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Sheree Smith honored for her service

Retiring County Health Department Director Sheree Smith, RN, was honored at the Morrow County Commissioner meeting last week. She was given a bouquet of flowers and heard many kind words of praise from those in attendance. Cupcakes were also served to those in attendance.

Smith's nursing career has spanned a total of 39 years, during which she handled a variety of jobs. She first became a Registered Nurse at the age of 21 in 1981. Her first job was as a charge nurse at Pioneer Memorial Hospital from 1981 to 1991 when she became a home visit nurse at the Health Department, providing the Babies First program. This was a brand-new program, and the Health Department was unsure if they would be able to sustain this service, so she was contracted for the first two years before becoming a permanent employee in 1993.

Although home visiting was her primary focus, she served in many other programs as well over the next several years. It was in 2002 that she took on the position of Morrow County Health Department Director where she remained until her retirement this year.

Bentz makes campaign swing through county



Oregon Republican 2nd Congressional Dist. Candidate Cliff Bentz made a swing through Morrow County last week. Here he meets with community members and county commissioners above Rock Street to discuss a planned new subdivision. Left to right is: Morrow County Commission Chair Melissa Lindsay, Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group president Kim Cutsforth, Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth (behind), Commissioner Jim Doherty, Cliff Bentz, Commissioner Don Russell and Oregon Republican Senator Dist. 29 Bill Hansell.

By David Sykes

Oregon Republican Second Congressional District Candidate Cliff Bentz made a campaign swing through Morrow County last week ahead of the November 3 election that will determine who replaces long-time Congressman Greg Walden, who decided not to run again for the seat.

Bentz started his visit to the county last Wednesday with a visit to the Morrow County courthouse to meet with commissioners. Then he had lunch with District Forest Service Ranger Brandon Houck and commissioners to talk about forest uses and relationships in Morrow County. From there he toured the proposed Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group subdivision above Rock Street, the Gilliam-Bisbee building to see that refurbished older building project, the old mill site industrial park,



Retiring County Health Nurse Sheree Smith, RN (center) was honored at a meeting of the county commissioners last week. Left to right front row are Kristy Beauchamp, State Liaison Preparedness, Mindy Smith, Sheree Smith, Erin Anderson. Second Row: Commissioner Don Russell, Vickie Turrell, Carlita Bloodsworth, Betty Marquardt, Pam Piper, Commissioner Melissa Lindsay. Back Row: Commissioner Jim Doherty, Shelley Wight and Diane Kilkenny. -Photo by David Sykes

"I just wanted to tell each of you how much it meant to acknowledge my 29 years of service within the Morrow County Health Department. I particularly appreciated your thoughtfulness in doing the celebration at the beginning of the meeting. I especially loved the kind words, the beautiful bouquet, the cupcakes, and the break so we had an opportunity to take a few photos and some brief conversation," Smith said.

Umatilla Electric court case moves county closer to power line permit approval

By David Sykes

It took circuit court action, but it appears Umatilla Electric Co-op (UEC) may be moving closer to getting a county permit for construction of a controversial new power line project near Boardman. The court action by UEC against the Morrow County Commissioners, asked the court to compel final approval of a permit, already issued by the county planner, for construction of a new 4.3-mile powerline from a Hwy 730 switchyard to Olson Rd near Boardman.

The new power line has been the subject of extended controversy since its proposal earlier this year, including appeals of planning decisions and a request to the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) to allow condemnation of private property. Time literally ran out on the permit, however, when the county failed to act within the state-mandated 150-day time limit. Circuit Judge Daniel Hill, October 2, ordered Morrow County to issue the permit or explain why it has not. The county has until October 19 to answer the court order or it will become final.

How the county and UEC ended up in court can be traced back to when interim County Planner Stephanie Case approved a construction permit for the powerline on March 23. Subsequently, a farm owner in the area appealed her decision to the planning commission, and on Sept. 4 the commission upheld her decision. That decision was also appealed, this time to the Morrow County Commissioners, who have final say over all planning commission decisions.

But the legal clock had already run out by that time, as the county was required by state law to have made a decision on the permit by August 20. After the second appeal to the county commission it appears UEC lost patience and filed the lawsuit on Sept 23. The lawsuit says since the county failed to act on the permit within the legal timeline, the power

line construction permit should now be automatically approved. In legal terms the action is called a Writ of Mandamus. Current County Planner Tamara Mabbott told the Gazette-Times Monday the county did not meet the deadline because "There were some delays in processing the application last spring and therefore the county did not meet the 150-day timeline."

The lawsuit is just one more step in a long line of controversies that have surrounded UEC's effort to build the power line. The co-op says it needs the new line to supply electricity to current and future customers in the area. To construct the line in the UEC desired route some private lands need to be crossed requiring legal easements from the owners. Several landowners have refused to sign the agreements prompting the co-op to take action that could lead to condemnation proceedings against these reluctant property owners.

The UEC filed paperwork March 19 with the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC), that if approved, would allow the co-op to move forward with condemnation proceedings against private land parcels needed for construction. The PUC has already held hearings on the condemnation request, but so far has not issued a ruling on whether the condemnation will be allowed. Alternate routes were explored to

General Election ballots go out this week

Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers reported that the ballots for the November 3 general election will begin to go out Wednesday, Oct. 14 and should start to arrive in mailboxes soon after.

Remember, ballots are not forwarded. Those who didn't receive a ballot, but believe they should have, should contact the Morrow County Clerk's office at 541-676-5604.

All ballots are due by 8 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3. Ballots must be received, not simply postmarked, on that day. Ballot return envelopes will include prepaid postage for business reply mail, which takes longer to be delivered than first class mail. October 29 is the last day to safely return your ballot by mail. After that date, voters must use an official drop site.

For voter convenience, 24-hour drop boxes are located throughout the county. All drop boxes close at 8 p.m. on election day. Drop sites are available at:

Heppner: Behind the Bartholomew Building, in the parking lot. Open 24



Official drop boxes are located throughout the county.

hours. Ballots may also be dropped at the Morrow County Clerk's office inside the courthouse. The clerk's office will be open from 8 a.m. to noon and 1-5 p.m., M-F and election day (Nov. 3) from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Lexington: 365 West Hwy 74 (Morrow County Public Works parking lot).

Ione: Spring St. (in front of the turn to 3rd Street).

Boardman: NW Boardman Ave.

Irrigon: 205 NE 3rd St. (Irrigon Annex).

build the powerline, but all were deemed unworkable by the co-op's engineers. UEC says ongoing easement negotiations with the affected landowners have been unsuccessful.

In an effort to alleviate the need for condemnation the county commissioners at one point even stepped in and offered to donate a parcel of county-owned land for use as an alternate power line route. In response to the offer, UEC co-op CEO Robert Echenrode said at a commission meeting, "While the county's offer to grant UEC a power line easement across county land is generous, it would not stop condemnation proceedings against other property owners in the area." Echenrode explained that even using the alternate route across county land there would still be a need to cross private property, on which so far, the co-op did not have easement agreements.

Adjoining land owners who filed appeals against both the planner and planning commission decisions, are Gary and Casey Frederickson. The Fredericksons have hired attorney Nick Blanc of Pendleton to represent them, and he argued that the planner's decision to issue the original permit was not valid since another powerline route that did not use farm zoned land should have been considered. Blanc also said the proposed transmission line

does not qualify as an "associated transmission line," or power service line, as described in UEC's application.

At the Sept. 4 appeal hearing the planning commission upheld the planner's decision, but only after county legal counsel Justin Nelson said the "150-day limit for a decision having already passed." Nelson said the remedy was a writ to the circuit court compelling the county to issue the powerline permit, which UEC later did.

"Lawyers for UEC exercised their right to file a Writ of Mandamus with the circuit court since the county did not process the application within the legally required 150-day time period," Mabbott told the Gazette. She cited Oregon law that "requires a local government to resolve all local appeals within 150 days. That includes all appeals at the local level."

The county commissioners had scheduled a public hearing October 14 for the second appeal filed by Frederickson to overturn the planning commission decision upholding the original permit approval. All planning commission decisions go to the county commission for final approval. That appeal hearing was subsequently canceled last week once the commissioners learned the circuit court had ruled in UEC favor and demanded the permit be issued.



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Offers valid on select new 2020-2021 Polaris snowmobiles purchased between August 1st, 2020 - August 31st, 2020. Minimum purchase required. Offer may not be combined with certain other offers, is subject to change and may be extended or terminated without further notice. Model specifications subject to change. All rebates are paid by the dealer. The Participant (dealer) reserves the right to discontinue the program at any time without notice. A 24-month warranty on all Polaris snowmobiles is included. Rebate amount is \$2000. Rebate amount is subject to a 24-month warranty on all Polaris snowmobiles. See dealer for details. No additional warranty coverage after the initial 24-month warranty period is subject to a 24-month warranty. See dealer for details. Not all participating Polaris dealerships may offer this offer. See your local dealer for details.

Polaris recommends that all riders take a safety training course. Do not attempt maneuvers beyond your capabilities. Always wear a helmet and other safety apparel. Please drink and ride.