

HEPPNER

50¢



VOL. 133 N.O. 3 8 Pages Wednesday, January 15, 2014 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## Morrow County schools plan for post-Labor Day start in 2014

By April Sykes

The Morrow County School year will start after Labor Day this year, the first time in around 10 years, said Morrow County School District Superintendent Dirk Dirksen at the MCSD Board meeting Monday night in Irrigon. The board voted in favor of the post-Labor Day start with board member Barney Lindsay voting against it.

Dirksen said that a tally of staff preferences of either a before Labor Day start or an after Labor Day start showed that staff preferred a post-Labor Day start almost two to one, 87 to 47.

Dirksen said that he was surprised about the staff preference, commenting that he has been on the record favoring the pre-Labor Day start in order to get in as many school days as possible prior to student testing. He noted, though, that it was a very early Labor Day, with it falling on Monday, Sept. 1. He added, however, that he wanted to support the staff feedback on the issue. He had originally planned a two-year calendar, but then recommended that the board approve only a

one-year calendar, which they did.

"I think this will be a good year to take a good look at it," he said.

Lindsay said he voted against the post-Labor Day start because it would lessen the number of school days prior to standardized testing.

The board also accepted the district's financial audit conducted by the Oster Professional Group, Certified Public Accountants.

"It was a very good report," noted Dirksen.

The Oster Professional Group noted, however, as in prior audits, a "significant deficiency in internal control related to a lack of proper segregation of incompatible duties," including the "management point to stress the importance of proper segregation of duties and to provide guidance in addressing this control deficiency."

Oster did, however, acknowledge that "given the limited staff on hand in the business office, proper segregation of duties is extremely difficult." They recommended "involving people in non-

financial positions to assist in addressing the district's lack of proper segregation of duties." They acknowledged that the district has made significant improvements toward segregation of duties.

Oster further noted that they were unable to reconcile some issues with the capital assets listing maintained by the district.

In other business, the board:

- received the following enrollment report as of January: A.C. Houghton Elementary School, Irrigon-272; Sam Boardman Elementary, Boardman-326; Heppner Elementary-170; Irrigon Elementary-174; Windy River Elementary, Boardman-201; Heppner High School-165; Irrigon Junior/Senior High School-387; Riverside High School, Boardman-390; Morrow Education Center-32; total-2,117.

- approved the following employment action: resignations-TaMara Thornton, IJSH science teacher, Sara Bevington, IES secretary, Cheryl

- See SCHOOL DISTRICT/PAGE FIVE

## City okays permit for county office construction

By David Sykes

The Heppner Planning Commission Jan. 6 gave its approval to a plan by Morrow County to buy three homes next to the courthouse, tear them down and build a brand-new, 10,000-square-foot, \$1.75 million office complex. Since the property is zoned residential construction of the new offices building required a conditional use permit from the city, which the planning commission approved.

Expected to move into the new county offices are health, juvenile and other offices from the Gilliam Bisbee building, and accounting and other services from the annex on Rock Street. There will also be two conference rooms that will be available for public use.

One of the major conditions on the approval of the new building was for the county to improve surfacing and widening of Gilmore Street behind the courthouse from Willow to Cannon streets, and also improve drainage on August and Willow Streets.

The permit also focused on landscaping and spelled out over 30 landscaping requirements including use of trees and shrubs and types of plants the county was allowed to use. In addition the permit addressed parking and traffic issues associated with the increased traffic that would be using Gilmore to access the new office buildings.

Formal announcement of the project was made Dec. 18, and the sale has closed on three residences to

the north of the courthouse. Those structures will be torn down and the facility will be built on that property. Lead contractor for the project will be the Pendleton-based Wenaha Group.

Wenaha Group provides construction management and consulting services to organizations, corporations, and tribes throughout the region, and is a certified Indian-owned business. Tallman said the company has committed to use as much local labor as possible for the construction, including subcontracting when possible.

The local Intermountain Educational Service District will also be involved, overseeing the tear down of the homes and construction of the new

- See COUNTY OFFICES APPROVED/PAGE THREE

## Town and Country Awards planned for Jan. 16

Heppner Chamber of Commerce's annual Town and Country Community Awards will be held on Thursday, January 16, at the Morrow County Fairgrounds.

The event will start at 6 p.m. with a no-host social hour provided by Bucknum's. The dinner and

program will begin at 7 p.m. Tickets are available at Bank of Eastern Oregon, Heppner chamber office, Community Bank and Murray's for \$20 per person.

The theme for this year is "Heppner Magic, It's the People." As in years past, special recognition

will be given to Man of the Year, Woman of the Year, Business of the Year, and Citizen-Educator of the Year, as well as a Youth Award and Lifetime Achievement Award.

The event is sponsored by Ambre Energy's Morrow Pacific Project and Portland General Electric.

## City council adopts revised property lien ordinance

Aimed only at utility bills and property cleanup

By David Sykes

The Heppner City Council voted Monday in favor of a property lien ordinance that gives the city manager the authority to place liens on homes that do not pay their water and sewer bills, or where clean-up is done on a property and the city is not paid back for the work. The ordinance is a scaled-back version of a proposed ordinance presented to the council last month, which would have given the city even broader lien power.

City Manager Kim Cutsforth said the intent of the new ordinance is for the city to be able to collect unpaid utility bills when a property is sold. She said the ordinance will also give the city the power to place a lien on property when the city does "nuisance abatement" or clean-up on a property. The city would clean up the property and then bill the property owner for the clean-up, and if the bill is not paid, then the lien would be placed.

While the ordinance passed Monday is a pared-down version of the one presented for consideration last month, it added a provision that the city would have the option to foreclose on property if it so desires, although Cutsforth said the aim of the city is

mainly to collect bills when a property is sold.

The lien process would start when a water and sewer bill is more than 90 days past due. The city would notify the property owner in writing of the overdue bill. The property owner would then have 10 days in which to pay the delinquent charges, or the lien would be placed. The city would then notify the property owner by certified mail that the lien had been placed. The lien would be recorded against the property at the courthouse and remain there until the bill, along with filing and other fees, was paid. The city will charge nine percent interest on unpaid bills. If the city does foreclose on a property, according to the ordinance, those charges will also be added to the lien amount.

Although the council voted unanimously in favor of the new ordinance, it still has to be published in the newspaper, and the city is required to hold a public hearing before the law actually goes into effect.

In a related matter Cutsforth asked the council to approve a resolution allowing the city to use an Oregon law to better collect for clean-up work done on foreclosed properties within the city.

Heppner has about four homes currently in foreclosure. Most of these homes become the property of large banks located far from Heppner. These homes can become neglected with debris, weed, rodent or other problems. Cutsforth says repeated attempts to contact these large banks, urging them to maintain their properties, has not been successful, and the city needs a way to perform nuisance abatement and then get paid back for the work. By adopting a certain Oregon law, the city will have more legal power to enforce nuisance prevention on foreclosed properties.

In other business at Monday's meeting the council heard the following report for Dec. work from Public Works Director Chad Doherty:

**Water Dept.**

• The city was called out to fix four frozen water meters.

• The booster pumps at reservoir two froze. This resulted in having to get pumps rebuilt. Steps have been taken to make sure this doesn't happen again.

**Sewer Dept.**

• The city replaced the old septic receiving station

- See HEPPNER APPROVES LIEN ORDINANCE/PAGE FIVE

## Rill to retire from Heppner Elementary at end of school year

By Andrea Di Salvo

Heppner Elementary School will lose another veteran teacher this year with the retirement of third-grade teacher Molly Rill. Rill's official retirement date was Dec. 1 but she says she will finish out the school year, with her last day in June.

Rill, who says she tries not to think about her 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday in a couple of weeks, is in her eighth year teaching third grade at HES. However, her history with the Morrow County School District goes back much further.

Rill was born and raised, as she says, "halfway to Condon," in the Liberty School Road area of South Morrow County. She attended HES and Heppner High School, where she served for a time as student body secretary before graduating in 1970.

She married local man Cecil Rill in 1980. The couple lived in Heppner for about a year and then moved out to the Rill farm, also on Liberty School Road, where they raised sons Lonnie and Leland. Rill still lives there, though Cecil passed away in 2011 and the boys are both currently living in Portland.

Rill's connection with MCSD began in 1984, when she went to work as secretary in the district office. She then moved to a position as accounts payable and investments clerk, where she stayed until 1990.



HES third-grade teacher Molly Rill stands in the doorway of the classroom where she has taught students for the last eight years of her 15-year teaching career. Rill officially retired last month; her last day with her students will be in June of this year. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

"Then I got this harebrained idea that I wanted to go back to a college and get my degree and teach," she says.

She quit the school district and took a job as office coordinator at the local OSU Extension Service. She also enrolled in online classes through Eastern Oregon University. She says her options for online courses were limited, and an online education degree wasn't on the table, so she worked toward her bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a minor in psychology. It was slow going while working full time and raising a family; she finally obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1998. She then quit her job at the Extension office and enrolled in a master's program, obtaining her Master of Teacher Education degree in 1999.

She immediately

returned to the Morrow County School District, though this time in a different role, as second-grade teacher at Sam Boardman Elementary.

After that, she says, things were a little "crazy" for a while.

She moved to Heppner Elementary to teach kindergarten in 2000, then stayed in Heppner the following year to teach second and third grade. In 2002 it was back to Boardman for second grade, followed by another year at Sam Boardman teaching fourth grade. In 2004 she returned to Heppner to take on first and second grade; 2005 saw her teaching second and third grade in Heppner.

"You realize I moved rooms every time, even when I switched grades in Heppner," she says, - See RILL RETIRES/PAGE FOUR