

GT Gazette Times

VOL. 136 NO. 26 8 Pages Wednesday, July 26, 2017 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Sorte resigns as county administrator

Morrow County Administrative Officer Jerry Sorte submitted his resignation to the county commission Monday, the commission announced yesterday. Sorte's resignation will be effective August 25.



Jerry Sorte

Sorte has accepted the position of community and economic development director with the City of Sweet Home, OR.

"It has been a privilege to serve the board of commissioners as Morrow County's first administrative officer. I am especially happy with the steps our team has taken to make the county organization more efficient and transparent. There are great things happening here in Morrow County," said Sorte.

Board of commissioners chair Melissa Lindsay said she would be sorry to see Sorte go.

"It is disappointing to be going through transition again," said Lindsay. "The staff and citizens have seen change from a county court to the hiring an administrator to a new board of commissioners. Mr. Sorte has moved many things in a positive and professional direction; we wish him success in his new endeavors."

"I am looking forward to the opportunity to continue moving in a great di-

rection for Morrow County. The county has so many good things going for it and we will all be working diligently to continue the momentum into the bright future Morrow County has," Lindsay added.

"I would like to thank administrator Sorte for the dedicated, professional approach he demonstrated while shepherding Morrow County through an historic change. In his albeit brief tenure, he worked diligently to advance the policies of Morrow County. I wish him all the best," commissioner Jim Doherty added.

The administrative officer is appointed by the board of commissioners and supports the board with the planning, coordination and implementation of county operations. The administrative officer supervises all department heads and specific employees, and serves as liaison with county elected officials.

Sorte began service as the county's first administrative officer in November 2015. Prior to working for Morrow County, he served as assistant director of administration for the City of Fulton, MO and worked for eight years as a land use planner for Polk County, Oregon.

New early learning center opens doors in Boardman this fall

BOARDMAN—Development projects around the Port of Morrow now include something for a much younger customer—preschoolers. Next to the SAGE Center and Blue Mountain Community College's (BMCC) new Boardman Workforce Training Center is a new project, the Neal Early Learning Center,

which will open this fall and offer early learning opportunities for area children.

The center is a project of the Port of Morrow, which partnered with the Morrow County School District, Umatilla-Morrow Head Start and the Inter-mountain Education Ser-

-See EARLY LEARNING CENTER/PAGE EIGHT

Submit fair and rodeo stories to the GT

The Heppner Gazette-Times is in the mood for good stories for this year's Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo special edition to be published Aug. 9.

Stories must be turned in to the GT by July 31. Email them to editor@rapidsolve.net, send them to the GT at PO Box 337, Heppner, OR 97836, fax them to 541-676-9211 or bring them by the office at 188 W. Willow.



The Heppner G-T is looking for a few good fair and rodeo stories for this year's special fair edition. Contact Andrea at editor@rapidsolve.net. -File photo

Extension may seek local tax base funding

State money not enough, official says

By David Sykes

Umatilla and Morrow County voters may be asked to approve a new taxing district to help fund local Oregon State University Extension Services, the Morrow County Commissioners were told at their meeting last week.

Philip Hamm, director of the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, along with Vern Frederickson of Frederickson Farms and Julie Baker, administrative program specialist for OSU in Morrow County, were all at the meeting to ask the commissioners for support for the new tax district.

"Everyone benefits (from Extension) besides just the farmers," Frederickson said in support of the new taxing district. He said agriculture contributes about half a billion dollars in farm value for Umatilla and Morrow counties, and that increases to between \$1.5 and \$2 billion when you include value-added food processing. He said in the past the wheat growers have contributed \$250,000 to the extension, but be-

cause of lower prices and low yields, will no longer be able to provide that funding.

To exemplify the reach into the community of Extension services, Frederickson said there were more than 99,000 contacts between the Extension and the populations of Morrow and Umatilla counties, and that there "are very few people who are not touched by Extension or research." The Extension district would include OSU's Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center near Pendleton and Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, where scientists conduct experiments to improve farming practices.

In order to form the new districts, however, the Extension must first get the approval of voters. It plans to go out for a vote in May of 2018, and the expected tax rate would be \$0.33 per \$1,000 of valuation. Extension officials first will need

to receive approval from both county commissions, and they then want approval from all 17 city councils in the two counties.

There were concerns at the Morrow County Commission meeting that the tax base would signal Oregon State University that it could cut back on the state's current funding of extension.

"What stops the state from reducing funding?" Commissioner Don Russell asked. Hamm said there would be an agreement with the state so that does not happen.

Commissioner Doherty made it clear he expected the new tax district to fund additional services through Extension. "If the state stops funding something we will not pick that (funding) up," he said.

Morrow County already budgets OSU Extension about \$177,000 in its current year, while Umatilla

-See EXTENSION TAX DISTRICT/PAGE THREE

Walton retires after 45 years with health district

By Andrea Di Salvo

Sue Walton will retire this month after 45 years of nursing at Pioneer Memorial Hospital (PMH).

"Forty-five years, or 68 percent of my lifetime, has been spent here; guess that makes me a relic," she quips.

Walton, 67, was born July 14, 1950 at PMH, the daughter of Don and Colleen Greenup, one of the first babies born after the hospital opened. Sue was raised on her family's cattle and wheat ranch 10 miles out of Heppner, the third

generation on the Kilkenny ranch. She worked there helping with calving, lambing, haying, and riding horses to move the cattle. In 1969 she graduated from Heppner High School. She says she was attracted to nursing early on—one could almost say it was in her blood.

"First, I grew up on a ranch and helped with calving, lambing and the doctoring of cattle, horses and sheep. In high school I did a career study on nursing," Walton says. "My aunt Ilene Laughlin was the hospital administrator and I always admired her. Her daughter Sheridan Tarnasky was attending Emanuel Hospital School of Nursing and I'd have to say she was a major influence to me."

So, after high school, Walton also attended Emanuel Hospital School of Nursing.

"Being from a small town and going to Portland was quite a challenge. Having her (Sheridan) there

made the transition much easier for me," she says.

Walton graduated with honors in 1972 and returned to Heppner. She started work at PMH on June 21, 1972.

"I started out on the night shift, which was quite scary, being the only RN on duty, not knowing what ER might come through the back door," says Walton.

She worked as director of nursing services for a short time before she got married—doing the schedule, purchasing, policies and helping on the floor.

She met Paul Walton through Paul's cousin Susie French. Paul was born and raised in Long Creek and worked on his family's third-generation cattle ranch. One Thanksgiving Paul was hauling cattle from La Grande to Heppner; he spent Thanksgiving with her family, and a courtship began.

Paul and Sue Walton were married June 18, 1977 and established their home

-See WALTON RETIRES/PAGE FOUR

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Farra marks a century of life lived 'One day at a time'

By Andrea Di Salvo

Local woman Ida Farra is celebrating a milestone next week that few of us ever hope to achieve—a century of life lived fully and lived well.

Farra was born Aug. 4, 1917 in North Dakota, the fourth among 13 children in the Wiest family. She was raised in North Dakota until the family moved to Nampa, ID. They moved because times were difficult in the Midwest; dates have gotten hazy with the passage of time, but it was around the time of the Great

Depression, when many families were looking to move West to a better life. They chose Idaho because they had relatives there, Farra recalls, but they moved because of the dust storms.

"We couldn't grow anything because of dust storms," she says. "When we got out here, they told us they had dust storms, too. I guess theirs just didn't last as long."

Though she doesn't remember her exact age,

her memories of that move are vivid.

"We all moved the same day. We all came in the back of a big truck," she recalls. "My Dad and two drivers were in the front." The rest of the family spent the trip on "one big bed" in the back, where they could lie down, sit up or read during the trip—all except Farra's mother, who spent the thousand-plus miles in a chair in the back of the truck.

They spent the night in travelers' cabins along the way, where they cooked dinner, and then breakfast the next morning, before getting back underway.

In Nampa, the family stayed together. School-age children got up early and went out with their father to help in the fields. Farra recalls that most people in that area owned their own businesses, such as farms and orchards, which the wives helped work. That meant they needed services like babysitting. Farra and the other older children found jobs like that to boost the family income.

"There were 13 of us, like this" she makes a staircase gesture with her hand. "They knew we knew how to babysit."

She kept on with work like that until she and a sister both found jobs working in restaurants in Ontario, OR. Her sister started out

-See IDA FARRA/PAGE TWO

Irrigon men face assault charges

Two Irrigon men are in Umatilla County Jail after Morrow County Sheriff's office arrested them July 17 on charges stemming from an incident that occurred in Irrigon June 3.

Preston Joe Morris, 18, is facing charges of robbery I and assault III, both felonies, and theft II and menacing, both Class A misdemeanors.

Dustan Caleb Maret, 35, is facing charges of robbery II and assault III, both felonies, and the misdemeanors of theft II and menacing.

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said the men are alleged to have stripped their victim of his clothes, taken his cell phone, threatened him with a gun and shot him with a paintball gun. The incident allegedly arose because one of the defendants believed the victim had been involved in a theft at his home.

U C J Dustan Maret lists the total bail for each man at \$70,000. They were both scheduled for preliminary hearings late Tuesday afternoon.

U C J Preston Morris

U C J Dustan Maret

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