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Heath district purchases new CT scanner

Board member LaRue resigns

By April Sykes

Morrow County Health District CEO Michael Blauer told the board, at their regular meeting in Irrigon Monday, that the district has purchased a new CT scanner for an amount substantially less than originally planned. He said the district bought the scanner, originally in the neighborhood of $420,000, for $327,000 through negotiations on behalf of district employees and group purchasing.

The district approved using the remainder of the monies for a down payment towards purchase of an electronic records system if the Columbia Basin Electric Coop Board is agreeable. USDA monies to purchase the scanner were obtained with Columbia Basin Electric as an intermediary. The CBEC board is to meet later this month.

MCHD Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney said that she has contacted USDA and has learned that USDA will likely approve the request to use the monies towards the electronic records system since the request is capital related. The other condition is that CBEC also approves the request and sends a letter indicating such to USDA.

Phasing in of an electronic record system is federally mandated and is expected to cost between $450,000-$500,000, according to Mahoney. She estimates that around 90 percent of that amount may be eligible for federal reimbursement, however she says the district will still need around $100,000 for a down payment. She said however that it could be up to two years before the district receives any federal monies. "We need to be aware that the feds don't reimburse in a timely manner," added board member LeAnn Rea. In the meantime, "We have to figure out how we're going to pay for this," stressed Blauer. "That's a lot of money and there are still some unknowns. If things continue to go well with Healthland (provider of hardware and software for the electronic records system), we'll probably go with them," he added.

Linda LaRue

Mahoney said that once the district begins to install the electronic records system the community may expect some economic development benefits, since it could take months for installation and training and out-of-town experts will need to be on site.

Phase I and II of the electronic records system will have to be accomplished within a year and a half, said Blauer.

On the downside, the board learned from Mahoney that the district lost $85,903 for November, giving the district a loss of $203,807 for the year to date, an average $40,761 monthly year-to-date loss. Gross patient revenue for the month was $503,988, with $17,456 less for bad debts, $91,376 less for contractual and other adjustments, $94,733 in tax revenue and $2,056 in other operating revenue for $491,945 in total operating revenue. Total operating expenses were $587,524. The district also received $9,675 for a non-operating net gain.

Board member Linda LaRue, Ione, tendered her resignation from the board Monday night, effective immediately. LaRue, who has been on the board 11 years, said that she would not be available for meetings and did not want to be an absentee board member. She and her husband, both retired, will be in Arizona for the next several months.

"It's been good," said LaRue of her tenure. "I'm very proud of what's happened with the district." "It's been challenging and sometimes downright scary in the early years," she added. At one point the district had been on the brink of collapse, but its financial picture subsequently improved greatly.

"I've always appreciated your counsel and advice," joked board Chair Larry Mills. "Some of which we didn't take." Board member LeAnn Rea added, "I want to thank you for everything I've learned from you."

LaRue's term is up

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Local boy wins giant stocking from HeppnerMini-Mart

Gavin Hanna, 9, of Heppner was this year's lucky winner of the "Colossal Christmas Stocking" given away by the Heppner Mini-Mart. Presenting the smiling Gavin with his prize are Mini-Mart employees Chelsey Hedman (left) and Shelbi Wiggers. *–Photo by David Sykes*

Government study says Morrow County needs more locally grown and distributed food

By David Sykes

A recent government report found that while well off people in Morrow County have access to good and plentiful food, there are in fact "pockets" of under nourished, hungry and "food insecure" people in all areas of the county.

Karen Wagner, Community Food Resource Developer, was program speaker at the Heppner Chamber of Commerce in Februray, 2010 when the Community Food Assessment program was launched. *–Photo by David Sykes*

From Our Roots, The People, Agriculture and Food of Gilliam, Morrow, Umatilla and Wheeler Counties, was recently completed and issued by The Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) in Pendleton. Funding for the study came from a federal government grant.

"Three of the four counties are classified as frontier counties, complete with "food deserts." People with resources and transportation are generally well-fed, but co-exist with pockets of under-nourished, hungry or potentially insecure individuals and communities disadvantaged by the current trend of procuring food from distant sources," the report summarized.

The study concluded that Morrow County residents should try and develop local food sources such as small scale food production, increased number of places buying and selling locally grown food such as restaurants, grocery stores, farmers' markets and roadside food stands. The study also said county residents should be better educated on such things as hunting, fishing and harvesting wild foods, as well as better cooking, gardening, shopping and nutrition skills.

"In terms of food security, Heppner and Boardman residents' food choices and needs are largely being met through hometown grocery stores and emergency services in their towns. Other communities (such as Ione) residents drive up to 10 or more miles to reach full-service grocery stores, pantries or meal sites. Those unable to drive or to pay the relatively higher prices at rural 'mom and pop' stores are dependent on limited local and personal resources and may be in jeopardy of food insecurity," the study said. Any community that is not within 10 miles of a full service grocery store are considered "food deserts". The study said Morrow County should work to "ensure regular access to a stable fresh food supply for all citizens year-round."

The study said that two fledgling farmers markets (including one in Heppner) and possible new roadside farm stands may provide greater local food access, availability and affordability over time."

Some of the agricultural facts documented in the study included that there are 421 farms on 1,104,250 acres in Morrow County, with an average value of $1.9 million per farm and $973 per acre. Government payments (a mix of commodity, conservation and land retirement programs) paid to farmers in the county have increased by 44 percent between 2002 and 2007, and are averaging $47,000 in yearly government payments per farm in the county. Total net cash farm income in the county is $354 million, averaging $170,760 per farm and $65 net dollar income per acre. "The gap between the costs and returns of typical farm production cause many to ponder the benefits and value of current, conventional agricultural activities," the report stated.

The report was done on, Morrow, Umatilla and Wheeler Counties where meetings were held and surveys conducted to collect data in each county.

Arbuckle Nordic Club announces schedule

The Arbuckle Nordic Club will begin skiing on January 8. Everyone is welcome. If you do not have equipment call the trip leader and they may be able to arrange a loan of equipment for you.

The club meets at the Heppner City Park at 9 a.m. on most Saturdays. The group skis locally, car pooling to the destination, usually a 25 minute trip. Those who attend should bring a lunch as the group always stops and builds a big warming fire around noon. Some skiers visit around the fire and then return to the vehicles while others may ski on for more exploration and exercise. Most of the time the group arrives back in town by 3 p.m.

This season's ski schedule follows: January 8 (trip leaders Steve and Luanne Brownfield); January 15 (trip leader Molly Rhea); January 22 (trip leaders Bill and Sherry Ewing); January 29 (trip leaders Dan and Sandra VanLiew); February 5 (trip leader John Edmundson); February 12 (trip leader Bill and Sherry Ewing); February 19 (Holiday weekend, no designated leader); February 26 (trip leaders Steve and Luanne Brownfield); and March 4 & 5 (ski to historic Cloud Cap Search and Rescue Shelter, trip leader John Edmundson).

Town and Country Community Awards to be presented Jan. 13

"Heppner - A little Town where big hearts abound ... in every direction" will be the theme for Heppner Chamber's Town and Country Community Awards - sponsored by CenturyLink, on Thursday, January 13, at the Morrow County Fairgrounds.

The evening program will begin at 6 p.m. with a no-host social hour (served by Bucknum's) and 7 p.m. will start the dinner and program activities. The tickets are $20 each and can be purchased at Heppner Chamber; Bank of Eastern Oregon; Murray's Drugs and Community Bank.

Cornerstone Gallery, Chef Alvin Liu will be serving up a meal consisting of: stuffed pork chop with pancetta apple reduction, grilled prawn with apricot honey glaze, honey toasted walnut pear salad, seasoned basmati rice, dinner rolls and dessert.

There will be a formal introduction of the fair and rodeo ambassadors; a winner will be drawn for jewelry donated by Peterson's Jewelers and a Phillips 9" Portable Widescreen DVD Player donated by Murray Drugs. Sandy Matthews and Dale Bates are working on "Your Community on a Big Screen" to enjoy, along with the announcements of the winners for the annual awards - Youth Recognition, Business of Year, Woman of the Year, Man of the Year, Lifetime Achievement and Citizen-Educator of the Year.

SWCD and MC Livestock Growers to hold 24th joint program Jan. 13

The Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District and the Morrow County Livestock Growers will hold their 24th annual joint program Thursday, January 13, at St. Patrick's Parish Hall in Heppner.

Morrow SWCD will hold their regular January Board Meeting at 10 a.m. followed by a hosted lunch at noon. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to Morrow SWCD at 541-676-5452 or MC Extension at 541-676-9642.

The program will begin at 1pm with Stephanie Page, ODA Renewable Energy Specialist, followed by Chas Koenig Columbia Blue Mt. Resource Conservation & Development Ag Efficiency Coordinator. Page and Koenig will have information on funding opportunities for projects. Matt Keenan, ODFW Access & Habitat Program Coordinator will have details on the availability of federal funds for increased access in the Columbia Basin and opportunities for landowners to enroll.

John Williams, OSU Extension Wallowa Co. and Rod Childers, OCA Wolf Committee Chair will give a preliminary report on a current Oregon/Idaho wolf study funded by the Oregon Beef Council. Russ Morgan, ODFW Wolf Coordinator will complete the afternoon with the history of wolves in Oregon and what options Oregon has currently. Time will be available for questions after each presentation.

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