Bessie Wetzell Newspaper Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

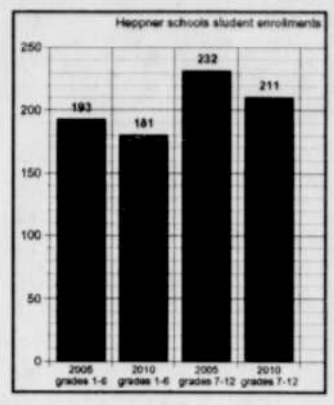
HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 129 NO. 49 8 Pages Wednesday, December 15, 2010 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Morrow County School Board to explore solutions to Heppner's dwindling enrollment

By April Sykes

Morrow County School Superintendent Mark Burrows told the school board, at their regular meeting at Irrigon Elementary School Monday night, that investigation does appear to show that Heppner schools are losing enrollment and are expected to do so over the next 10 years.



At the latest count, Heppner High School had 211 students and Heppner Elementary School had 181.

According to district enrollment figures, on September 12, 2005, Heppner High School had 232 students and Heppner Elementary had 193.

Burrows said that an appointed committee has met concerning the enrollment decline and is investigating ways to cope with the issue, including developing strategies to bring in home schoolers and using technology to bring in virtual students, who potentially could live anywhere in the world. Board member Bill Kuhn commented that the virtual schools provide a way to reach children, especially in times of dwindling resources.

A work session on that topic has been planned for Tuesday, January 11, beginning at 5:45 p.m. at Heppner Elementary School, with the regular meeting to follow.

Burrows, who will retire June 30, at the end of the current school year, submitted his official retirement letter to the school board.

"We can be proud of our many accomplishments over the last seven years," said Burrows in his letter. "I believe the board has instilled a spirit of trust and cooperation among the communities in our county as evidenced by the positive vote in our local option levy. We have taken care of our infrastructure with several major projects completed and our finances are relatively sound considering the economic reality of these times. Most importantly the academic performance of students and teachers has been impressive and continues to improve.

"I am confident that given the leadership of the board, the skills of the administrative team, the support of our patrons, and the dedication of our staff the children of Morrow County will continue to prosper in their school district," Burrows concluded.

In other business, the board:

-heard a presentation on assisting struggling students at Irrigon Elementary School.

-received the following attendance report: A.C. Houghton Elementary School, Irrigon, kindergarten though third grade-252; Heppner Elementary School, kindergarten though sixth grade-181; Heppner High School, grades seven through 12-211; Irrigon Elementary School, grades four through six-223; Irrigon High School, grades seven though 12-320; Riverside High School, Boardman, grades seven through 12-391; Sam Boardman Elementary School, grades kindergarten through three-310; Windy River Elementary, grades four through six-218; Morrow Education Center, Morrow County School District students-52, Umatilla School District students-20; total-2178.

-See DWINDLING ENROLLMENT/Page FIVE

HHS Spanish students caroling through town

Students from Petra Payne's Spanish III and IV class at Heppner High School traveled to various businesses in Heppner on Tuesday, singing Christmas carols in Spanish. *–Photo by Autumn Morgan*

Cause and extent of wheat damage as yet unknown

30 to 40 thousand Morrow County acres may be affected

By David Sykes

The cause of yellowing and purple tips on up to 40,000 acres of Morrow County wheat land is still under investigation, Larry Lutcher, Associate Professor Dryland Cereal Production with the Morrow County Extension office told the Heppner Gazette Tuesday.

Last week Lutcher told the Heppner Chamber of Commerce that aphids are the probable cause of the damage to the winter wheat crop, but that tests are still ongoing.

Lutcher said the symptoms are different that anything he has seen and that he believes the aphids have injected a virus or toxin into the plants and then when the aphids are sprayed the bugs are killed but the symptoms remain. He said samples of infected plants have been taken to the lab for analysis to try and determine what happened. Lutcher added that the major problems occurred in wheat seeded between Sept. 20 and Oct. 1.

Lutcher said some cold temperatures or some snow on the ground would help. "Zero degrees for 10 days will do it," he said. He added that some fields he has seen have been "devastated".

The problem Lutcher said is that if farmers are going to have to reseed in the spring they have to make plans and purchase seed soon. As far as studying the problem he said experts need to understand what has happened, to manage it in the future.

Lutcher said the problem will be discussed at a meeting at the Legion Hall in Ione from 7:30 to noon Jan 11.

City to consider raising sewer rates

Rates could jump $2-$3 per month to make up deficit

By David Sykes

The city of Heppner is considering raising sewer rates by two to three dollars per month to make up for a shortfall in the sewer fund, it was announced at Monday's city council meeting.

City Manager Dave DeMayo said the just completed annual audit showed each year the city is falling behind in the sewer fund because it was spending more than it was taking in. "We are falling behind," DeMayo told the city council. "We are eating into our carry forward." DeMayo said that since the money coming in from sewer fees is not enough to cover what it costs to keep the system running, the city has been using cash carry over to make up the difference.

The 2010 audit shows that sewer fees brought in $206,688 in 2010, but $310,955 was spent. The city currently charges $23.10 per month for sewer fees.

Heppner Public Works Director Brian Harmon agreed with DeMayo, saying the reason the city is falling behind is because it has not raised fees in the past. "We haven't raised sewer rates. That is why we are in this position," Harmon told the council. "The cost of pipe isn't going down," he added.

DeMayo said with a $2-$3 raise "We could get by." He said the increase should come "fairly soon." DeMayo said the city utility commission would take up the issue at its next meeting Dec. 16 at 8 a.m. at city hall. The utility commission will then bring its recommendation back to the city council at its next meeting.

Police Report

In other business the council heard the police report from the sheriff for November:

Received a report of a fuel drive-off from the Chevron station. It was believed the driver thought they had paid when they swiped their credit card at the pumps. MCSO was unable to locate the vehicle.

Other

MCSO deputies arrested two people on warrants.

MCSO received two requests for welfare checks.

A dispute was reported to be occurring outdoors. When the deputy arrived in the area, the participants were gone.

Two sex crimes were reported and determined to be unfounded.

A person called MCSO to report they were being stalked over the internet by a person in Heppner.

A two-way radio was found at the cemetery.

A deputy investigated a sexual assault.

A deputy contacted some juveniles and told them not to sled on Water St.

A juvenile was arrested by a MCSO deputy for Assault 4-Domestic Violence and lodged at NORCOR.

A person called MCSO and reported they were receiving prank phone calls from a Morrow County agency. It was determined to be unfounded.

A deputy investigated a report of a juvenile

-See SEWER RATES/Page FIVE

Heppner Christmas event planned for Thursday

Heppner's Christmas event for this year is planned for December 16.

The evening will kick off with the annual parade of lights sponsored by Columbia Basin Electric at 5:30 p.m. Parade entrants will meet at Green Feed at 5 p.m. to line up. Anyone wishing to enter the parade can pick up an entry form at the Heppner Chamber office.

After the parade a chili/chili dog meal will be served from 6-7:15 p.m. at the Elks Lodge. The cost is $7 for adults and $5 for children. A $10 rewards card will be given for every meal purchased. Musical entertainment will be provided during dinner.

Pictures with Santa will be taken on the stage at the Elks Lodge. The cost is $5 per picture.

Activities will move upstairs at the Elks Lodge from 7:15-9:30 p.m.

-See CHRISTMAS EVENT/Page SIX

Port extends purchase option on Heppner co-gen plant

Company has plans to produce electricity with sorghum

By David Sykes

The Port of Morrow last week extended an option to an Ontario company to purchase the co generation plant at the industrial park at Heppner. The company plans to produce electricity by burning sorghum, and last June was given a 90 day option to purchase the former Kinzua saw mill co-gen plant for $4.2 million.

The port has granted several extensions on the purchase option and the current extension expires Jan. 12, 2011.

Renewable Ag Energy has contracted with several Morrow and Umatilla farmers to grow the sorghum for burning in the 10 megawatt plant and Tuesday Kurt Christensen, a principal of Renewable Ag Energy, told the Heppner Gazette that although yields on the sorghum crops have not been as high as hoped, he feels the next crop will be better.

"We have grown and harvested some 600 acres in the area (Umatilla and Morrow counties) ," Christensen said, "and we are now working toward next summer's crop," which he said should be high. He said there was not as much "solar" as they expected so the crop was lower than expected.

Christensen said the main obstacle now is putting together the funding to purchase the co-gen plant. "I am a farmer and I am used to just going out and getting things done, but this is taking longer than I had earlier expected."

Christensen had visited the area in June speaking to the Heppner city council and the Willow Creek Economic Development Group and at that time had said he expected the plant to be up and running by the end of 2010 or the first of 2011. Obviously that has not happened and Christensen said his growers group had formed a co-op, Agri Energy Producers in Ontario, to control the process from growing to distribution to producing electricity, and this co-op has been working to line up financing for purchase of the go-gen plant.

Christensen said the inspection period on the co-gen plant has passed, but Agri Energy producers had done some "due diligence" on the facility prior to purchase. "We are now waiting for financing to trigger our next step (purchase of the plant)," Christensen said.

MCHD to give free flu shots

The Morrow County Health Department will be giving free flu shots on Thursday, December 16, from noon to 7 p.m. at Heppner City Hall.

For more information contact the Morrow County Health Department. The Heppner branch can be reached at 541-676-5421 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Boardman branch can be reached at 541-481-4200 Mondays and Tuesdays from 8:30 to 12:30 and 1-4:30.

Paustian to head Chamber

Les Paustian has been nominated to head up the Heppner Chamber of Commerce next year.

Paustian, who is also Heppner's Mayor, will be sworn in at the Chamber's annual meeting next month. He was nominated along with other officers at last Thursday's chamber meeting.

HHS Honor Society sponsoring free Christmas tree pick-up

The Heppner High School National Honor Society is sponsoring a free Christmas tree pick-up service on December 29 and January 5. Anyone who would like to have their Christmas tree collected can contact Petra Payne at 541-676-5466 or at 541-676-9138, ext. 2518.

GUN SAFE CLOSEOUT SALE!
Model 23
On Sale ONLY $1249
Also-Model 17 on sale ONLY $749
SECURITY- •3-sided bolt coverage • 11-all active bolts
FIRE- •18,000 more BTUs •50% more fire protection •More fireboard layers
STYLE- •Brass Hardware •Mocha foss interior •Burgundy marble finish
Morrow County Grain Growers
Lexington 989-8221 • 1-800-452-7396 For farm equipment, visit our web site at www.mcgg.net