

How does Heppner look to outsiders?

Visiting team gives "first impressions" of our town

By David Sykes

If you have ever wondered how Heppner looks to people on the outside, a public meeting last week by the Rural Development Initiatives, RDI, would have told you.

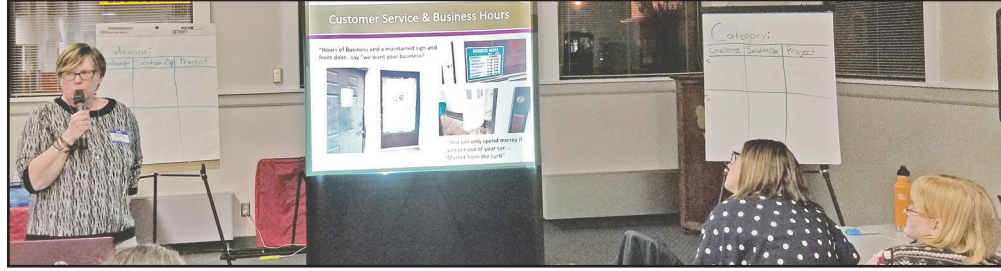
RDI recently completed a "First Impressions" study where a team of people from nearby communities (those communities were not named) come to the town and look at how visitor friendly it is. Heppner scored pretty good in some areas and not so good in others.

Each team member has an assigned task when they get to town says Anne Mitchell of RDI, who along with Jonelle McCoy, conducted the study and put on the public program last week. They looked at the town from the standpoint of someone visiting who not only wants to enjoy the town for the day but maybe move here or start a business here. "We are not being judgmental with our assessment," Mitchell told the large crowd of locals gathered at city hall where they were also served a pizza dinner as part of the program. "We are trying to help."

She said the teams came into the town from two different directions; one from the north and one from the south. Mitchell said the Welcome to Heppner signs were nice but the one from the south was rather hard to see as they drove in. Other signage that got high marks were those pointing to the sheriff's office and the hospital. Mitchell did point out that with Heppner trying to promote the Blue Mountain Scenic Bikeway as a tourist attraction, there should be more bike signs in town.

Mitchell also said in some areas there was visual clutter with too many signs and information in one place, causing "clutter" that was hard for people to sort out. She did not identify the exact areas of the visual clutter.

The visitors did have some confusion when they



Anne Mitchell of Rural Development Initiatives shares observations about Heppner. -Photo by David Sykes.



Visiting team was impressed with the large mural on the side of the Farm Museum on Riverside, but thought there should be a sign directing motorists back onto Main Street, instead of leaving them to drive down residential Gale Street.

came into town from the north. A sign pointing to the farm museum directed them down Riverside Street. They enjoyed the murals on the wall of the farm museum as well as the fit park and swimming pool (although they did say the entrance to the pool was not well marked for visitors), but when they got to the Heritage plaza park they continued on down Gale Street through a residential area. No sign directs visitors back onto the main street and into town, so the visitors kept traveling down Gale street and missed the Historical Marker at the park and driving into town on main street.

Public restrooms are very important Mitchell says, since the first thing visitors need when they get to town is a restroom. She said Heppner has a very good public restroom in the park, (she gave it an A plus) however there is inadequate signage to tell people where they are.

Other observations by the team was their surprise we have an Irish theme, and they liked the good walking path, neighborhood watch signs and a general tidiness to the city. They also liked the doggie bag stations available around town. She said the town had some

"pocket parks" and places for kids to play, historic buildings and awnings on some of the businesses.

Other areas that were deficient in the downtown area were no "blade" signs, she said. Blade signs are ones that stick out from the buildings and allow people down the street to see what is down there before they walk the block to get there. "People need signs to show them if they should walk down that street," Mitchell said. She said neither side of the Heppner's Main Street had blade signs, but some on the side street do.

The team also noted that Heppner had "lots of trash cans but no recycling bins." It was also noted that although the tops of the public trash cans had shamrock covers, many were in bad need of a paint job and look shabby. She said the public water fountain on the corner of Main and Willow "did not look good." She said the team liked the bike racks available around downtown.

It was also noted by the team that Heppner had a mix of services and restaurants but no bakery or bookstore. On the look of local businesses, the team's observation was that there were too many signs, many placed there

Historical Society appoints new president

The Morrow County Historical Society appointed Kay Proctor as the new president at their annual meeting held last week. Proctor previously served as president of the Union County Historical Society in LaGrande prior to moving to Heppner. She has only lived in Morrow County since 1986,



Kay Proctor

but has roots that go back to 1921 when her mother was born in Boardman. Her extended family homesteaded in the area after the irrigation project opened up.

MCHS plans to continue the work that they have done in the past including the number one priority of

publishing the Chronicles. Contributions of stories and/or photos from the public are being sought. Proctor noted that a Facebook site is in the works where people can post, share and enjoy the history of the county.

New and returning members are welcome. For additional information, contact Kay at kayproctor@gmail.com.

Local woman arrested in drug sweep

Charged with two counts meth distribution

Local woman Megan Futter, 34, was arrested last week and charged with two counts of unlawful delivery of methamphetamine within 1,000 feet of a school. Both charges are class A felonies and she is currently lodged in the Umatilla County Jail under \$50,000 bail.



Megan Futter

Futter was caught up in the seven-month long drug investigation called Operation Wildfire carried

out by the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team. The undercover investigation was aimed at identifying, disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking organizations operating in Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Gilliam counties. A total of 65 people were arrested in the sweep.

"Today approximately 85 law enforcement, corrections, parole and probation, Department of Human Services Child Protective Services and prosecutorial personnel formed 11 arrest teams charged with locating and arresting

indicted person, seizing illegally possessed items and vetting associated persons," a news release stated. The Pendleton Convention Center served as the main command and processing facility for those arrested. The arrests resulted in the seizing of fentanyl pills, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine.

Futter was arrested last Wednesday morning by two Morrow County Sheriff's Deputies at her place of employment, the Heppner Gazette-Times newspaper. Publisher David Sykes says Futter is no longer employed with the paper. She had also worked part-time at the local library.

Online student manages studies and rodeo



Jett Stewart competes in rodeo while doing school work online

Jett Stewart is a freshman at Heppner High School. He takes classes like math and language arts. Stewart also just competed in team roping in the Junior National Finals Rodeo in December in Las Vegas. He placed third in the world in open team roping and fourth in #10 roping. How does he do both? He is a student at Morrow Academy, the online program of Morrow County School District.

Last fall, Jett's parents realized that the amount of time he had to spend on the road traveling with Junior Rodeo was not going to be possible with a traditional school schedule. After talking with district administrators, they decided to try the online program.

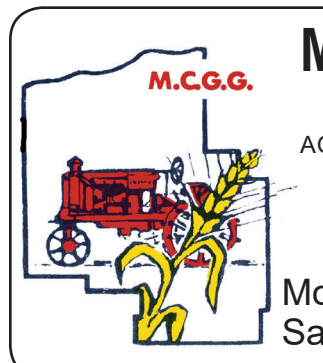
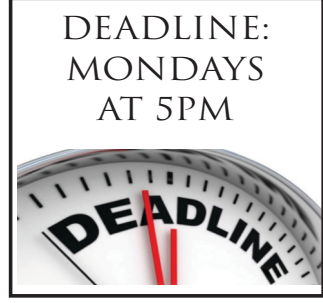
Sybil Stewart, Jett's mom, said that initially she was hesitant about Jett not going to a regular classroom, because education is their first priority. However, considering Jett's team roping goals, they had to step outside their comfort zone.

They were introduced to Betsy Shane, the district's Morrow Academy teacher. "Mrs. Shane was amazing! Several times, I was worried that we didn't do what was best for Jett's education, but he gained lots of 'real life' education when it comes to being your own advocate and time management. Mrs. Shane was really helpful with struggles and kept encouraging me and Jett and helped us through some growing pains," Sybil said.

Jett said that at first the program was intimidating because you don't see your teachers face to face, but with help from Mrs. Shane, his mom and Marie Shimer, MCSD Director of Educational Services, he made it work. "What makes it really work for me is the flexibility and getting the one on one with Mrs. Shane. Staying on top of the work was pretty challenging because it continues at the same pace and sometimes you need to be your own advocate and contact the online teachers on your own. This is especially important when you are struggling with something that is difficult," Jett said.

This is the second year Morrow County SD has operated Morrow Academy. Shimer said the online program is a great option for students who need some flexibility in their school schedule. This could be for academic, medical, outside activities or other reasons. Shimer said the program is positive because students remain in their own, local school district. This benefits the student by being able to participate in school activities and benefits the district because the district retains the state money for that student. "When Morrow Academy is a good fit, it's really a win-win for everyone - we get to retain our students and provide an education that works for them," Shimer said.

-See ONLINE STUDENT/PAGE FOUR



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