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The art of preserving Heppner's history

Area residents work to turn back time for the Morrow County Courthouse clock tower

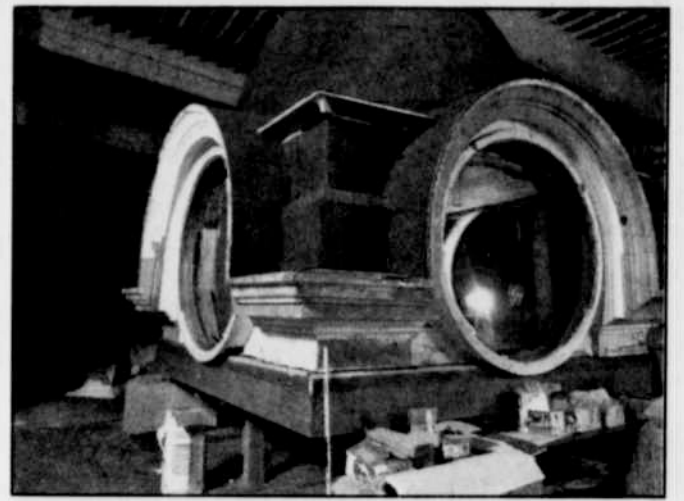
By Andrea Di Salvo
It looks like something from a movie, the empty

industrial building, tarp partitions and high-powered lights reminiscent of something from Area 51 or a high-tech CSI investigation. Rather than being the set of a futuristic drama, though, the site within Heppner's old Kinzua Mill is deeply rooted in Heppner's past.

That's where local contractor Rod Wilson and "helper guy" Tim Adams are working to restore the Morrow County Courthouse clock tower to its former glory.

Wilson, the 49-year-old owner of Wilson Construction in Heppner, says the renovation work is "not really a high production thing," but more a labor of love for the old tower.

"We've worked almost



Wilson shines a light into the interior of the clock tower where it sits in the process of restoration. -Photo by Mallorie Jones

the tower. The assumption, Wilson says, is that it dates back to 1902, the year the courthouse was completed.

"We can't find a lot of history on it," says Wilson, adding that there are blueprints at the courthouse but not a lot of old pictures of the bell, the tower, or what it took to put them up at the turn of the 20th century.

"The most amazing thing about it is that they built that thing way up there over a hundred years ago and we don't know how they did it," he says.

Wilson says that there are a few clues to the past, such as a piece of tin found on the tower imprinted with "American Sheet Steel Co.; Apollo Best Bloom; New York." His best guess, he says, is that the pieces—or some of them—may have been made in New York and then shipped out and

tower. The oldest dated name belongs to Red Hicks, who recorded his presence for posterity on June 14, 1903...the date of the historic Heppner Flood. One name, Tony Clement, is as recent as October of 2012.

Aside from the names inscribed inside the tower, Wilson and Adams also counted up to nine bullet holes, apparently from people shooting at the tower "just for fun." Two holes were in the topmost ball on top of the tower.

With all that history at stake, the men know they have to do the job right, Wilson says.

"The biggest thing was deciding how to put it back together with the right materials that will make it last," he says.

Aside from the actual structure of the tower, Wilson and Adams will



The bell from the courthouse tower. -Photo by Mallorie Jones

two months on this and this is where we've gotten so far," says Wilson, gesturing at a half-built platform and gutted tower. "That's working almost full time."

The platform, or clock floor, Wilson says, will hold the cradle in which the bell rests, as well as the pedestals and pillars that will, in turn, hold the tower itself once it's completed and returned to its spot atop the courthouse. The bell also sits in the old mill building, waiting to have the paint stripped and a new, clear sealant applied.

The tower itself will take a bit more work.

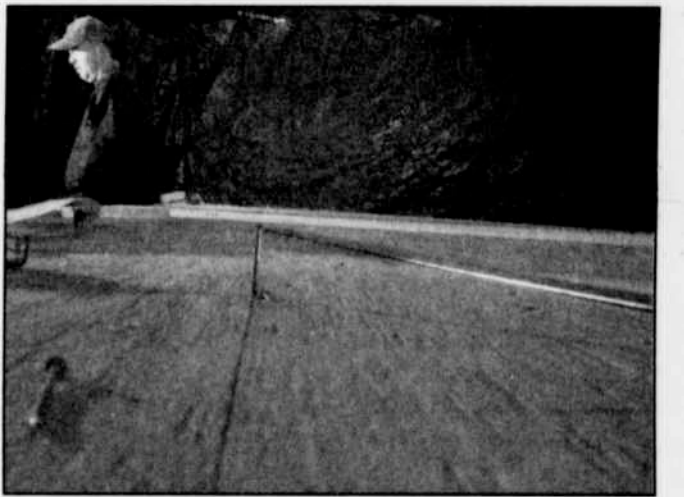
"In the beginning it was in very poor shape. It was leaning out toward the street. The supports that were holding it up were starting to fail," says Wilson. "When we got it down, we could see what kind of poor shape the tin was in."

Much of the outside of the tower had been covered with painted tin, not wood as many assumed. Wilson says the tin was rusted through and leaking, letting moisture through into the wood structure beneath and rotting the wood. The men have redone the tower itself, reframing and reshaping it with new wood, over which they placed ice shield. It will next be topped with galvanized iron.

Wilson says they worked their way through the renovation carefully, leaving intact parts of the structure that were still in good repair. He says they also preserved as much as was usable of both the wood and the tin from the tower to re-use in its repair.

"It would have been easier to build a new one," he says, only half joking. "We're trying to make it as authentic as we can. We're looking for old pictures or what people remember it looking like in the past."

That may be the difficult part. Not a lot is available on the history of



Rod Wilson stands next to the clock floor he and Tim Adams are constructing. -Photos by Mallorie Jones

assembled locally.

One of the most interesting pieces of history on the tower lies in the many names written inside. More than 50 names are scrawled on the wood inside the tower, many with dates that span more than a century. It seems that many locals, whether maintenance workers or adventure seekers, couldn't help leaving a bit of history behind in the prominent

rewire the light inside the tower. Wilson says other parts of the tower and clock have been farmed out all over the Pacific Northwest. The pedestals will be new and re-skinned with aluminum; the metal work will be done by David Rich, a tinsmith in Portland, OR. The pillars and caps are being made by Turnco Architectural

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'I foresee a happy Halloween...'



Kathy Turner foresees the future for a skeptical Velma (from Scooby-Doo) at St. Patrick's Senior Center last week during Halloween festivities in Heppner. -Photo by David Sykes

-See PAGE EIGHT for more Halloween photos

HEPPNER

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Local man spends weekends in the fast lane

By David Sykes

When most people think about a Sunday drive, it usually means a drive in the country or a trip to the Tri-Cities for some shopping and lunch. However, for one Heppner man, it's a trip around the race track behind the wheel of his own BMW race car.

Mondays through Fridays you can find Russell Seewald behind a desk at the Bank of Eastern Oregon, where he works as an agricultural and commercial loan officer. But come weekends, Seewald has a hobby that most of us never get to experience. He races cars at several Pacific NW race tracks, and he really enjoys it.



Russell Seewald with his BMW 325i racing car. -Photo by David Sykes

to when he was attending a banking conference in Phoenix years ago. He was working for an Idaho bank at the time, before he and his family moved to Heppner, and the conference offered several different options for entertainment.

"They had a choice of activities like golf and other things, but they also had driving school. I always like to watch racing so I thought, 'That is what I want to do.'" He tried it and was hooked.

From there he joined the Sports Car Club of America and started attending small driving events that were basically cones set up in parking lots where people would use the family car and start driving. They cost about \$20 and the top speed wasn't more than 50 miles per hour, he says.

From there Seewald started entering hill-climbing events sponsored by the Northwest Hill Climbing Association, where one car at a time

would race up a hill and be timed. He says he still holds several course records from those events.

He bought his first BMW 328 for racing because he always liked this model and "there are a lot of them around," for parts and such, he says. He built that car for racing and attended the Bob Bondurant driving school to become qualified to join the Sports Car Club of America and begin racing. He raced that BMW for two years from 2009 to 2010, entering races mostly in the Portland area, including the Rose Cup.

"I liked that race," he says. "There are drivers from all over the West there."

From there he joined the International Conference of Sports Cars, and that opened up more racing opportunities for him on tracks in Oregon and Washington. One of the goals of the association, and

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G-T Trophy Corner



Dave Pranger of Heppner harvested this 6x7 bull elk in the Heppner Unit on Saturday, Oct. 26. -Contributed photo

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