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# Gazette Times

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# Morrow County fair and rodeo queen crowned

**Maggie Collins of Heppner was crowned the Morrow County Fair & Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Queen at a packed house at the Morrow County Fairgrounds on Saturday. Besides the crowning ceremony, performed by Marlene Fetsch Currin, 1962 Morrow County Fair & Rodeo Queen, the gala featured a prime rib dinner, a welcome and introduction by Sylvia Sandford, an invocation by Maggie's grandfather, a dessert fund raiser, introduction and recognition of Maggie's family, sponsors and close friends, ambassadors and visiting royalty, music by the Old Time Fiddlers, which Maggie, an accomplished fiddle player, joined in, and a live auction. Maggie, the daughter of Tim and Jeannie Collins, is a student at Heppner High School. Pictured: Queen Maggie Collins crowned by former Queen Marlene Currin.** *–Photo by David Sykes*

# Remembrance walk to fitness this Saturday

There may be no better was to enjoy getting fit while taking a walk down memory lane than at the Friends Helping Friends Walk/5K Run event slated for March 17.

The one-mile walk route will be lined with remembrance shamrocks centered with pink hearts memorializing loved ones, with all funds being donated to local home health care. The walk begins at Heppner United Methodist Church and goes up Main Street, by the old swimming pool, across to Sweeney Mortuary, to the court house, to Heppner Elementary School and back to the Methodist church. Though the route is one mile, walkers can walk as far as they choose. The 3.1-mile run follows a different route, but participants will be able to see and greet each other at one point along the way.

Friends Helping Friends strives each year to give back to local health care in memory of Donna Schonbachler, a home health nurse. True to that goal, this fundraiser is an opportunity for residents of Morrow and Gilliam counties to give back to Pioneer Memorial Home Health, which has been impacted by recent Medicare cuts. This wellness event is a chance for the community to step up and participate in helping those locally with medical hardships.

Each $5 donation in memory of a loved one will go to Heppner's Pioneer Memorial Home Health to help those who have qualified for the health-care program. Participants are reminded that children accompanied by adults are free. Strollers and dogs on leashes are welcome.

Remembrance reg-

*-See REMEMBRANCE WALK/PAGE SEVEN*

# Heppner gears up for 30th Wee Bit O' Ireland

City staff, volunteers and local merchants are busy gearing up for Heppner's 30th annual Wee Bit O' Ireland St. Patrick's Day Celebration, which takes place this week.

As in years past, the community-wide event promises to have something for everyone, with the first events beginning on Wednesday with O'Donkey Basketball. Thursday offers the chance to see the production of "From Cenacle to Calvary" by local priest and playwright, Father Gerry Condon.

Friday evening, the community is urged to come out and cheer on some of our local "fighting Irish" at the Irish Boxing Smoker Event. Of course, events will culminate on Saturday with St. Paddy's Arena Motocross, the Great Green Parade and Cruz-In, traditional Ceili at the Elks, O' Putt Putt golf, Ewe-Do-Bingo, Old Time Fiddlers in the evening and much, much more great entertainment.

*See PAGE THREE for full schedule of events.*

*'You look up, and there is this huge animal there'*

# Ranchers, sheriff relate experiences living with wolves in Wallowa County

**By David Sykes**

A county sheriff and three ranching women told their stories Sunday on what it's like living with the grey wolves in Wallowa County, and what those animals are doing to their lives and livelihood.

The wolves have been in that county for several years now. During a wolf forum in Heppner, Wallowa County residents explained what people can expect once the wolf population grows, as it is expected to in Morrow County.

Grey wolves are on the endangered species list, so ranchers are not allowed to harm them, even when it is determined that they are killing livestock.

Wallowa County Sheriff Fred Steen, whose family was in the cattle business, related to the crowd of 130 people gathered at the Heppner Elementary School what it is like for his department to investigate the deaths of livestock by the growing wolf packs in his county.

**Fred Steen**

Working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, it is Steen's job to gather evidence that can be used to determine if cattle and other animals found dead have been killed by wolves. That determination is supposed to guide ODFW in the management of the wolves and be factors in its decision not only to give compensation to ranches, but also whether to kill individual wolves that are killing livestock. Steen did not have positive things to say about the ODFW's wolf-management methods.

"They have no idea what they are doing and they are affecting people's livelihoods," Steen, who has been working with the wolves for the past three years, said bluntly.

He said when a dead cow or other animal is found, his department is called, and they treat the area as a crime scene. ODFW is also called but Steen says they often show up late, gather evidence in an unprofessional and arbitrary manner and make decisions not based on facts.

With a large projection screen behind him, Steen showed the crowd photo after graphic photo of damaged and dead cows, calves, bulls, and even a mule, that he says were attacked by wolves, even though ODFW denies many of them.

Showing one bull that Steen said was a classic example of a wolf attack, he said that even with the overwhelming evidence, ODFW officials would not admit it was a wolf attack.

"They are like a

*-See WOLF FORUM/PAGE SEVEN*

# Soldier injured in Afghan riots

**By Andrea Di Salvo**

Kent Ployhar, a 42-year-old staff sergeant with the Army National Guard out of Washington, was injured last month by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Afghanistan.

Ployhar, who was stationed in the Kunduz province of northern Afghanistan, was one of seven soldiers seriously injured when Afghans rioted over the apparently accidental burning of Korans at a military installation in the country.

His mother, Alice Ployhar of Heppner, said she heard about the attack on the news before receiving word from the Army. While she has not been able to visit her son, she said the Army has been good about keeping her informed of his condition. She has also been able to speak with him on the phone.

Ployhar was on his third deployment, following previous deployments to both Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Alice Ployhar, the soldier sustained shrapnel injuries to an arm and both legs, as well as a broken leg. He is now being treated at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX. She said she expects him to return to his home in Kennewick, WA after treatment.

**Army National Guard SST. Kent Ployhar**

"He himself wants to go back to Afghanistan," she said, "but he doesn't think [the Army] will let him go because of too many injuries."

# MCSD to cut 3-1/2 positions; approves serial levy

**By April Sykes**

Morrow County School Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the board, at their Monday night meeting in Irrigon, that the district will have to cut 3-1/2 "full-time equivalent" positions to meet the district's declining budget for the 2012-13 school year. He also said that budget cuts will increase the class size in district schools by 10 percent.

Dirksen said that the positions include one and a half FTE counseling positions and two elementary teaching positions. Two temporary teaching positions will also not be renewed. The number of teaching positions originally scheduled to be cut was reduced by resignations and retirements. The actual teachers involved will be determined in a RIF (reduction in force, depending on seniority and other factors) after all the notices of resignations, retirements and transfers have been determined by the district.

Dirksen said he had yet to tighten up the classified positions.

Dirksen pointed out, in response to questions concerning cuts in athletic programs to help shave the budget, that cuts will not be made in athletics and activities because they are zero-funded by the school district. Extra curricular athletics and activities are funded by the Morrow County Unified Recreation District, not the school district.

Board Chair Thad Killingbeck commended Dirksen for his transparency and handling of a sensitive situation and also thanked the building principals.

*-See MCSD MAKES CUTS/ PAGE EIGHT*

# Showers, cool weather forecast for St. Pat's

The weather forecast for the Heppner area for most of St. Patrick's weekend is cool with a chance of showers.

Thursday, March 15, the forecast is for showers, with the high expected to be 54 degrees, the low 38 and a 50 percent chance of rain.

On Friday, March 16, the forecast is for a few showers, a high of 48 and a low of 35, with a 30 percent chance of rain.

On Saturday, March 17, the forecast is cloudy with a high of 44, a low of 30 and a 20 percent chance of rain.

On Sunday, March 18, the forecast is mostly cloudy with a high of 46, a low of 26 and a 10 percent chance of rain.

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