

# Coffee Hour host chosen St. Pat's grand marshal

## Tom Melton to lead parade for 31<sup>st</sup> Wee Bit O' Ireland

By Andrea Di Salvo

The grand marshal of this year's Great Green Parade isn't a native of

Heppner, but his face—and his voice and ready wit—will be well-known to most along the parade route.

the 31<sup>st</sup> Wee Bit O' Ireland weekend.

"It's embarrassing, but it's an honor," says Melton.

raised in the city. He graduated from Pendleton High School in 1971 and then left for Treasure Valley



A Coffee Hour all-star lineup featuring (L-R) Father Gerry Condon, Dominic Monahan, U.S. Rep. Greg Walden and Tom Melton. Melton has a long history of involvement with Heppner's Wee Bit O' Ireland celebration as yearly host of the KUMA Coffee Hour. —Photo by Sandy Matthews

Tom Melton, host of the KUMA Coffee Hour that broadcasts live from the Elk's every year during the St. Patrick's celebration, has been chosen as the parade grand marshal for

"It's a wonderful experience to be part of (the St. Patrick's celebration) even if I'm not the grand marshal."

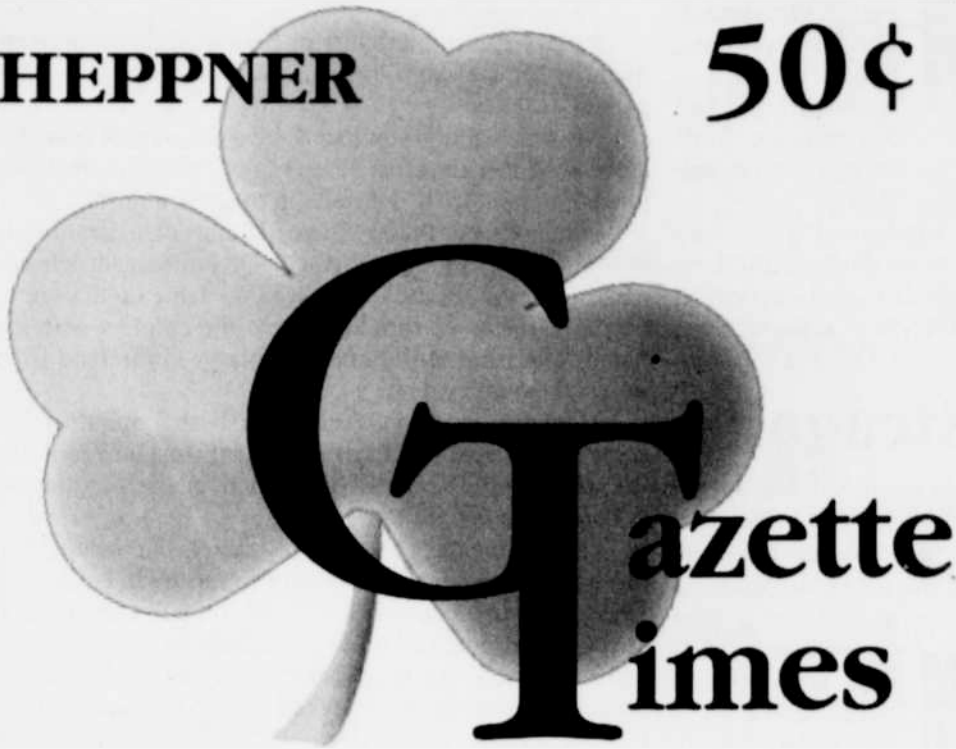
Melton is a true Pendleton, OR native, born and

Community College in Ontario, OR to study business administration, the only three years of his life that he would live away from his

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HEPPNER

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## Planner wants to see county benefit from energy projects

By David Sykes

Morrow County Planner Carla McLane would like to see the people of Morrow County "reap the economic benefit" of the many energy projects scheduled to be constructed here, she told the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group



Morrow County Planner Carla McLane, featured speaker.

(WCVEDG) at its annual meeting last week.

McLane was the featured speaker at the meeting, which also saw the group elect Nancy Snider as this year's president. WCVEDG serves the South Morrow County area promoting economic development.

McLane said there are up to 14 separate energy and other business development projects coming to Morrow County over the next several years; we will be seeing an influx of, first, temporary construction workers, and then, hopefully, more permanent jobs as the projects are completed. She cited the Cascade Crossing transmission, Coyote Springs substation,

Carty gas-generating plant, UEC wind farm, and Ella Butte and Heppner Wind wind farms, as well as various data farms, substations and other projects at the Port of Morrow, as to what is coming to the county.

McLane said last year when working with the various project developers, each one said they had

—See ENERGY PROJECTS/PAGE SIX

## Mustangs advance to quarterfinals



The Mustang girls' basketball team huddles to formulate strategy during the first-round battle against Vernonia last week. The Mustangs had a plan, and it showed, with a 62-33 victory catapulting them into the state quarterfinals in Pendleton. —Contributed photo

The Heppner Mustangs jumped out to a 15-9 lead. Things cooled off for the Mustangs as the Loggers fought back into the contest to pull ahead 23-21 with two minutes to go in the second quarter. Bas-

championship playoffs. —See MUSTANG BASKETBALL/PAGE THREE

## Harvesting 100 years of memories from the MoCo Fair

### Morrow County Fair and OTPR Queen coronation to be held

The annual Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Queen Coronation dinner and auction will take place this Saturday, March 2. Festivities will begin at 6 p.m. and will include a prime rib and chicken dinner, dessert dash, open bar, silent and live auction, entertainment and more at the Morrow county Fairgrounds.

This year, the county is celebrating the fair's 100<sup>th</sup> year, and the rodeos and

royalty's 91<sup>st</sup> year. Queen Krysten Powell anticipates a great year, with many appearances, parades, rodeos and fairs. She has been attending several neighboring counties' royalty coronations already this winter. She says she is excited to get started with her local appearances, as well.

Major sponsors for the queen are: Community Bank, Queen's official belt buckle; MCGG/Green Feed, Queen's of-

ficial chaps; OTPR Board, Queen's official mount, bridle set and custom breast collar; and Willow Creek Storage, Queen's official crown.

"It is sure to be a great evening of good food, great people and great auction items," says Court director Sylvia Sandford. "Please come out and support our new queen."

For more information or tickets, call Sandford at 541-571-5930.



Queen Krysten Powell

## USAID honors Ione native

Ione native Michael "Butch" Bengé was honored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on Wednesday, Feb. 13, in Washington, D.C.

Bengé, a retired Foreign Service Officer, received the Purple Heart and Prisoner of War medals for his sacrifice in the line of duty.

Bengé is the son of the late Terrel and Mary Bengé. He grew up in the Heppner/Ione area and graduated from Ione High School. His niece, Teresa Hughes Bedortha, still lives in the area and his nephew, Terry Hughes, lives in La Grande, OR. Bengé now resides in Falls Church, VA.

Bengé joined USAID in 1965 and was posted to Vietnam as a Provincial Development Officer based in the central highlands of South Vietnam. He served simultaneously as a senior civilian advisor on the joint civilian-military Civil Op-

erations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program.

In 1968, after surviving an all-night siege during the TET offensive, Bengé radioed for an air evacuation of American civilians in the area. He was captured by enemy forces while en route to notify four American teachers and several missionaries of the planned evacuation.

Bengé spent the following five years as a prisoner of war in numerous camps in North and South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. During this time, he spent over two years in solitary confinement, one year in a black box and one year in a cage. Although a civilian, Bengé served for a period of time as the deputy to the senior ranking officer during their captivity at the "Plantation Gardens" in Hanoi.

After his release as part of a prisoner exchange in 1973, Bengé resumed his



Ione native Michael "Butch" Bengé (far left) was recently awarded POW and Purple Heart medals for his service in Vietnam. —Contributed photo

career with USAID. He served another 33 years before retiring in 2006.



The medals Bengé received earlier this month. —Contributed photo

## Health district board contemplates supplemental levy

By April Sykes

The Morrow County Health District Board, at their Feb. 25 meeting in Ione, pondered the prospect of putting a tax levy before the voters once again.

While the district has currently been doing well financially, board members voiced concern over numerous looming issues, which could once again put the district at risk and necessitate a supplemental levy.

Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney expressed concern over a possible elimination of the district's current status of cost-based reimbursement for critical access hospitals. This means that now the district is reimbursed for Medicare patient services at a rate

which approximates the costs the district expends to provide these services. Prior to receiving the critical access hospital cost-based reimbursement designation, the district faced dissolution and imminent closure. Mahoney said she fears this could happen again.

"If cost-based reimbursement goes away, we'll be in serious, serious trouble," she added.

Another uncertainty is concerning Obamacare. At this juncture, no one really knows how a national health plan will affect patients' insurance plans and Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to clinics and small hospitals.

—See HEALTH DISTRICT/PAGE SEVEN

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