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Education Center works to strengthen county's $7.6 million health industry

Health care responsible for 144 Morrow County jobs

By David Sykes

An organization based in La Grande has been working hard to keep Morrow County's health care industry healthy itself, the executive director told the Heppner Chamber of Commerce last week.

Amy Dunkak of Northeast Oregon area Health Education Center (NEOAHEC) said the county has six physicians and 144 employees in the health care industry for a total of $7.6 million annual contribution to the economy. That works out to 23 jobs and $1.3 million, per physician.

Dunkak said there is a shortage of physicians looming in the future for rural areas and her organization is working to try and alleviate that shortage. "We try and attract health professionals to your community," she told the Chamber of Commerce. And it is not just physicians they deal with. "We work with physical therapists, physician's assistants and dental professionals too," she added.

According to the 2008 census, Morrow County has a total population of 11,140. She said 24.8 percent are over 55 years of age and 61 percent of those people need clinical health care. She said "a lot of physicians are going to retire," and her group is working to get young people interested in the medical field. Dunkak said there were 945 students in her region, which covers 10 counties in Oregon, who have gotten "intense health care training," including Med Quest and other programs.

Dunkak said educational efforts by her group will help keep Morrow County's health industry viable.

Two of the most popular programs are Med Quest, a residential health career explorations camp for high school students, and Girls in Science, a one-day event for middle school girls held on the Eastern Oregon University campus.

Other programs offered are health career day funds that give $1,000 grants to communities that wish to coordinate a health career day for elementary students. Another grant program also gives $1,000 grants to high school students that wish to coordinate a breast health awareness or fundraising event. Dunkak said another popular program is In-A-Box materials that offer supplemental science materials available to check-out for fourth through eight grade teachers focusing on the body and environmental sciences.

Patti Allstott, administrative coordinator at the Morrow County Health District, who is on the board of directors for NEOAHEC, said it is important to encourage our youth to enter the health care field. "Small towns are vying for health care professionals with other communities. It is hard to get radiology techs and lab techs," she said, "not just physicians and physician's assistants." "Anything we can do to get young people involved (in the health care field) will help us locally," she said.

Amy Dunkak, executive director of Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center, addressed the Heppner Chamber of Commerce last week about the organization's efforts to strengthen Morrow County's health care industry. *–Photo by David Sykes*

M.C. Fair & OTPR implementing Ambassador Program

This year the Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo are implementing a new Ambassador Program.

Applicants must be a resident of Morrow County, between the ages of 16-20 years of age. The Fair is interested in those that are able to commit to service during the year starting November 2010 through November 2011.

Activities include contact with local schools, parades at county events, county Music in the Park concerts, Chamber of Commerce events, community holiday events and all Morrow County Fair functions. Candidates may be required to participate in some Morrow County Rodeo events if needed, but will not be required to ride in the rodeo.

Applications must be received by 11 a.m. on November 10 at the Fair Office. Late applications will not be considered. The Ambassador Program will be coordinated this year by Alita Nelson, at (541) 377-7300 and Wendy McPherson, at (541) 571-4309.

A contestant interview and parent information session will be held on November 21 in Heppner at the fairgrounds at 1 p.m.

For more information call fair manager Ren'ee Yocom at 541-676-9474. For applications contact your local school or the fair office at mcfaire@co.morrow.or.us.

Halloween arrives at Willow Creek Terrace

George Nairns carved this large pumpkin as part of the Halloween decorations at Willow Creek Terrace. The pumpkin was donated by Duane and Robanai Disque. Pictured with Nairns are Narin Stone and Teagan Ramsey. *–Photo by Megan Futter*

Listening sessions to be held regarding wind turbine health concerns

Oregon Public Health officials will hold community listening sessions regarding health concerns about wind turbines in the community. The Office of Environmental Public Health is conducting a Health Impact Assessment on the siting of wind farms in Oregon.

The first session will be held on November 3 at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, One University Boulevard, on the third floor of the Hoke Union Building in room 309 from 6:30-8 p.m. The next session will be held on November 4 at the Umatilla-Morrow ESD in Pendleton, 2001 SW Nye, from noon to 1 p.m. The final session will be held at the Arlington Grade School cafeteria, 1400 Main Street, from 6:30-8 p.m.

For more information visit http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hia/windenergy.shtml or email wind.hia@state.or.us.

Annual Artifactory planned for November

The Artifactory, sponsored by the Heppner St. Patrick's Senior Center, is scheduled for Saturday, November 13, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Senior Center.

Tables are available for vendors who wish to participate and can be reserved by contacting Judy Buschke at 541-676-5826 by filling out an application at the Senior Center office. The table rental is $20 and will go to the Senior Center to help keep their doors open and available for community events.

There will be a variety of items for sale this year including baskets, ceramics, gourds, wood items, jewelry, country crafts, paintings, baby quilts, teddy bears, doll beds, and home décor.

The Senior Center will have cinnamon rolls, hot dogs, polish dogs, soups, and drinks for sale.

Columbia Basin to hold annual meeting

The 66th annual meeting of Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative, Inc. will be held at the Gilliam County Fairgrounds in Condon on Thursday, November 4.

Registration will begin at 4:30 p.m., dinner will be held at 5:15 p.m., and a business meeting will begin at 6 p.m.

This meeting is for the purpose of electing four directors and for the transaction of any other business to properly come before this meeting.

Emergency medical services personnel recruitment up

By April Sykes

Morrow County Health District Emergency Medical Services director Rusty Estes told the board at their regular meeting Monday night in Lexington that the district now has 46 EMS personnel and 28 ambulance drivers.

Estes, who is also the Heppner Fire Chief, said that Heppner now has 20 EMS personnel, Boardman has 10, Irrigon, 11, Ione, three, and Lexington, two. He said that five of those are paramedics, 14 are intermediates and 27 have basic certificates. He reported that the district now has 28 ambulance drivers: 15 in Heppner, six in Boardman, four in Irrigon and three in Ione. Two of the Boardman personnel are full-time employees paid by the district and one in Irrigon is also a full time paid employee.

Estes said that a new EMT class has been scheduled in Boardman with 10 people signed up. Last year the class was held in Heppner with 11 enrolling for the class and 10 passing the requirements. Four of the prospective EMTs are bilingual, he added. He told the board that MCHD EMS personnel are "some of the finest rescue people" in the state.

The board told Estes that he has been doing a "great job" of recruiting EMS personnel.

Estes also said that it was time for an ambulance rotation, with the Irrigon community next in line for a new ambulance. He estimated it take at least a year to complete the search, purchase a new vehicle and receive delivery. He said that after a new vehicle is purchased for Irrigon, Irrigon's old ambulance will go to Heppner, Heppner's backup will go to Ione and Ione's current vehicle will go to surplus.

The last community to receive a new vehicle was Boardman in 2007; Boardman's second vehicle was purchased in 1997; Heppner's main ambulance was purchased in 2005 and its backup in 1997; Irrigon's last ambulance was purchased in 2000; and Ione's in 1987. Estes estimated that a new vehicle would cost in the neighborhood of $140,000.

MCHD Board member LeAnn Rea, who is also a Morrow County Commissioner, told the board that the county is in the process of negotiating with the Navy over usage of Bombing Range lands within Morrow County and possible purchase of a new ambulance. "They haven't paid the county any money for 72 years," said Rea. She said that the county also wants to own Bombing Range Road, which is "the primary north-south corridor" in Morrow County. She noted that currently the road is in the Navy's jurisdiction and the Navy could choose to close the road at any time. She also mentioned that fire district personnel are often called out to assist with fires on the Navy Bombing Range and suggested that negotiations

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The Heppner Gazette-Times wants to see pictures of your trophy animals from this hunting season. Stop by to have your picture taken, drop off photos, or email them to editor@rapidserve.net.

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