

HEPPNER

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Gazette Times

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Post office bids Watkins flowery farewell



Heppner postal employee Barb Watkins received a flowery farewell on her final day at work on Friday, June 12. Watkins, 60, has worked for the Heppner post office for 22 years, since October of 1992. She says she started as a "casual" and then worked her way through part time postal worker before finally becoming a full-time clerk. Previous to that, she worked for 18 years at the Bank of Eastern Oregon. The Heppner native, who graduated from Heppner High School in 1973, says she is looking forward to retirement. "I'm looking forward to being a grandmother this year for the first time," she says. "That will probably fill my time." —Photo by David Sykes

Home lost in Biggs fire has Heppner ties



Connie Thurston, who works for TREO Ranches, sits amid the rubble that used to be her home in Biggs Junction. —Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

The owners of the home lost in the Biggs Junction fire last week have ties to Heppner, and Heppner locals are banding together to help the couple in their time of need.

Sam and Connie Thurston had to quickly evacuate their home with their two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter when winds drove the fire through the house they were renting. The couple escaped with their lives and the lives of

their dogs, but lost everything but their car and the clothes they were wearing in the fire. They reportedly did not have renters' insurance.

Sam at one time taught in Heppner, and Connie currently works for TREO Ranches and TREO Bike Tours as Safety Coordinator and Human Resource Person. The Gazette-Time was unable to reach the couple for an interview. —See BIGGS FIRE/PAGE FOUR

Heppner grad honors fallen linemen at NASCAR event



Prior to the Drivin' for Linemen 200 NASCAR race in St. Louis MO June 13, Heppner graduate Tayler Hodges (far left front) and other linemen climbed to the tops of poles and placed flags on them to honor fallen linemen. —Contributed photo

Tayler Hodges, a 2008 graduate of Heppner High School, participated in the 2015 Past and Present Lineman event June 13 in St. Louis, MO.

Hodges is the son of local woman Deona Siex.

After graduating from HHS he went on to graduate from Northwest Lineman College in Meridian, ID in 2010. He then took a job with Mid-Plains Power, —See LINEMEN CEREMONY/PAGE TWO

Busy week for fire crews

Fire season heats up with two grass fires, one structure fire

By Andrea Di Salvo

It was a busy week for fire crews in Morrow County, with multiple fires that herald an ominous start to what promises to be a bad fire season.

Late Wednesday night, about 11:30 p.m., Ione, Lexington and Heppner fire crews responded to a grass fire near the Ione gas transmission plant on Pipeline Loop off of Gooseberry Rd out of Ione. A double-wide trailer in the vicinity was initially reported as threatened, but Ione Fire

Chief Virgil Morgan said no structures were in real danger.

Columbia Basin Electric crews were also on the scene to provide aid and check power poles. Morgan said he did not believe any power lines were damaged. About 100 acres of grassland burned, he said.

Crews worked several hours on the fire, which Morgan said was partly a waiting game.

"We kind of let it come to us," he said. "It was on a steep hillside and not easily

accessible."

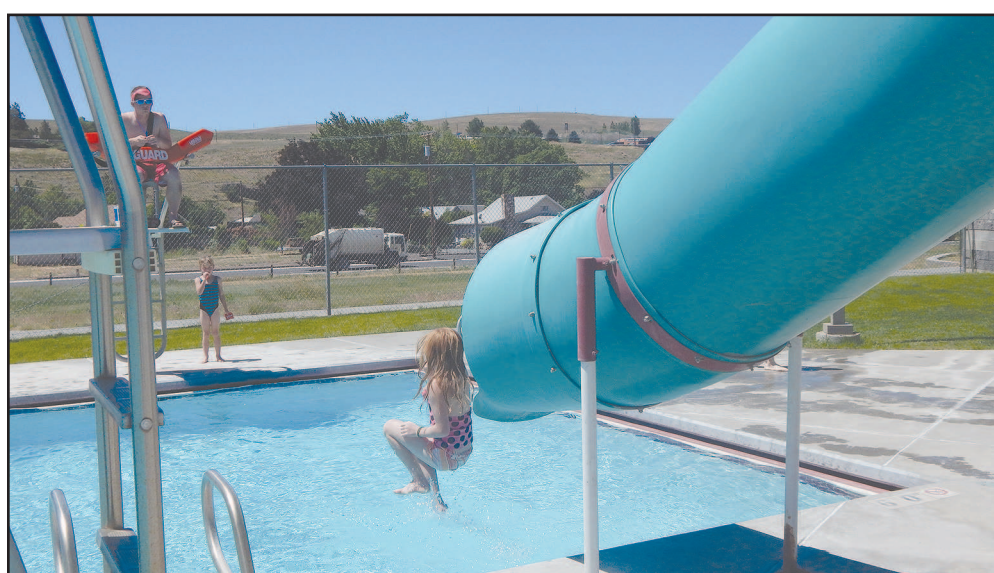
Morgan said fire crews put out the fire between 4 and 5 a.m., but stayed on site until around 6 a.m. mopping up and making sure all the edges were out.

Then, Monday morning, all local crews were called out again, this time to a fire on Brenner Canyon Rd. south of Ione.

The fire call came shortly after 3 a.m., but Morgan said they estimated the fire had been burning

—See LOCAL FIRES/PAGE FOUR

Heppner, Ione pools splash into summer



Local pools have started their 2015 summer season. See PAGE TWO for more information on Ione and Heppner pools. —Photo by Megan Futter

Sandford wins Miss Oregon High School Rodeo

Ivy Sandford, a sophomore at Ione Community High School, has earned the crown for Miss Oregon High School Rodeo Association



2015-2016 at the State High School Rodeo Finals held —See QUEEN IVY/PAGE FOUR

New bike racks extend welcome to passing cyclists

Heppner's Main Street addition is meant to be functional and inviting

By Andrea Di Salvo

More shamrocks will be sprouting along Main Street in Heppner in the coming week, this time in the form of green bicycle racks that sport the town's favorite symbol.

Heppner City Manager Kim Cutsforth said the city purchased the unique bike racks through local fabricator Jay Coil. They were designed by Craig Gutierrez and funded by a grant from Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation out of Hermiston. The six planned bike racks cost \$2,000; they will all be installed by next week, Cutsforth said. All the racks will be located on Heppner's Main Street.

Jay Gibbs, a local biking enthusiast who was part of the development process

for the bike racks, says the racks are part of a required update to the management plan of Heppner's bikeway, the Blue Mountain Century Scenic Bikeway. The 108-mile bikeway is a scenic loop starting and ending in Heppner; it follows the Blue Mountain Scenic Byway east through the Umatilla National Forest to Highway 395, climbing 3,280 feet followed by a downhill run to Ukiah. The route then heads north, climbing through forest and rangeland to Highway 74 and back to Heppner.

The bikeway, which is not considered an easy ride, attracts dedicated cyclists from around the Northwest and beyond. The Heppner Chamber of Commerce hosts an annual Blue Mountain Century Ride, planned this year for Sept. 19-20,



Local cycling enthusiast Jay Gibbs poses with his bike next to one of the new bicycle racks that will soon dot Heppner's Main Street. —Contributed photo

—See BIKE RACKS/PAGE THREE

Big time artist comes to small town venue for down-home Fourth of July

James Otto to play at Ione's Red, White and Blues festival

Grammy nominee and Academy of Country Music award winner James Otto will be the featured artist performing on the outdoor amphitheater stage in Ione this Fourth of July.

It might seem strange to some that such a big name would come to such a small town. However, Otto is a Northwest boy born in Tacoma, WA and graduating from Benton City, WA before moving to Nashville to pursue his music career.

In 2008, Otto released the album "Sunset Man," which contained the single, "Just Got Started Loving You." The song went on to become Billboard's number-one single of the year. He also received the CMA Song of the Year Award for "In Color," which was also nominated for a Grammy. Otto, who has toured with Reba McEntire, Toby Keith, Trace Adkins and



Two-time ACM award winner James Otto.

Shania Twain, plays his own unique style of South-

ern Country Rock with great passion and enthusiasm. A two-year Navy veteran, he also brings a great respect for our country and our freedom—characteristics quite appropriate for the Fourth of July celebration in Ione.

Otto will take the stage at 8:30 p.m. on the Fourth.

As impressive as the headliner is, though, that's only the cherry on top of what promises to be another sweet celebration this July 4.

The day starts early with the Firecracker 5K Run/Walk at 7 a.m. and a Fireman's Breakfast from 7:30-10:30 a.m. The parade, which starts at 1 p.m., will include vehicles from the Blues Cruise car show. Other events throughout the day include children's games, volleyball and three-on-three basketball tournaments, and a talent show at 3:30 p.m., which is open to anyone who is

—See OTTO AT IONE FOURTH/PAGE FOUR

ALL Women's Clothing 30% OFF JEANS & TOPS



Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed & Seed 242 W. Linden Way, Heppner • 676-9422 • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)