

Steve Rhea named new Heppner Fire Chief



Retiring Fire Chief Rusty Estes (left) presents new Chief Steve Rhea with the white command helmet at the Heppner City Council meeting Monday night.

By David Sykes

Steve Rhea has been named the new fire chief for the city of Heppner; it was announced at Monday's city council meeting. He will replace retiring chief Rusty Estes.

Rhea has been with the fire department 32 years, most recently serving as assistant chief. He has also been the department's long-time training officer. "I hope I'm half as good as Rusty was," he told the city council. Rhea said he would need to get used to his new role of giving directions instead of "going in there with the guys."

Estes served a total of 45 years with the department before his retirement.

In other business at the meeting the council instructed City Manager Kraig Cutsforth to move forward with a credit and debit charge service for people to pay their water bills.

There has been much discussion the past couple of months about adding the service with some councilmembers opposed because it would require payment by the city to add the bill pay option. Monday Cutsforth presented a new company he had found that does not charge the city an annual or monthly fee for the credit payment system

and the council agreed to it. "I don't have a problem with it as long as it doesn't cost the city anything," council member Teresa Hughes said when hearing the proposal. At the past couple of meetings Hughes had been against the city entering into a credit/debit card charging contract, saying she didn't think enough people would use it to justify the annual and monthly costs to the city.

Under the proposed plan approved Monday night, people who pay their water and sewer bill with credit card will be charged 2.65 percent with a \$1 minimum. Cutsforth said the cost would work out to about \$1.85 per transaction. Using a card for administrative and civil payments will cost a little bit more at four percent.

In other business the council voted unanimously to approve a rate increase to Miller & Sons Disposal Services for garbage pickup in the city. The new cost will be \$22.5 per month to pick up a can inside the city limits, \$25 outside the city limits, \$80 for local business and rural dumpsters. The new rates will take effect February 1, 2020.

"We have not had a rate increase since 2011," Ryan and Sharon Miller said in a letter to the city requesting

the increase. "In the preceding years we have incurred annual wage increases, increased fuel costs, insurance costs and disposal dump fees. With the growth of our much-appreciated customers, both locally and county wide, also brings increased mileage on our fleet, and the replacement of many carts and dumpsters," they said.

In other action the council heard from Kelsey Greenup who said she was purchasing a home on Matlock and wanted to know who was responsible for the old cement water flume that runs along the hill in the back of the home. She was concerned because chunks of concrete were coming down the hill and she was afraid kids would get up there and cause more problems. She wanted to know who she should talk to about it. City officials indicated that the old water flume is on private property and they did not know who should be contacted.

In other business Councilmember Hughes wanted to know if the surveillance camera at the city park was still operational. She had information that there was "lots of activity" after hours at the park and maybe young people were jumping on the playground equipment trying to tear it up. She

Two men attempt car theft

Zachary Richard James Holte, 29, and Justin Cameron Christian Brown, 23, were arrested and lodged



Zachary Richard James Holte

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office received the report at 9:35 a.m. from a Heppner citizen. Within three minutes, Deputy Dalton Garcia was on the

scene and Lt. Terry Harper located the suspects within nine minutes of the call.

The two suspects had attempted to steal the car and one was already in the driver's seat when two Heppner residents confronted them, saying they did not recognize them as locals. The suspects fled, with the residents giving chase. A description of the suspects allowed MCSO to locate them quickly.

Holte was charged with Robbery II, Attempted Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle, Unauthorized Entry into a Motor Vehicle and Theft of Loss/Mislaid

Items. Total bail is set at \$271,000. He was also lodged on a Washington State Department of Corrections Nationalwide Warrant, with no bail for Escape Community Custody.



Justin Cameron Christian Brown faces charges of Robbery II, Attempted Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle and Unauthorized Entry into a Motor Vehicle. Total bail for Brown is \$266,000.

Heppner Elementary shows academic growth and commitment to students

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) recently released report cards for every school in the state, reporting test scores from the 2018-19 school year. When Dieter Waite, principal at Heppner Elementary School, shared results with school staff, he had some good news to report. The ELA (English Language Arts) score showed that 63 percent of Heppner Elementary students were meeting the standard, an increase of 13 percent from the year before, and well above the Oregon state average of 51 percent. Math scores also increased by five percent to 43 percent, just above the state average of 42 percent.

In addition, the school went from average to high in Individual Student Progress, which measure year-

to-year progress in ELA and math. "I told my staff to keep up the good work. I am excited about our changing school culture and academic growth," Waite said.

Although Waite was pleased with the steady academic growth of students, he was concerned about the slight drop in regular attenders, students who attended more than 90 percent of their enrolled school days. Heppner Elementary 2018-19 average was 81 percent, down one percent from the previous year. However, Waite already has many strategies in place to combat this.

Using the "Every Day Matters" program, which focuses on the importance of steady attendance at school, Waite said staff have increased communication with families of

