



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢

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## County to lose dedicated park fire fighter

*'He protects the parks like it's his own house'*

By David Sykes

Dean Robinson recently announced his retirement as county firefighting boss, and with that the county will lose its most dedicated protector of park lands against wildfires. "I want to express how much we appreciate Dean and how much he is going to be missed," Public Works Director Matt Scrivner said at a recent County Commission meeting announcing Robinson's retirement. "Dean protects those parks like it is his own house."

Robinson has been involved with wildland firefighting a long time, stretching all the way back to when he was employed for 22 years as an Ione schoolteacher. During that time, he fought forest fires in the summer for the Forest Service for seven years, and then the State of Oregon for 13. After retirement from the schools, he took on the job of firefighting boss for the county, spending the next 10 years overlooking the protection of the three county parks, mostly the 9,000-acre OHV park in the mountains southeast of Heppner.

"The worst fire we had was one three years ago that burned 200 acres of the OHV park," he recalled when talking recently to the Gazette-Times. "It started from a logging operation off the park and burned into the park," he recalls. He says they were able to save quite a few acres but then realized with better equipment they could have saved more. That's when he, Scrivner and Parks Operations Manager Greg Close sat down together and decided what kind of additional equipment they needed to better protect the park. They added three "side by side" ATVs to the firefighting line up. A side by side is an all-terrain vehicle with seats next to each other. The county's equipment has 80-gallon tanks mounted on the back that are used to extinguish fires quickly before they get too big. "These are ideal for the park because we are covered with trails," Robinson says. "With an engine (regular fire truck) it is impossible to get down the trails," he explains. Robinson says in addition to the new equipment, the five county employees tasked with fighting fires also received firefighting training from Heppner Fire Chief Steve Rhea. "He helped us out during the winter off-season," Robinson said. He also credited County Commissioner Don Russell with advocating for the new additional equipment, and Boardman Rural Fire Department for donating an engine.

Of the people he has worked with over the years Robinson said he has high regard for Close, and the whole county crew. "They are great people to work with, a great team," he says. "Greg told me when I was hired 'you're the boss with

fires, and I'm your boss the rest of the time,'" Robinson recalls. When not doing fire control work Robinson helps out around the parks fixing things and taking care of all the problems that come with running three county parks. "I can't say enough about that guy," he says of Close, relating how he is a "people person. If he sees someone at the park looking lost or having a problem, he will ask them what is the matter. And then we go take care of it," Robinson says.

What is the best part of the firefighting job for the county? "There is an adrenalin rush about fighting a fire," says Robinson, who would go out during a lightning storm, watch for smoke, then go to the fires and get them put out quickly. "Every time a lightning strike comes through, I know where he is at," says Close. "He is on one of those ridges (out in the forest) looking, looking. I don't care if it's all night long. He will sit there. And he'll mark and check them and the next day he's found some. The next day we are ahead of the game. It's going to be really hard to replace him. I don't know if I can replace him." Close says.

So, is Robinson going to slow down now that he's off the job at the county? "I have a long list of things to do," he says. "People ask what are you going to do? I say all the things I didn't do when I was working." On top of the list of things to do is working cattle for some of the local ranchers. Robinson was on his way out to work on fences the day he spoke to the Gazette. He said he has his horses and still helps out some of the cattlemen. He did say Close wasn't quite ready to cut him completely loose yet. "Greg said if we have thunderstorms, I get the first call." Somehow, we think Robinson, who loves the mountains and outdoors, and loves the parks, will answer that call.

## CARES Act funding available

Morrow County has received CARES Act funding in the amount of \$601,000 to assist small businesses who have their principal operations in Morrow County. This funding is available to all small businesses with less than 25 employees that can demonstrate:

1. Business was prohibited from operations, as directed by Executive Orders 20-12 or 20-65; or
2. Business can show a one-month decline in sales of 25 percent or more, caused by COVID-19 pandemic regulations between March 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020, as compared to the same time period in 2019.

The deadline is Tuesday, December 15, 2020 by 5 p.m. for receipt of the completed applica-



Robinson fighting fire for the US Forest Service

## Knowles wins round one in fifth trip to National Finals Rodeo

Blake Knowles, 38, of Heppner is competing in the steer wrestling event in his fifth Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (NFR). The finals, usually held in Las Vegas, were moved to Globe Life Field in Arlington, TX this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. The NFR runs through December 12.

Knowles placed first on December 3, to tie for the first-round lead with Jesse Brown, Baker City, and Dakota Eldridge of Elko, NV. This is the first time Knowles has placed first at the NFR, although he placed second in the first round in 2018. The three winners each picked up a buckle and a check for \$20,872 by taking down their steers in 3.9 seconds. Knowles managed to take down his steer in again in 3.9 seconds in round three but did not place. He came back in round five with 4 seconds flat, placing third and taking home an additional \$15,654.

Knowles and Brown are the only two Oregon cowboys who qualified for the NFR this year. Knowles is currently sitting eighth in the world standings for steer wrestling with earnings of \$89,008.94, followed by Brown in ninth with \$88,558.70

Blake is the son of Butch Knowles, rodeo broadcaster and 1987 National Finals Rodeo saddle bronc champion, and Mary (Healy) Knowles. His brother, Brian, works the family ranch in Heppner.

The NFR includes 10 rounds of world championship competition in bareback riding, steer wrestling, team roping, saddle bronc riding, tie-down roping,

## Celebrate the holidays with photos



Local area residents are asked to submit photos of their homes that are lit up and decorated for the holidays. Please include the city where the photo was taken and the street it is on if you choose. The Heppner Gazette-Times will be publishing the photos in the December 23 issue.

Photos may be emailed to editor@rapidsolve.net, uploaded to Heppner.net or texted to 541-980-6674 and must be received by 5 p.m. on Monday, December 21 to be included. For additional information, contact the G-T at 541-676-9228.



Dean Robinson behind the wheel of his 'favorite' firefighting piece, a since retired water tender

## Knowles wins round one in fifth trip to National Finals Rodeo



Blake Knowles

barrel racing and bull riding, and an all-around cowboy also will be crowned. The top 15 money winners

for each event in 2020 qualified for the NFR, which features a total prize purse of about \$10 million.

## Pastors reminded to submit Christmas messages

The Heppner Gazette-Times will publish Christmas messages from area pastors on Wednesday, December 23. The deadline to submit messages will be Monday, December 21, at 5 p.m.

Those planning to submit Christmas messages may email them to editor@rapidsolve.net, send via mail to Heppner Gazette-Times, PO Box 337, Heppner, OR 97836 or drop them by the office at

188 West Willow, Heppner, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Pastors are also invited to submit separate news articles for Christmas church services or activities.



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**ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.**