to be used for new roads in the port's East Beach area. A bridge will be built over the Union Pacific rail line and connect onto the freeway at Hwy. 730, which will provide another Hwy. 84 interchange to access the port.

Also coming is a possible \$1.3 million for dock improvements which will allow larger barges to dock. In a related matter, Neal said the Columbia River shipping system will be shut down for four months from December through March for repairs to locks, and the port is looking for ways to get around the shutdown.

In other improvements the port has received about \$500,000 from the state for improvements to the airport for new hangers and fueling facilities.

A favorite project

that Neal has been working on for some time is a new agricultural information center to be built at the port. "People on the west side (of the state) do not have any idea what we do out here,"

Neal said. He said the ag information center would show people how food is processed by using virtual tours. "When Tillamook Cheese opened up at the port I envisioned a nice tourist information center like they have in Tillamook," Neal said. But the company said it did not want to set up another tourist center here,

they 'just wanted to make cheese.'" So Neal says the port came up with the idea for an information center where tourists and other visitors could get off the freeway and take a "virtual look around" at what is being done at the port. "We have so many things going on in here," Neal says. "Food just doesn't just come from the grocery store. It is regions like ours that is providing all this food and we want the people to be educated about this," he said.

Mark Patton of Ione is the project manager on the information center and Neal says he hopes to have it up and running by next year. The center is being paid for with State of Oregon funds secured by Rep. Greg Smith of Heppner.

Neal says the port has seen some decrease in business because of the recession. There is less solid waste coming through the port's docs to Findley Buttes Land Fill. He attributed this to the slow down in construction. Construction projects generate a large amount of solid waste for the land fill, and

fewer trips to the land result in less money for Morrow County's popular tipping fee funds.

Neal says that water usage, a good indicator of how business has been going, has held up pretty well over the past year, with the port providing 2.6 billion gallons of water for the industries located at the port, up from 2.5 billion gallons the previous year.

He said containers at the port's dock have dropped from 25,000 per year five years ago, to about 18,000 containers last year. He said the number of containers loaded and unloaded at Boardman had a lot to do with the activity at the Port of Portland. So when Portland traffic is down then it affects Boardman's traffic. Neal said the Port of Portland has now leased out its facilities to be run by a Philippine company and he expects there to be increased traffic through Portland now.

In other business at the port, Neal said they have had an "uptick" in the number of businesses they are talking to and that usually means things are going to pick up. He said he expects the big data center that is under construction at the port to be up and running by March of 2011, and that there may be a new lease to a \$15 million bio-diesel plant coming along.

Neal did not have encouraging news to give about the proposed raceway that has been in the works for many years at Boardman. "They need to bring a big check if they come and see me," he said. He added that the raceway company does not have an office open in Boardman anymore.

As for the South Morrow Industrial Park (former Kinzua saw mill site) Neal said the Port still has an open purchase option with a farmer-owner co-op that is considering operating the co-gen plant to produce electricity using sorghum. He did not say when that option expired.

Trophy buck donated to Fish & Wildlife office

By David Sykes

Local Fish and Wildlife Biologist Steve Cherry has a new trophy buck hanging on his wall, thanks to the family of a man who took the animal in 1937 in the Potamus Point area near Heppner.

Joe Thurner was a long-time hunter in the area when he harvested the animal. He passed away several years ago and Joe's wife, Pearl, who lives in a Portland assisted living center, and their son David of LaGrande, asked if they could donate the head to the local Fish & Wildlife office. Cherry agreed and accepted the gift to hang on his wall. "We had it scored and unofficially it scored 204 7/8," Cherry said.

In a note about the hunting trip, Pearl related the following story: "Four guys helped pack out the big buck. They cut two lodge poles and tied the deer on. They placed the poles on their shoulders and started out. However they didn't make it very far when the poles broke. They then cut two bigger poles and started again, finally making it to camp." She said that the horns started out black but have now bleached out over the years.

Also given was an original hunting and fishing license from 1937. It was about the size of a business card and cost \$5, which in today's dollars would have been about \$75. The license read "This certifies that Joe J. Thurner is entitled to hunt game birds and animals and to angle in conformity with law during the calendar year 1937." Thurner was 23 years old at the time. The tag from the buck was made from wire at that time. The wire was wrapped around the horn, inserted into a small piece of lead and then the lead was crimped to complete the tagging process.

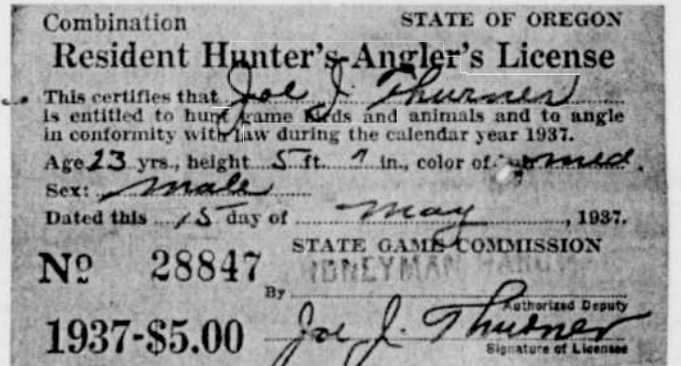


Local wildlife biologist Steve Cherry shows the new trophy deer hanging on the wall in his office. The head was donated by the surviving family who harvested the big buck back in 1937 in the Potamus Point area. The buck scored an unofficial 204 7/8

Biologist Steve Cherry shows the old type of tag used "back in the day". It was a piece of wire inserted into a bit of lead which was then crimped down. Cherry said he wasn't sure how long that type of tag was used. (right)



This is the actual Oregon hunting and fishing license from 1937 issued to Joe Thurner. Cost of the tag was \$5, which in today's dollars adjusted for inflation is about \$75.



Health district board pleased with administrator's performance

The Morrow County Health District Board gave administrator Michael Blauer a vote of confidence and a two-percent raise at their regular meeting held Monday night in Ione.

"We think that Mike has done a great job overall and the board is extremely pleased with his performance over the past year," said board Chair Larry Mills.

The board opted to raise Blauer's salary from \$105,000 to \$107,500.

Blauer announced at the meeting that the district will receive over \$40,000 in grants from Pacific Source, Regence and Providence for community outreach planning projects.

Blauer also told the board that he had interviewed one applicant for the Irrigon Clinic physi-

cian's assistant position and has arranged to interview another. He said that both candidates attended Idaho State University and have ties to Oregon. He reiterated that Dr. Kenneth Wenberg has been doing a good job as provider for the Irrigon Clinic in the interim.

In other business, the board:

-approved a "Community Benefit Grant Guidelines for Columbia River Community Health Services" which will specify what CRCHS services and activities the district will approve funding for and how the application process will proceed. The district will require CRCHS to file quarterly progress reports and a final report after completion. The district will also require that CRCHS publicly recognize MCHD for their support

and interest in Boardman's community health improvement.

MCHD had previously donated a substantial amount, \$100,000 in previous years, to CRCHS with the requirement that CRCHS provide its financial report to MCHD, however an official financial report had never been received, despite frequent requests from MCHD. Prior to the financial contributions to CRCHS, MCHD had provided Dr. Robert Boss, who formerly operated the clinic, with substantial yearly financial contributions, but had not received financial reports from him either, despite repeated requests. CRCHS had also not publicly acknowledged that MCHD had contributed to them financially.

"We want to main-

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Special Fair & Rodeo section included in this week's paper

A special 24-page Fair and Rodeo section is included in this week's issue of the Heppner Gazette-Times. The section has extensive information about the activities and events at this year's Fair & Rodeo starting next Wednesday at the Morrow County Fairgrounds in Heppner.

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