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Gazette Times

VOL. 137 NO. 33 6 Pages Wednesday, August 15, 2018 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Ribbon cutting held at Fit Park

The official opening of the Fit Park was held Saturday, Aug. 11. The Willow Creek Park District and the Howard and Beth Bryant Foundation celebrated the event with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

The ribbon cutting was performed by Hadlie, Mikalie and Whitlie Duncan, daughters of Mike Duncan, owner of Silver Creek Contracting. Corey Peterson performed and Blas Elguezabal demonstrated the equipment.

2018 Morrow County Fair begins today

Superintendents Karen Clough, Karen Smith-Griffith and Jannie Allen prepare for the opening of the Morrow County Fair. *-Photo by Megan Futter.*

Baseline gets plowed

Someone got a little carried away with their field work last week and ran across Baseline Road between Hwy 207 and the Lexington Grange with their farm implement. The unidentified tractor driver crossed the road from one field to the next about 5:45 on Tuesday August 7 causing the above damage.

The road was damaged enough the Sheriff's Department shut it down until the Morrow County Road Department could repair the damage. The road had only recently been repaved. *-Contributed photo.*

Community meeting called to discuss 'negative changes' to Heppner

Vandalism, drug issues to be addressed

A community meeting of citizens and businesses is scheduled for Monday, Aug. 20 at 6 p.m. at the Heppner City Hall. Among the topics to be discussed are recent vandalism, drug issues and other negative changes to the Heppner community. The meeting is being sponsored by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce.

"Come and participate in conversation to discuss and decide what action our local community and businesses want to take to address and eliminate these issues," a release from the Chamber stated. The purpose of the meeting is to address problems and issues, develop solutions and create action items and next steps.

Refreshments will be provided and the Chamber asks that you RSVP if you plan to attend. Call 541-676-5536 or email heppnerchamber@centurytel.net.

Neal reflects on successful Port of Morrow career

Long-time manager retires

By David Sykes

When Gary Neal looks out across the Port of Morrow's industrial park today, he sees a much different landscape than when he took over as general manager in 1989. Over the past 29 years The Port of Morrow has seen tremendous growth and expansion and much of that can be attributed to Neal's aggression, skills and business acumen.

When Neal arrived, there were a few businesses and services such as the potato flake plant, Oregon Potato, Lamb Weston and a couple of terminal docks on the river. By comparison, a recent economic impact analysis shows that port businesses generate $2.7 billion of economic output and have created approximately 8,500 direct and indirect jobs.

Neal, who is preparing to retire from his job in a couple of months, says he does have a satisfying feeling with all that has been accomplished. "I do feel a sense of satisfaction. We have accomplished a lot, and it does give one a good feeling knowing you have made a difference." But like any hard charging manager, Neal adds with a grin, "And you always think about the ones that got away."

There doesn't seem to be too many that got away however, as Neal speaks about the difficulty of economic development. "Some people don't realize how much effort goes into this. We (the commissioners and port staff) can sometimes work on a project for two to three years before it comes to fruition. And sometimes it falls apart and never happens," he explains. Neal does enjoy the process, however, of bringing new businesses to the port. "I like the opportunity to nurture a project along. Things don't happen overnight and there are lots of curves in a project before it becomes a reality. I'm going to miss that," he says.

Port of Morrow general manager, Gary Neal, in his office overlooking the Columbia River at Boardman. *-Photo by David Sykes.*

The economic development business can be competitive, and Neal says although the Port of Morrow has a lot going for it, they can sometimes find themselves in competition with other areas for business. "Utah and Nevada are pretty aggressive," he says, adding that Washington state is there because of the river, but the Port of Walla Walla "has good people and they do a good job." On the question of the port getting into bidding wars with other ports or industrial parks, Neal says they usually give prospective businesses their best deal and see where it goes from there. "My method has been to offer them as good and fair deal as we can and see where it goes. Sometimes we have to just say 'you might find a better fit somewhere else.'"

Neal says the Enterprise Zone has been successful at the port, and a tool they need to compete. The zone offers tax reductions for businesses locating here if they meet certain investment, job and wage targets. "The enterprise zone is working, and it is the only tool the State of Oregon gives you of any significance," Neal says. "It will probably continue, and when I go out to recruit I want to make sure I have the tools so I can compete."

One of the lessons Neal says he learned early on at the port, was you need the infrastructure to attract businesses. "I remember going out and taking a client to see a bare piece of ground we had, painting a nice picture and telling them all the things we could do there for them. That didn't work so well," he says. Neal says businesses want to see the infrastructure in and operating, not promises, when they get ready to commit to a site. With that lesson, the port has put in water and steam systems, rail and road lines, power and even a cold storage facility. He says these, and other improvements, have helped attract businesses to the Port of Morrow. As part of the "build it and they will come" theory, he says the port is looking at installing a non-potable (lower grade non-drinking) water system, and possibly a new freezer storage system. There is currently a cold storage facility, but the lower temperature freezer system would allow the port to attract yet another type of customer.

Being in the center of three transportation systems hasn't hurt either. "When I came here I saw opportu-

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