

Morrow County School District approves 2011-12 school calendar

Calls for pre-Labor Day start, two week Christmas break

Monday night in Boardman, the Morrow County School Board voted for Option A for the 2011-12 school calendar.

Option A, which

was preferred by a large majority of district employees, calls for a pre-Labor Day start of school and two weeks vacation at Christmas. With this option, teachers will begin school on August 22, students on August 29. The last school day before a two-week Christmas break is December 15. Students' last day of school is Thursday, June 7; secondary teachers end Friday, June 8 and elementary teachers end Monday, June 11.

Also at the meeting, held at Riverside High School, the board welcomed newly-hired RHS Principal, Robert Elizondo. Elizondo has most recently been principal on special assignment at Chiawana High School in Pasco, WA, and has eight years of administrative experience. Elizondo replaces former RHS Principal Dirk Dirksen, who is assuming the Morrow County superintendent's position. Dirksen replaces current superintendent, Mark Burrows, who is retiring at the end of this school year.

Elizondo, who is bilingual, has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Central Washington University at Ellensburg, WA,

and received a master's degree in education and his administrator's certificate from Heritage University, Toppenish, WA.

Burrows announced that the district has hired Marie Shimer for the RHS assistant principal position. Shimer, who has been a teacher at Nyssa for the past nine years, replaces former RHS assistant principal George Mendoza.

Mendoza, who has been named assistant superintendent, replaces current assistant superintendent, Phyllis Danielson, who is also retiring at the end of the school year.

Shimer has a master's degree in content area literacy, and received her administrator's certificate

See *SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR APPROVED/* PAGES

Fire damages Heppner home



A fire caused extensive damage to the home of Heppner resident Sam Hornbeck last Friday evening. -Photo by Breyana Hynes

Former Heppner insurance agent's license revoked

The Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services (ODCBS) revoked Brenda Sherrell's individual insurance producer license on March 30, 2011. Sherrell's license was revoked due to charges of misappropriation of funds and failure to timely deposit premiums. At one time, Sherrell operated the Heppner branch of Farmers Insurance Group.

According to ODCBS, in exchange for no continuing investigation or enforcement, Sherrell agreed not to apply for any license authorized by ORS Chapter 744. She also agreed not to have equity interest in, be an officer or director of, or be

employed by or contracted with any person that is issued a license authorized by ORS Chapter 744. The action came as a result of Sherrell's alleged behavior while an employee of Farmers Insurance Group in 2008 and 2009.

According to the ODCBS, on January 12, 2009 Farmers Insurance Group "terminated Sherrell's appointment 'for embezzlement of monies belonging to Farmers.'"

From October 17, 2008 to January 12, 2009, Sherrell received 79 cash insurance payments from 67 persons, a total of \$11,901.97. The premiums were for insurance to be provided by Farmers, but

Sherrell deposited the payments into her insurance premium trust account at Columbia River Bank and did not give the payments to Farmers.

From October 17, 2008 to December 19, 2008, Sherrell also received 84 cash insurance payments from 75 persons for premiums totaling \$12,322.66. These payments were also for insurance to be provided by Farmers. According to the ODCBS, Sherrell did not deposit the payments into her trust account. She issued 21 checks, totaling \$12,322.46, drawn on her trust account, and deposited

See *LICENSE REVOKED/* PAGE 4

Doherty named Eastern Oregon AWWA operator of the year

Chad Doherty of Heppner was named the operator of the year by the Eastern Oregon Wastewater Association (AWWA). The award was in recognition for Doherty's "Outstanding Dedication and Service to the City of Heppner," for his work as operator of the City of Heppner's wastewater treatment plant. The award was made at the 29th annual AWWA meeting March 27 in Pendleton. Doherty was presented with a plaque at Monday's city council meeting.

"It's a big deal," Heppner Public Works Director Brian Harmon said when presenting the award to Doherty. "Running an old trickling filter plant built in 1953 and keeping it operat-



Brian Harmon (right) presents City employee Chad Doherty with a certificate of recognition for his work with the Heppner waste water treatment facility. -Photo by David Sykes

ing is an accomplishment," city council. "Chad does a good job."

Pastors invited to submit Easter messages

Area pastors are invited to submit Easter messages for the April 20 edition of the Heppner Gazette-Times. Deadline to submit articles is 5 p.m. Monday, April 18. Article may be dropped off, faxed to 541-676-9211 or emailed to editor@rapidsolve.net.



VOL. 130 NO. 14 8 Pages Wednesday, April 13, 2011 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

City to boost monthly water & sewer fees \$5.25 over next two years

Time to stop playing "catch up" with sewer fund, says utility commission member

Heppner city residents will see an increase in their monthly water and sewer bills by \$3.25 starting July 1, 2011, and another increase of \$2 per month beginning July 1, 2012, the Heppner City Council ruled Monday night. The increase is to cover increased costs in operating the city's waste water treatment system documented in a recently completed engineering study.

The city brings in about \$200,000 per year in sewer fees and the system costs \$229,000 to operate. According to city manager Dave DeMayo, the city has been using cash carry forward funds to cover the shortfall, which, he says, is

putting the city "financially at risk." A recently completed waste water treatment study by the city's engineering firm Anderson Perry confirmed the shortfall.

The Heppner utility commission agreed and voted at its last meeting to endorse the rate increase. Tom Wolff of the utility commission was on hand at the council meeting, and, although he did not agree that the city was running as steep a deficit in the sewer fund as claimed, he did endorse the rate increase. "It was the commission's idea that the rate was necessary overall," Wolff said. "However I thought labor rates were applied (in the budget) to the sewer fund to

make it look like it was running a deficit," he told the council. But Wolff said the rate increase was necessary so the city was "not continually playing catch up" with the sewer fund. "The commission looked closely at the Anderson Perry report and this will keep us caught up," he said.

Council member Cody High thought the city should hold off raising rates until it was done with its budget. "I would like for us to do our budget first," he told the other council members. "We ended up with a \$2,600 increase in the sewer fund. I am sure

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Lepper arraigned on 28 counts of sexual abuse

On April 8 Lonnie L. Lepper, 69, was arraigned on 28 counts of Sexual Abuse in the First Degree.

Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a call on April 6 from a mother in Irrigon stating that her two daughters, both under the age of 12, had been touched inappropriately by her mother's fiancé. The sheriff's office dispatched a deputy to Irrigon to contact the mother and a criminal investigation

was initiated.

According to the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, the suspect called the MCSO on the morning of April 7 and made statements concerning the allegations involving the two young girls.

Sergeant Mark Pratt arranged to meet the suspect at the Irrigon Justice Center, where he was interviewed concerning the allegation of sexual abuse. Lepper was consequently arrested on 60 counts of

Criminal Sexual Abuse in the First Degree involving the two girls. The suspect was transported to the Umatilla County Jail and lodged on the 60 counts of First Degree Sexual Abuse, a class B felony, with a total bail set at \$3 million.

At the arraignment, the state requested that the court set bail at \$1.5 million based upon the charges. Judge Temple set bail at \$200,000. A preliminary hearing date has been set for a later date.

Heppner Little League season opens



Tim Jaca with flag, along with Kevin Smith, open the little league season with ceremonies held Saturday at George Waterlund Field in Heppner. Madison Coombe sang the National Anthem to get another season underway. Long time Heppner Mustang baseball coach and little league supporter Rick Johnston threw out the first pitch of the season. -Photos by David Sykes



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