

Gazette Times

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Local man's volunteer work leaves positive imprint on community

By David Sykes

If you drive around south Morrow County much it won't be long before you see the handiwork of one of our community's longest serving volunteers, John Edmundson. A long-time resident, Edmundson is not only a man who believes in the intrinsic value of giving to the community through service, but also of doing so many times without any public recognition.

Chances are if you've been to a public meeting or belonged to a community service group you have bumped into Edmundson, who has at one time or another been a member of both the Heppner and Lone Lions Clubs, the Arbuckle Nordic Club, Morrow County Historical Society, president of the Chamber of Commerce and one of his favorites, member of the Willow Creek Country Club. Over the years he has worked on transportation system plans, urban growth boundary projects, Blue Mountain Scenic Byways and probably his most visible work, multiple highway signs around the county. Those signs include Welcome to Heppner, Heppner service clubs, veterans and Heppner flood recognition signs and the Blue Mountain Scenic Byway information kiosk down on Interstate 84

He doesn't do all this community work alone, but Edmundson always seems to be around when a helping hand is needed. He has painted the shamrock many times (before the city crew took over the job), handed out 40 trash bags and vests when organizing multiple community litter pick days, and gathered his friends to do maintenance on neglected signs around the area. And of course, there are the



Volunteer John Edmundson makes sure welcome signs look good coming into town.

countless hours, along with many others, spent at the local golf course keeping that community asset in good shape.

One of the more visible projects he helped with, and the one we drive on all the time, is the Blue Mountain Scenic Byway. It runs from I-84 just east of Arlington at the Highway 74 junction, for 145 miles to the Grande Ronde River. If you stop at the kiosk at the beginning of the byway you can read a description which Edmundson helped write. And when the sign got shot up by hunters, he organized a crew, including Earl Fishburn and Al Scott, to restore it. He also worked on the interpretive sign farther up Highway 74 for the Oregon Trail at Cecil, and he helped plan, write grants for and develop the illuminated town map sign at the Heritage Plaza in Heppner. He got that sign idea after visiting Fossil and seeing theirs. He said when the Kinzua mill closed down and they donated money for community projects, he wrote the draft application for the city to put in the special turnout and sidewalk in front of the town sign at that park.

And even though he's 84 years old Edmundson shows no sign of slowing down. He is currently wrapping up work on a volunteer project to do an inventory of all the streetlights and pole numbers in Heppner. In addition to checking on those

that aren't working, he is counting and recording the pole numbers. "I have visited every single streetlight in the city," Edmundson will tell you with a satisfied smile. He recently turned in his report on that project.

Not all his projects have worked out however, as Edmundson recalls his efforts to get Heppner a sister city in Ireland. He contacted the city of Carnonagh, population 2,400, in County Donegal. He remembers how he and Father Jerry Condon tried to make that happen. "But they weren't much interested," he said of his contact with city officials there.

He also remembers a time when he was working on the service club sign montage at the entrance to town. It listed all the clubs in town and one of them was the Willow Creek Valley Service Club. But, as soon as he got the signs made and installed, the club changed its name to Willow Valley Service Club. "Being one who values accuracy we had to make a new one," he says. "And then, one year later, they disbanded," Edmundson recalls with an ironic grin. He has also helped rehabilitate that same service sign twice when it needed a fresh coat of paint.

Pointing out that he will often times get friends together to help with needed community projects, Edmundson says when it came time to do work on the flood memorial sign at the Heritage plaza it was done in cooperation with the late Bob Despain, Mayor Bob Jepsen and Marsha Sweek, all longtime community volunteers. "When I have asked people for help, I have always gotten help," he says pointing out that he has learned over the years who the volunteers are in town. "I like to see projects get done," he says. Often, he would ask community leaders to become involved in projects like litter pick up to help show the community that everyone can get involved and help to in making the town cleaner and a better place to live.

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Putting up the "correct" service club sign.

Enterprise Zone disburses \$5.84 million

Willow Creek Economic Dev. gets \$628,399

By David Sykes

The Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) on Jan. 17 disbursed \$5,842,089 to various entities around the county. The money comes from yearly collections the CREZ makes from businesses and industry located around the Boardman area, and the funds are paid instead of property taxes mostly by Amazon, Lamb Weston, Tillamook Cheese and others.

The companies are given tax breaks for locating in the Enterprise Zone, mainly at the Port of Morrow. The tax breaks are given to attract new businesses or entice existing business to expand and provide more employment in the county.

CREZ disburses the money to 18 different entities in the county including the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG), which serves Heppner, Lexington and Lone in south county. In the past WCVEDG, which received approximately the same amount this year as in 2019, has given grants with the money for community and business enhancement, housing rehabilitation and housing purchase grants. Last year in an effort to alleviate a severe shortage of rental units in the area, WCVEDG purchased ground and built two new duplexes which are scheduled to begin renting soon. WCVEDG will be holding its annual meeting at a

later date and the public is welcome to attend and hear what the groups plans for the money in the coming year.

The CREZ board is made up from two representatives each from the Port of Morrow, City of Boardman and Morrow County. The six board members negotiate agreements with the various businesses seeking tax reductions, as well as decide on how the money is to be distributed around the county. Population of the various areas of the county is part of the formula used to decide how to distribute the funds. Below is a list of all the entities that received money from the CREZ so far this year.

Disbursement of 2019 CREZ II Funds

| Entity or Fund | Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Morrow Education Foundation | 731,261.73 |
| Boardman Police Department | 165,000.00 |
| Boardman Rural Fire | 137,441.13 |
| Morrow County Health District | 189,882.86 |
| Boardman Community Development Association | 1,017,760.20 |
| City of Irrigon | 818,151.06 |
| Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group | 628,399.17 |
| Morrow County | 678,992.04 |
| Port of Morrow | 678,992.04 |
| City of Boardman | 678,992.04 |
| Umatilla Morrow Radio District | 6,744.62 |
| Irrigon Cemetery | 4,054.71 |
| Irrigon Park | 16,111.71 |
| Morrow County Unified Rec District | 18,091.45 |
| Intermountain ESD | 24,423.46 |
| Blue Mountain Community College | 26,228.63 |
| North Morrow Vector Control | 11,501.56 |
| Oregon Trail Library | 10,061.38 |
| Total | 5,842,089.79 |

What you need to know about Real ID in Oregon

Something big is happening October 1 of this year. If you aren't paying attention, it might mean missing your flight out of PDX or any other airport across the U.S.

On that date the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, begins requiring a new type of identification to board a commercial aircraft. The new ID must be compliant with something called the Real ID Act. It's designed to keep us safer in the air, but if you try to board an air-

craft using your current Oregon driver license starting in October - it won't work. That's because the current Oregon driver license is not Real ID compliant.

Oregon DMV will begin offering a Real ID option on July 6, 2020. To fulfill the demand of nearly one million Oregonians who will want the Real ID option, DMV would have to issue 32 licenses a second every business day from July to October. That's just not possible.

If you don't have a Real

ID compliant form of ID at the airport, TSA will put you through an alternate identity verification process that could take an hour or more, and you could miss your flight.

There is an answer for Oregonians: obtain and use a passport or passport card. The cost of getting a new passport card is roughly equal to that of getting a replacement license with the Real ID option, and you can apply now at one of over 76 acceptance sites across Oregon.

Free tax assistance available

The AARP Foundation's Tax-Aide program will provide free tax assistance and preparation in Lexington for a special three-day limited service this year. The tax service will be available at the Lexington town hall from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Fridays, Feb. 21, Mar. 6 and Mar. 20. There are no scheduled appointments and people are encouraged to arrive early to get on

the list. For those unable to visit on those dates in Lexington, assistance is also offered in Pendleton on Mondays, Hermiston on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Boardman on Wednesdays from February through early April.

The assistance, provided through Tax-Aide, is available to those with low or moderate incomes, not just adults over 50. AARP

membership is not required.

Volunteers are trained and IRS-certified each year to ensure they are aware of the latest changes to the U.S. Tax Code. People are encouraged to check the website for current information and a list of what to bring when going to a Tax-Aide site.

For additional information, visit www.aarpfoundation.org/taxhelp.



REBATES UP TO **\$1,700**
PLUS
0% FINANCING 12 MONTHS



Morrow County Grain Growers
350 Main St
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Contact Justin Bailey at
541-989-8221 Ext. 204 for more
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