

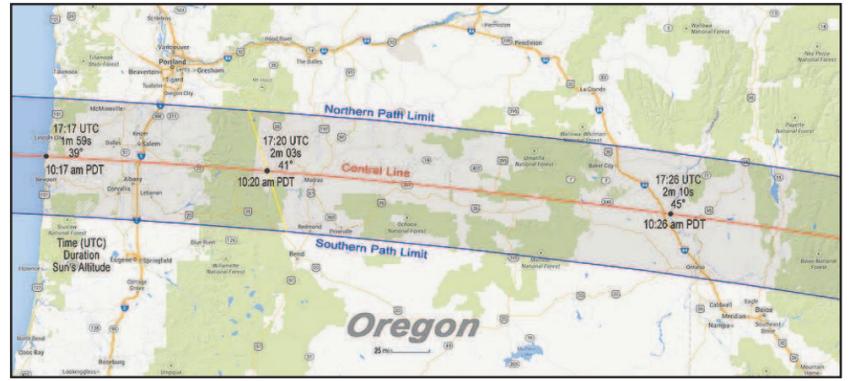
HEPPNER

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Gazette Times

VOL. 136 NO. 23 8 Pages Wednesday, June 21, 2017 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Local planning efforts underway for massive solar eclipse event



The path of totality for the much-hailed 2017 solar eclipse will pass over South Morrow Aug. 21, and residents are being warned to prepare for an influx of tourists. -Map by Fred Espenak

Planning efforts are in full swing for the record-setting crowds expected to descend on Eastern Oregon during the total solar eclipse later this summer. The rare celestial event will take -See ECLIPSE PLANNING/PAGE THREE

County plans electrical upgrade at fairgrounds

RV spaces will see improvements

By David Sykes

The Morrow County Commission has decided to move forward with a planned electrical upgrade at the fairgrounds, which will benefit six RV spots located there, and also provide more amperage for vendors setting up at fair.

“We have a bunch of stuff running off 200-amp service provided for the vendors,” Public Works Director Burk O’Brien told the commission at its June 7 meeting. “We need 800 amp for the six RV spots.”

The RV spots are down by the creek and mainly used now during fair and rodeo; however, O’Brien said with the upgrades there may be more usage of the spots.

“Fifty-amp service is needed. The days of 20 to 30 amp are gone. It is time to do things right,” he said in urging the commission to approve the upgrade.

It was estimated that the electrical upgrades would cost around \$23,000, and O’Brien compared doing the work to when several years ago the county upgraded the fair’s water system.

“You can compare this to the water system that wasn’t working and we kept spending money on it. We replaced the water system and it has been a good investment.”

He said the current electrical system is undersized for what it is being used for and if fixed should be good for “many, many years.”

O’Brien suggested that the upgrades might also prompt more usage of the RV spots, which prompted commissioner Don Russell to ask if the improved sites would be in competition



RV spaces at the fairgrounds will see improvements with the electrical upgrade planned by the county. -Photo by David Sykes

with the RV sites the Park District operates at Willow Creek Lake. He said he can see the fairgrounds RV spots taking up slack if the lake has an overflow, such as during high usage times of St. Patrick’s Day weekend and fair and rodeo week, but wondered if they would be taking away for the lake park during other times. O’Brien said the fairgrounds spots would be there more for people using the fairgrounds facilities, and did not see it as competition. Russell agreed, pointing out that the lake park is not set up for horse trailers and livestock, and the fairgrounds would be more for usage for a specific event and not take away from the park district.

Treasurer protests proposed bank policy

In other business, the commission had a discussion with Morrow County Treasurer Gail Gutierrez over commission access to

county bank accounts. At present neither the commissioners nor Morrow County Finance Director Kate Knop are allowed to look directly at the county’s accounts at either Community Bank or The Bank of Eastern Oregon, and must go through the treasurer for that information.

Gutierrez told the commission she was opposed to a proposed change in policy that would allow them access. In a letter she read to the commissioners Gutierrez said she was particularly upset that the proposed policy change was discussed at an open commissioner meeting before she was informed, and felt “blind-sided” by the request. She said she should have been told privately before the meeting. Commission chair Melissa Lindsay said she brought it up at a commission meeting because she wanted all three commissioners to be in-

involved with the discussion. By Oregon Open Meetings law, commissioners are not supposed to meet together privately with two or more commissioners present, as this constitutes a quorum of the three-member board, and is not allowed.

Lindsay had originally proposed the policy change when she went to the bank to check on certain payments made to contractors during a construction project, and asked to look at the bank accounts. At that time she was told she did not have authorization. Lindsay, along with the other two commissioners Russell and Jim Doherty, all said they wanted policy changed so all commissioners and the finance director are able to go to the bank and look at the county’s bank accounts. They felt it was better for checks and balances if more than one person had access

-See COUNTY COMMISSION/PAGE EIGHT

Gray takes over as MCGG manager

By Andrea Di Salvo

The man stepping in to fill the shoes of outgoing Morrow County Grain Growers General Manager John Ripple is no stranger to Eastern Oregon. New MCGG General Manager Kevin Gray says he ran the Arlington grain elevator in the mid-1990s, a piece of personal history that may be why the executive search firm retained by MCGG came calling when Ripple announced his retirement.

“I made a lot of close business relationships when I was out here before,” 50-year-old Gray says. “When they approached me, it was through those relationships, through people I knew out here before.”

Despite his history with the area, Gray comes to the MCGG Lexington headquarters from a bit further away—Monticello, IA, a town of about 4,000 located between Cedar Rapids and Dubuque. For the last two years he worked in Monticello and a couple of other small towns doing agronomy sales for AgVantage FS, an agriculture and energy supplier based in Iowa. He had a long history in grain before that, however; for the 14 years previous he was a grain division manager for AgVantage. Before that he worked for Growmark, a regional grain cooperative

based in Illinois.

“I think my previous job experiences and skills lined up with what they were looking for,” says Gray, referring to the MCGG board. “I had a lot of conversations with my wife and my kids, and we felt this was really a great opportunity and something we needed to look into.”

Gray and his wife, Diane, have five children; the two youngest, twins, will be high school juniors next year and are heavily involved in student activities, including student council. He shares that his family hasn’t yet made the move to Oregon, because they’re hesitant to uproot the girls at this point in their lives and he’s “leaving it up to them.” However, his family is behind the move, and is visiting this week to look at colleges in Oregon.

“My wife and I have both lived in small towns our entire lives,” he says. “We feel very comfortable, being involved. We look forward to getting involved here, as well.”

Meanwhile, Gray, who started May 15, is taking advantage of his time learning the ropes from Ripple, who officially retired May 31 but agreed to stay on through June.

-See MCGG MANAGER/PAGE TWO



Kevin Gray

Pastor Brudevold returns to Heppner

Rev. Keith Brudevold, formerly of Heppner, is returning next week after an absence of nine years. He will be assuming once again the position of pastor of the Heppner United Methodist Church. The present pastor, Patty Nance, who has served the congregation for several years, has decided that it is time for her to step down from this position.

Rev. Brudevold lived in Heppner for six years, beginning in 2002, and says

he is looking forward to this reconnection with “a community that I grew to love.” He will once again reside at Grace House, the parsonage for the church located on Church Street.

His first Sunday in the pulpit will be July 2, and friends and church family alike are welcome to join in the reunion at 10:30 a.m. The theme for the Sunday gathering will be A Nation Under God, as America celebrates the nation’s birthday.



Rev. Keith Brudevold

MCSO vessel saved from sand bar

A combined effort by emergency personnel and civilians freed a stranded law enforcement vessel over the weekend.

A Morrow County Sheriff’s Office marine vessel became stranded in the Columbia River near Crow Butte due to engine failure

late Saturday afternoon. A combination of the river’s current and high winds caused to vessel to come to rest on a sand bar around 3:40 p.m. June 17.

MCSO was assisted by four Boardman Fire Department members, an

off-duty Boardman Police officer and a private citizen, and MCSO was able to recover the boat with minimum damage to the vessel. MCSO reports that by around 9 p.m. all members of the rescue team and their vessels were back at

the Boardman Marina.

“It was a great example of team work and members of the community coming together to help each other out with one goal in mind,” said MCSO Sergeant Brian Snyder in a written statement.

Gazette will be closed July 4



Deadline for July 5 is June 30

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed Tuesday, July 4, due to the Independence Day holiday.

The Gazette will go to print on Monday, July 3, so the deadline for all news and advertising will be Friday, June 30, at 5 p.m. Normal business hours will resume Wednesday, July 5.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.