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Gazette Times

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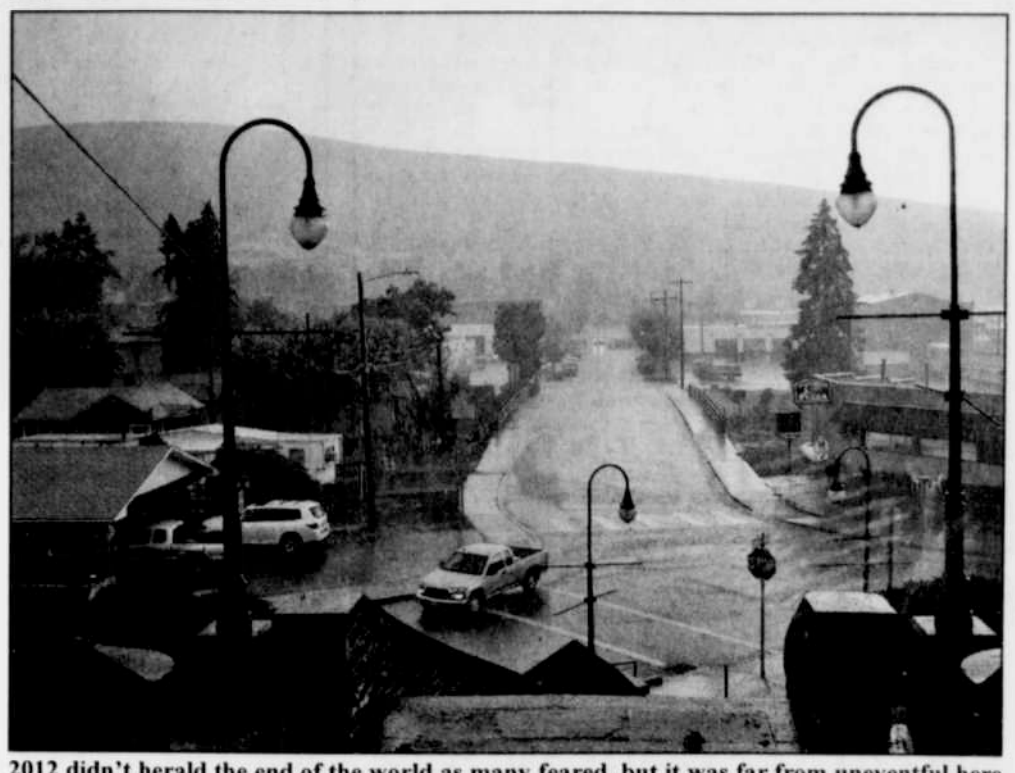
2012: The year in review



2012 didn't herald the end of the world as many feared, but it was far from uneventful here in Morrow County. Above: A view from the Morrow County Courthouse in Heppner during the hailstorm that swept through South Morrow County on July 17, 2012. Vehicles around the area received broken windows and dents during the storm; roof damage was also reported in some places, as well as some minor crop issues. All in all, though, the county emerged largely unscathed from a storm that hammered the area with hailstones that some witnesses said were as large as ping-pong balls. *See page FOUR for more photos from 2012.*

Advocate for disabled seeks to help Heppner

By Andrea Di Salvo

An area disability advocate is trying to break ground in offering services and options to persons with disabilities in South Morrow County.

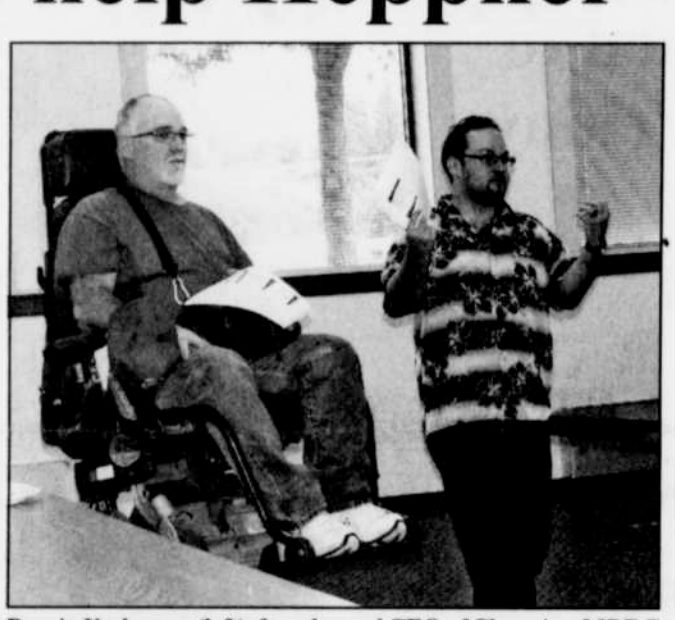
Darrin Umbarger, CEO and founder of Clearview Mediation and Disability Resource in Pendleton, is working to gain support to expand his work to an office in Heppner, which would also serve Lexington, Ione and outlying areas.

"I want to be able to spend time over there helping whoever needs it. Right now it's a community not being served," he said.

Umbarger, 47, has first-hand knowledge of the struggles faced by those living with disabilities. He has lived with Multiple Sclerosis more than half his life, since the age of 23.

A Pendleton native, Umbarger met his future wife, Carol, in the ninth grade. The childhood sweethearts were married in 1986 and their son, Jeremy, was born in 1987. After working in the lumber mill in Pilot Rock, Umbarger started his own carpet and upholstery cleaning business. Things looked good for the new family. Then, one night in 1988, everything changed.

"I went to bed one night in perfect health and woke up the next morning and couldn't walk, talk, do anything. It happened overnight. Surprise!"



Darrin Umbarger (left), founder and CEO of Clearview MDRC in Pendleton, with son Jeremy at a Heppner Chamber of Commerce meeting. The pair was at the meeting to speak about treatment of disabled persons. *-Photo by David Sykes*

Umbarger, who now spends about 99 percent of his time in a wheelchair, said that, at first, his disability embarrassed him. He ran the Pendleton Smoke Shop and then UB Fishin', a business that manufactured and sold fishing tackle throughout North America. The whole time, he said he kept to himself, engaging the public as little as possible. After a while, though, he saw a need he thought he could help meet. That was when he started Clearview MDRC.

"There are so many needs...the communities are rural, it's not like the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is big in this area. There are so many places that are hard to get into. There are so many things they could do cheaply to make places more accessible. We're trying to break down barriers; it just helps everybody," Umbarger said.

He started Clearview, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, to address the needs he saw in his own life and for others living with disabilities. Clearview offers a variety of services, including job development, working to make buildings more accessible, peer-to-peer counseling, etiquette and sensitivity training, and a medical loan closet, from which they loan supplies such as wheelchairs and canes at no cost to those who need them.

"With the medical loan closet we have a lot of different types of medical equipment that we loan out, because some people only need it for a short time," he said, giving the example that sometimes electric wheelchairs break down or run out of power during a prolonged electrical outage, making a push wheelchair necessary for a short time.

He said he would now like to expand the work he does in Pendleton to include Heppner and the rest of South Morrow.

"People over there need recognition," said Umbarger.

Umbarger said the majority of the work they do in Pendleton deals with helping people with disabilities find employment, mostly

-See DISABILITY ADVOCATE/PAGE SIX

Planning warm-water therapy at water park

This article was provided by the Community Health Improvement Partnership of Morrow County.

If you want to increase your winter activity level but find yourself with limited options due to age, injury or disease, you may be interested in the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) of Morrow County's latest endeavor.

"To encourage individuals to increase daily physical activity, our communities need safe routes to walk and bike, as well as parks, playgrounds and community centers where people can find activities that are exciting and challenging enough to keep them engaged," says a spokesperson for the group.

To this end, a new workgroup is currently being formed in Heppner in partnership with the Willow Creek Park District to reestablish operation of Willow Creek Water Park warm water therapy pool.

The project is part of CHIP's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and disease/illness prevention, physical activity and the development of fitness infrastructure. CHIP workgroups continue to meet throughout the county to identify obstacles and implement solutions, such as providing warm-water therapy.

Aquatic physical therapy uses buoyancy and resistance of water to create a unique exercise environment. Warm water pools make exercise easier and less painful for people recovering from injuries or suffering from chronic conditions. Aquatic physical therapy also uses hydrostatic pressure to decrease swelling and improve joint position. The warmth of the water relaxes muscles and improves blood flow to injured areas. People with muscle spasms, back pain, arthritis, multiple sclerosis and fibromyalgia typically find aquatic therapy especially beneficial.

Repair of the hydrotherapy pool is already underway but the working group is tasked with identifying means to cover the operational expenses for heat, maintenance and personnel.

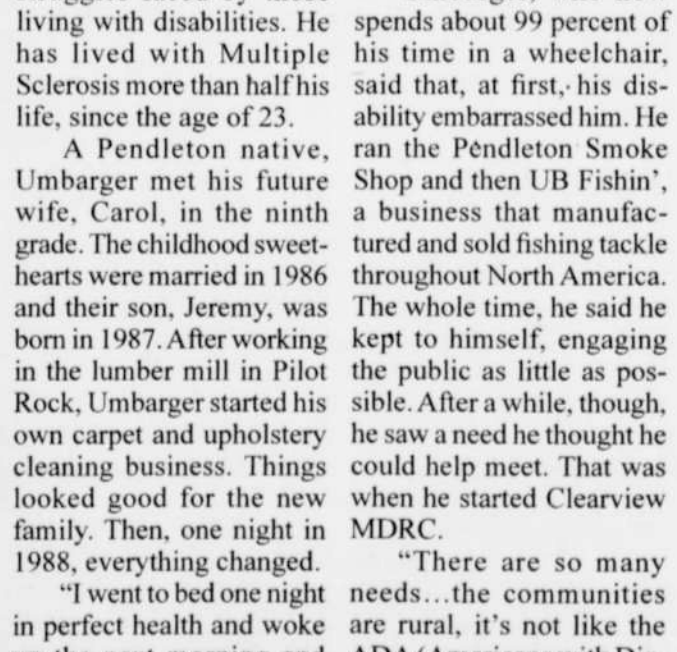
"As someone with MS, I experience stiffness in my legs, and the therapy pool gives me the ability to move more freely and actually strengthen my muscles," says workgroup representative Merilee McDowell. "I want this for many others, which is the reason I'm asking for your help."

Anyone who would be interested in using, or who supports an individual who would be interested in using, the pool year-round is asked to volunteer and help make this worthwhile project happen. Contact McDowell at 541-571-5853 for details.

Fair and rodeo queen celebrates Christmas

Krysten Powell (left), 2013 Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Queen, visits with Santa Claus and Ivy Sandford during the festivities at the Celebrate Heppner Christmas dinner on Dec. 20. *-Contributed photo*

One gigantic stocking



Manager of the Heppner mini-mart Dawn Brosnan presents Derek Howard, 12, with the big Christmas stocking he won from Devin Oil. Derek is the son of DeRina and Matt Howard of Heppner. *–Photo by April Sykes*

Chamber annual luncheon this week

This week's meeting of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce will be the chamber's annual luncheon, held on Thursday, Jan. 3, at noon in the St. Patrick's Senior Center dining room. Chamber members will vote on proposed by-law revisions at the meeting.

Cost of lunch is $10; Stable of Youth will cater. Lunch attendees are asked to RSVP no later than noon the Wednesday before.

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