

HEPPNER

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## City says late water bills under \$5 won't get late fee charge

By David Sykes

The city of Heppner will no longer charge a late fee on water and sewer bills less than \$5 not paid by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, it was announced Monday night. In July of 2013 the city council had adopted a resolution that a flat late fee of \$5 will be charged to all accounts with any amount owing after the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month; however, the city administration has apparently been granting waivers and not charging for overdue balances less than \$5.

The issue came up when Lee Berlinsky, who has lived in Heppner eight years but is out of town some of the time, came to Monday's council meeting and said his water bill normally runs \$49. Berlinsky said he paid the city \$50 a head of time, and then was surprised when his water bill came back at \$55 and subsequently was billed the \$5 late fee on the \$5 unpaid balance. He said this represented a 230 percent Annual Percentage Rate (APR) late fee on the overdue amount which he thought was "abusive."

Berlinsky said he called Mayor Joe Perry to talk about it and was told that the fee was fair and that the city could actually, based on other cities' charges, be justified in charging its users an even higher late fee.

After hearing Berlinsky's complaint at Monday's council meeting Perry said he would not discuss the bill at the meeting; however, city Manager Kim Cutsforth said if Berlinsky would have called her, she would have waived the \$5 late charge.

"You could call us and we are happy to work with people," Cutsforth said. "We apologize for any confusion."

City councilmember and mayoral candidate Skip Matthews told Berlinsky

that the charge is in fact not a late fee.

"That fee is not a late fee; it is an administrative fee," he said. "The utility commission said it was more than fair when they adopted it. It has nothing to do with APR."

According to the public notice and resolution passed by the council the city changed from an interest-based late charge to the flat fee of \$5 in August of 2013. Matthews said the \$5 handles administrative costs in rebilling an overdue account.

On Tuesday after the meeting Cutsforth told the Gazette-Times that, "The city position is not clarified. I believe that the intent was the late fee would encourage our customers to pay on time. And yes, if the overdue amount is less than \$5, there is no late fee. The utility commission will be discussing raising this amount at their meeting on Thursday," she said.

In other business the council was told that there are problems with drainage on Water St. after the major rehabilitation project, and that the city engineer would be in town this week to talk about the problems. Cutsforth said there is \$11,000 held back from the project that could be used for fixes. Also she said the construction company has a bond but she does not want to go that way, as then the city would have to do the work itself.

"We don't want to fix it; we want them to fix it," she said.

In other business the council heard a report from Chad Doherty of the Public Works.

### Water Report

-Fixed a water leak on our side of a home owner's service. Replaced water meter at the same address.

-Installed new water sample station at Public

### Works Shop

-Installed safety eye wash station in chlorine room at Reservoir 1.

-The city crew dug up and fixed a leaky water meter at the grade school.

### Sewer Dept.

-Cleaned contact basins at sewer plant, twice.

-The city crew hauled multiple loads of biosolids to range land site.

### Streets Dept.

-The city crew repaired the sidewalk on Water Street. Painted the Shamrock before the rodeo parade.

-The city crew hauled spoils out of city yard.

-Took down rodeo banners.

-Repaired two deck boards on Kirk Street bridge.

-Painted the red and white caution stripes at grade school.

-Set up and took down barricades for rodeo parade.

### Parks Dept.

-The city crew fixed the ramp out at Hager Park restroom.

-Pulled all weeds in new soccer field and planted grass in bare spots. Cut

## Fairgrounds bleachers safer thanks to volunteers

Heppner High School Friday night recognized the engineers, welders, designers and painters responsible for the beautiful new hand rails installed at the football field grandstands.

The "Old Boys" firm of Archie Ball, Butch Laughlin, Don Stroeber and Sonny Biddle are responsible for taking on this job and making the bleachers easier to access and safer.

"They saw a need and went to work" said Greg Grant, athletic director at Heppner High School. "They were not satisfied



Dedicated local volunteers Archie Ball, Butch Laughlin, Don Stroeber and Sonny Biddle built and installed the handrails that now make the bleachers at the Heppner football field safer and easier to navigate. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

until they had it perfect. I think they looked at a dozen other stadiums to find the best design."

"It is really cool to live and work in a place where people have ownership, take pride and have initiative to get things like this done," Grant added.

## It's your turn...

Readers invited to weigh in on G-T candidates' forum

The Heppner Gazette-Times will publish a candidates' forum for Heppner City Council and Heppner Mayor in an upcoming issue before the November general election.

As part of this process, we're inviting our readers

to weigh in with questions they would like to see answered by the candidates. Simply fill out the form below and submit it in person or by mail or fax, or email your question to editor@rapidservice.net Friday, Sept. 26.

Your candidate question:

Form for submitting candidate questions

Return to:

Heppner Gazette-Times  
P.O. Box 337 / Heppner, OR 97836  
Fax: 541-676-9211 editor@rapidservice.net  
Questions will be selected and may be edited at the editor's discretion

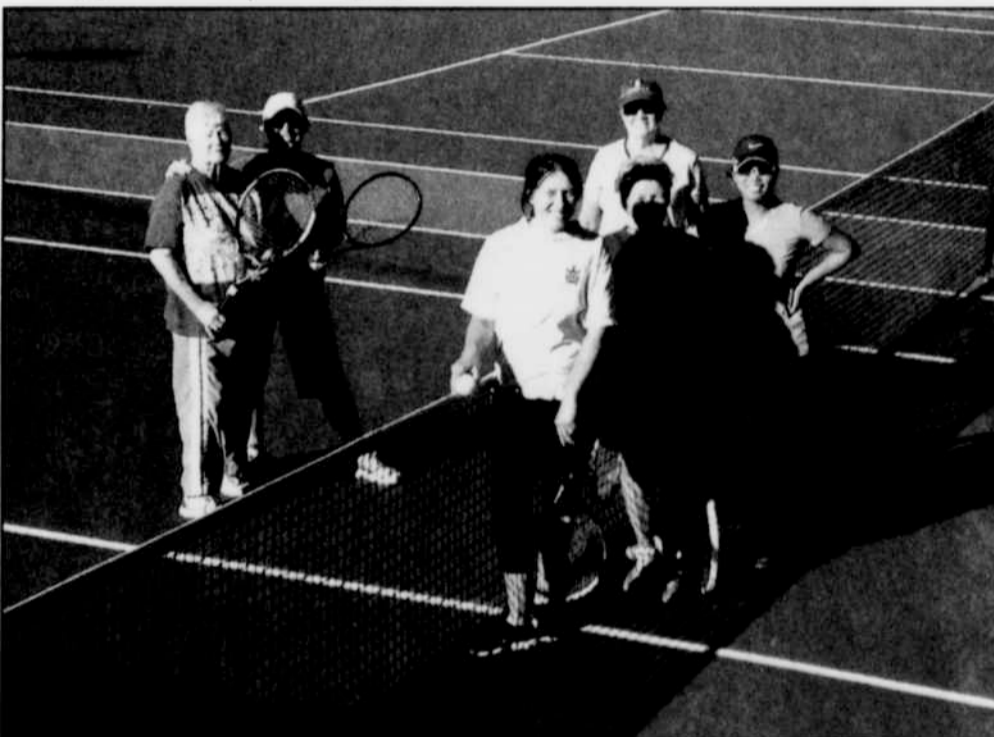
## New surface gives Heppner tennis courts new life

By Doris Brosnan

Thursday, Sept. 11, was a red-letter day on the Heppner tennis courts. On that morning, six players were using the singles and doubles courts at the same time—a first that these players could remember, a definite first on the newly resurfaced courts.

After City Manager Kim Cutsforth's research early this spring and communication with Heppner schools administration, Morrow County administration, and Willow Creek Park District administration, the resurfacing of the tennis courts became a reality in late July. The Willow Creek Park District funded the project as part of its community outreach program, and the resurfacing job was coordinated with the striping work at the new basketball courts near the swimming pool.

This successful work delighted the few women who regularly use the courts and admit to having become "overzealous" in their requests for improvements at the courts. It has also been welcomed by some younger players. Playing on the courts last Thursday morning were women who are in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. Later in the day, teen-



Tennis lovers (from left) JoAnne Burleson, Sherry Ewing, Carie Brosnan, Doris Brosnan, Nancy Prophet and Diana Ball put the new tennis court surface to good use last Thursday, possibly the most traffic the courts have seen in some time. -Contributed photo

agers Kai Arbogast, DaiChi Walters, Earl Prophet and Justus Schoerborn practiced their skills at doubles... proof that the appeal of the courts spans generational and decades' lines.

Last spring, Arbogast, Walters and Brian Fowler played tennis as members

of the lone team, and now they can get in some extra practices without having to drive to Ione. At the end of summer school this last spring, Mary Ann Elguezabal gave each of her students a tennis racket and tennis balls, as well as a lesson with retired tennis

coach JoAnne Burleson, possibly stimulating interest in the sport among even younger Heppner students.

The welcome mat is out and the well-marked courts are weed-free and smooth, so everyone is encouraged to hit the courts for exercise and entertainment.

## Drivers on I-84 had bumpy ride Friday



Oregon Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) had its work cut out clearing rocks from I-84 when a truck pulling a belly dump trailer loaded with large rocks spilled its load onto the east-bound lanes near Boardman last Friday afternoon. ODOT and Oregon State Police responded to the scene. Only one vehicle was reported damaged. -Photo courtesy of Oregon State Police

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