

Columbia Basin announces rate increase

The directors of Columbia Basin Electric Co-op, at a recent board meeting, took action to increase retail electric rates 4.3 percent, effective October 2015.

The rate increase is in response to Bonneville Power Administration's announcement of a 7.10 percent wholesale rate increase effective Oct. 1, 2015.

Electric kilowatt-hour (kwh) rates will increase 4.3 percent, fixed monthly meter fees will be increased \$3 per service, with street and security light fixed fees increasing 50 cents per month.

"CBEC employees and board of directors continue to be ever-vigilant in their

efforts to control costs, provide reliable service and maintain rate stability" a spokesperson said. "The Board of Directors has not taken this rate increase action lightly; they know the additional burden this increase places on families and businesses in our service territory.

"However, the cooperative cannot absorb the entire BPA rate increase."

Budget Pay/Level Payment Plan consumers have had their payments adjusted to reflect this increase.

If you would like more information or a calculation of the rate increase on your individual account, please contact CBEC at 541-676-9146 or 541-384-2023.

Sen. Hansell to hold town hall series

A recap of the 2015 session and issues important to District 29

Salem—Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) will be in Heppner next Monday, Sept. 21, as part of a series of town halls across the district.

The Heppner town hall will take place next Monday from 7-8 p.m. in the Heppner City Hall conference room, 111 N. Main Street, Heppner.

Hansell will be joined during the Eastern portions of his tour by Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove).

Hansell will provide his thoughts on the 2015 Legislative Session, discuss the "Good, Bad, and Ugly" legislation that was proposed, and field questions from constituents on issues that matter to them.

Close call proves good neighbors don't have to live next door

By Andrea Di Salvo

Louis Carlson of Heppner has been a farmer all his life. It's what the 85-year-old loves to do, and why he was out on a tractor sweeping thistles one Wednesday in August.

Carlson said he had been working on that ground—owned by George Griffith of Ione and farmed by Carlson's son, Clint Carlson—for several days. It happened to be a patch of ground being traversed by the new natural gas line being put in from the Ione pumping station to a natural gas plant being planned near the current coal-fired plant (*see related story, "TransCanada shows appreciation to Ione community" PAGE SIX*). That gave Carlson the chance to get acquainted with the Michels Pipeline Construction employees who were laying the pipeline.

"I'd had quite a bit of contact with the crew, stopping occasionally to visit with them," he recalled.

And there was nothing unusual about that Wednesday. Carlson said he finished sweeping the field, and "as luck would have it," ended about a half mile from the pipeline crew and a quarter mile from his pickup parked near the road.

As Carlson drove the tractor toward the edge of

City waste water study recommends \$719,000 in improvements

By David Sykes

A recently completed study of Heppner's wastewater system recommends improvements at a cost of \$719,000, the city's engineering firm told the city council Monday night.

The plan calls for improvements to both the collection system and the city treatment facility. The engineering firm of Anderson Perry completed the study in 2012, but experienced a three-year delay because of changes made by the Department of Environmental Quality.

To pay for the improve-

ments Anderson and Perry recommended either doing the improvements over time using the city's own funds, or doing the improvements all at once using outside funding such as a loan. Brad Baird, president of Anderson and Perry, was at the meeting and said there were advantages and disadvantages to both methods.

Doing the improvements over time using the city's own funds would require the city raise sewer rates each year over a 20-year period. It would require potentially smaller rate increases for the first

two to four years, but the total rate increase over 20 years would be considerably higher because of inflation, the study said. The disadvantage to completing the improvements over time would be the city would continue to have to deal with some of the sewer problems as time goes on until they are fixed.

The other option would be for the city to take out a loan and do all the repairs and improvements at once. The immediate upgrade would make the system more efficient and simpler to operate for the public works crew, plus overall costs of would be less because over a longer period there would be inflation and higher construction costs.

The disadvantage to taking out a loan and doing the whole project at once is that the rate would be higher initially but then less in later years. If you consider a \$750,000 loan at four percent over 20 years, the annual payment would be \$48,000, the report said. Considering the city has 698 connections, this would require a \$5.73 per month rate increase to cover the debt payment.

Heppner Mayor Skip Matthews asked Public Works director Chad Doherty if any of the city's sewer systems were in immediate danger of failing.

"Our main concern is catastrophic failure," Matthews said. "There is nothing that is going to fail and drop millions of gallons down Willow Creek?" he asked.

Doherty said there are some really bad sections of the sewer system and that the plant is getting old and in need of replacement, but stopped short of saying there was an immediate threat. He said the sewer plant is working okay and the samples coming out are passing DEQ tests.

City attorney Bill Kuhn, who has been on the school board for many years, said with a dwindling student population in Heppner—*See CITY COUNCIL/PAGE FOUR*



Louis Carlson of Heppner displays the card, envelope of cash, and a couple of souvenirs from his friends at Michels. —Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

the field, he heard what he first thought was an explosion. It turned out later that a universal joint on the tractor's driveline had broken. The broken hydraulic line spread hydraulic oil over the tractor, including the cab in which Carlson was sitting. That ignited a flame, which quickly consumed the tractor.

"I found myself engulfed in flames," Carlson said. "I opened the escape door and saw flames outside. I knew I would certainly be burned to death if I stayed in the cab, so I opened the door and escaped by jumping off the tractor."

Carlson escaped without any broken bones, but was burned as he jumped through the flames. He said

he landed on the ground and crawled 200 feet from the burning tractor. He then pulled out the cell phone his wife, Betty, always insisted he carry.

"I told her the tractor was on fire and that I'd been burned," he said.

According to wife Betty Carlson, that in itself was something of a miracle.

"Never are you able to get cell phone reception, except for one or two spots," she recalled. "But he was able to call."

Carlson said he was then able to walk the quarter mile to his pickup, which he drove back toward the burning tractor. There, he found Tim Schmitt, Safety Coordinator for Michels, —*See TRACTOR FIRE/PAGE FOUR*

Matheny Project on the road and under the microscope

Sandy Matheny and Molly Rill of the Matheny Project recently visited with the research staff from the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) Neurological Research laboratories.

The laboratories Matheny and Rill visited have been the beneficiary of funds earmarked for spinal cord injury research and sent through the Matheny Project music CD sales since 2011.

The Matheny Project was named for local wheat rancher Dave Matheny, who was seriously injured in a horse accident in September 2001. Despite his injuries, he remained an active member of the family ranch until his passing in October 2013. In Dave Matheny's honor, all proceeds from the Matheny Project are donated to the OHSU Foundation to be used in their spinal cord injury research programs.

Drs. Mary Heinricher and Susan Ingram's laboratories work to study how the brain controls pain. Pain, especially pain following some sort of damage to the nerves, spinal cord or brain itself, is incredibly challenging for both pa-



Pictured L-R: YangMiao Zhang, Ph.D., postdoctoral scholar who recently joined Dr. Heinricher's lab from Washington State University Pullman; QiLiang Chen, M.D./Ph.D. student at OHSU; Molly Rill of the Matheny Project; Susan Ingram Osborn, Ph.D.; Mary M. Heinricher, Ph.D.; and Sandy Matheny of the Matheny Project. —Contributed photo

tients and their doctors. The pain is "felt" in the body, although the body was not injured. Their laboratories are working to understand how changes in the circuits of the brain can cause or modify pain, and trying to figure out how we could restore those circuits to normal in chronic pain.

With support from the Matheny Project, the team has been able to adopt a new technique called "optogenetics." This technique uses pulses of light to provide exquisite control of

specific nerve cell populations in the brain. The labs are using this approach to figure out how activation of certain nerve cells leads to pain.

Rill and Matheny said they enjoyed a first-hand look at both current and anticipated research projects and had an opportunity to get to personally know the people actually doing the work.

"It was inspiring to see not only what they've accomplished, but to also get a glimpse into some of the exciting research we can anticipate on the horizon," said Matheny. "It's wonder-

ful to be a part of what these folks are doing!"

Both Rill and Matheny also remarked on how good it is to actually get to know the people behind the voices they've only been talking with by phone and emailing until now.

School district enrollment up slightly Kindergarten numbers down

By April Sykes

Morrow County School District Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the board at its Monday night meeting in Heppner that the district is up 11 students over its budgeted number. Dirksen said the increase was "good news," as opposed to five years ago, when the student population had taken a downturn.

Dirksen said, however, that kindergarten enrollment was down somewhat.

Enrollment data as of this month is as follows: A.C. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon (kindergarten through grade three)-266; Sam Boardman Elementary, Boardman (K-three)-344; Heppner Elementary (K-six)-173; Irrigon Elementary (four-six)-192; Windy River Elementary, Boardman (four-six)-214; Heppner Junior/Senior High (seven-12)-161; Irrigon Junior/Senior High

(seven-12)-387; Riverside Junior/Senior High, Boardman (seven-12)-395; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon-29; total-2,161.

In other business, the board:

—learned from Dirksen that the district purchased 750 additional computer devices, with 600 "pretty much ready to go" at the beginning of the new school year. "We have two more devices than we have students," Dirksen said. "We're pretty pleased with getting that close to one-to-one." He said that the majority of the new devices are Chromebooks, which are better for word processing, with the remaining devices being iPads. He said they were dispersed in a teacher specific, area specific manner. He credited the purchase of the devices to the education foundation,

—*See SCHOOL DISTRICT/PAGE FOUR*