

HEPPNER

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Raymond and Norma French reign as 2020 St. Patrick's Day Grand Marshals

Raymond and Norma French, long time Heppner residents, have been chosen as the 2020 Heppner St. Patrick's Day grand marshals. They will preside over the St. Patrick's Great Green Parade and festivities.

Raymond, 92, is proud to say that three out of four grandparents are from Ireland. He was raised on the French Ranch on Big Butter Creek until he was nine. He attended the Lena school through the third grade. He and his brother, Joseph, rode five miles on horseback to school which took an hour or so. He was then sent to St. Joseph Academy for the fourth grade. He finished school in Heppner.

Norma, 93, grew up in Promise, one of 10 children born to Nettie and Edgar Denton, then moved to Milton-Freewater to attend McLaughlin. When she was in the eighth grade her family moved to Condon. Norma is "not technically Irish, but acts like a feisty little leprechaun," laughs Raymond's younger sister, Francine Evans of Irrigon. "If Raymond did one good thing in his life it was to marry this woman," adds Francine.

Raymond and Norma first met in Condon when they were in high school and went together a few years before he volunteered for the service. He enlisted in the Navy during the end of World War II. He attended Colorado State and then went to Seattle where he had been training to become a pilot.

"Their courtship was a long distance one since Raymond lived in Heppner and Norma lived in Condon. Raymond did not own a car. This was during the days of rationing due to the war when coupons were needed for almost everything, including gasoline and tires. One coupon was worth four gallons of gas. Raymond's mother would occasionally be able to give Raymond a coupon and the Catholic priest, Father McCormick, would sympathize with him and furnish him one or two. Then Raymond would find someone with a car and offer the coupons for a ride to Condon. Another challenge to the journey was the tires. In those days, tires had tubes and everyone remembers the tubes had "patches on patches" as tires were hard to obtain. The road between Heppner and Condon was still partly gravel. Raymond remembers helping to change many flat tires. When Norma wanted to get to Heppner, she caught a ride with Bill Cox on the creamery truck as it made its regular route from Heppner to Fossil. No one needed to be in a hurry since the speed limit was 35 miles per hour. They still laugh about the fact it had to have been true love between them to overcome the distance and travel obstacles they faced to be able to see one another."

"Raymond enlisted in the Navy following his high school graduation in Heppner. He was released from service at the end of World War II and returned home to marry his high school sweetheart on October 26, 1946 in Condon." (According to an article on their 70th anniversary).

They married at 19 and 20 years old (Norma didn't know she was a little bit older than Raymond until much later). "Following a honeymoon trip to Portland, Norma and Raymond lived at Vinson for a year and then moved to the ranch home on Big Butter Creek, with the nearest town, Heppner, 25 miles away. At the beginning in their new home, they had a 1941 Ford pickup that his grandfather had given him, no electric-

ity and no running water in the home. He did all the ranch work with work horses."

Norma and Raymond have three children, Karen Wood, who now lives in Tigard, Verina Schiller, Austin, Texas, and Susan French, who lives on the ranch, nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren, "who live all over the U.S.," says Raymond.

Raymond served as a Morrow County Commissioner for eight years, from 1990-1998, a state representative for four years; a Heppner School Board member; a member of the Cattlemen's Association, both county and state, the Morrow County Cattleman of the year in 1964, and the Oregon Cattlemen's Association president from 1980-81, vice president of the National Cattlemen's Association; a rodeo board member, the Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo grand marshal in 2001; a 16-year member of the Soil and Water Conservation District Board, serving as chairman for several of those years. He



Raymond, age 4, 1931, on Midget.

Painting 'O the Green



Heppner's signature street shamrock got a fresh coat of paint Monday morning in preparation for the 38th Annual "A Wee Bit O' Ireland Celebration" starting this weekend in Heppner. Members of the city crew handling the paint job are left to right Kaleb McDaniel, Public Works Director Chad Doherty and Robert Whalen. See inside for a complete schedule and all the information you need about the big weekend.



Raymond and Norma French.



Raymond and Norma French during various years of their lives.



was honored with a lifetime achievement award in 1997.

Besides raising the three girls, Norma was active in the St. Patrick Church Altar Society, county and state CowBelles (now the CattleWomen) of which she was the Oregon vice president. She also was a member of the Sentimentalists, a Heppner singing group.

After the couple retired from the ranch, they moved to Heppner and later to a retirement home in Pendleton. When they decided to make the move into assisted living, they were able to move back to Heppner, to Willow Creek Valley Assisted Living.

Raymond's Irish ancestors, all from Carndonagh, County Donegal, Ireland, or nearby include:

- great grandfather, William Callahan Doherty

-See 2020 GRAND MARSHALS/PAGE TWO



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