



# Heppner graduate joins Team Mexico for shot at Olympics

**By David Sykes**  
Heppner High School graduate San Juanita Fetuuaho (Elguezabal) may have a chance to participate in this summer's Tokyo Olympic games after being recruited by Team Mexico to play as a member of that country's up-and-coming rugby team. The Heppner Gazette-Times spoke to San Juanita Friday just before she packed her bags and left Saturday for Monaco in preparation to play in a qualifying tournament June 19 - 20. There will be 12 teams in the tournament, with the top two going on to the Olympics.

"I like the physical part of the game," San Juanita said about what originally attracted her to the game of rugby while she was attending Western Oregon University in 2004 on a softball scholarship. "They were putting together a new rugby team and I saw people playing the game and I was drawn to it," she recalls. "I like the full contact aspect to the game. Full contact for women," she explained.

Western University rugby was pretty good for a new team and in her senior year, the year she started playing, she and the team did very well, going all the way to the Division I playoff and taking second place. Because of her college play Fetuuaho says she was recognized by the American rugby coaches and "put



San Juanita Fetuuaho (Elguezabal) shows her trademark toughness while carrying the ball in the 2019 Pan Am Games. She is now headed with the Mexican rugby team to Monaco this week for a shot at qualifying for this summer's Tokyo Olympics. Fetuuaho attributes much of her competitive drive to her father Juan Elguezabal (inset) who coached her during high school at Heppner.

on a fast track for Team USA" which she played from 2008 until 2013. She then retired from the sport at age 30 and settled down with her family, husband Talo and son Juan Talo, 2, in West Linn.

But the competitive drive has never left San Juanita and in 2018 at age 35 she was contacted by Team Mexico (the Serpientes - Serpents) about playing for them and she jumped at the chance. Team Mexico was putting together a rugby team and went looking for

experienced players they could use to "beef up," she recalls. "When you play for a team it's called capturing that player and then you are capped," she explains. She says Mexico contacted the USA coach and wanted to know "do you have any players you haven't captured? Maybe some older players that have some life in them. That was me," she says. "It was really exciting because there has only been one other player in the United States who has played for another country's team."

But how could San Juanita, as an American citizen, play for another country? "I was eligible because my father was a Mexican citizen," she says. "When you play in the Olympics everybody has to be a citizen of the country they are playing for," San Juanita explained. She has what is called a natural born birthright because of her dad's citizenship. The family moved to Heppner when her father, Juan, got a job as teacher and coach at the Heppner High School,

# Lions club holds annual meeting, elects officers



Jaylene Papineau is sworn in as a new member by President Alan Scott (right) and Sec/Treasurer Steve Rhea. -Photo by David Sykes

The Heppner Lions Club held its annual meeting last week, enjoyed a steak dinner at the park, and reelected current officers for the coming year. Alan Scott was named president, Steve Rhea was elected sec/treasurer, Dan Sharp VP, Andrew Johnson Tail

Twister and Jimmy Fichter will be Lion Tamer. New Lion member Jaylene Papineau was also sworn in. Anyone wishing to join the Heppner Lions club, and be a part of community service, is encouraged to call Rhea at 541-980-4232.

but he had never given up his Mexican citizenship. "I feel so lucky and so blessed that my dad retained his citizenship," she says.

Her name, if she is to play in the Olympics, will also reflect the mixed heritage she comes from. Her mother Mary Ann's maiden name is Dority, and in Mexico they use the combination of the father and mother's names so on the programs and other places at the Olympic Games, she will be referred to as San Juanita Guadalupe Elguezabal-Dority.

San Juanita says one of the benefits she will bring to team Mexico is her ability to read defenses and do "off the ball work." When there is a tackle, she explains, there is then a new phase and the game moves forward building on phases. "I like the mental part of the game. I like to move the defense around and I understand this better now that I am older with more experience," she says. Fetuuaho has also played against both the New Zealanders and Australian teams whose players are "some of the best players in the world. They have vision and I have learned a lot about the game from them," she says.

Fetuuaho's style of play is aggressive, and she knows it. "I am known for my physicality. Teams love and hate me. I get a kick out of being a pest, and I'm quite good at it," she says. In rugby there are two positions the forwards and the backs. The forwards are known for being tougher and bigger and backs smaller and more athletic," she points out. "I am one of the smaller forwards, but I'm known for being more physical," she says mischievously.

Her mother also tells a story about young San Juanita. "The first sentence out of her mouth was 'I do it myself'," says Mary Ann. She also remembers in the sixth grade San Juanita broke her leg. "She was out playing tackle football - with the boys. The doctor told her she would never

play catcher in baseball again and only outfielder. But she did," recalls her mother.

Before packing up her cleats and heading off to Monaco, San Juanita gave a big "shout out" to people in her life who have helped her in the achievement of the success she has experienced. "I have to thank my mom (Mary Ann Elguezabal) who was there for me when I went away to play. I have to leave for Mexico sometimes to play and she comes here, stays in the house and takes care of our son, little Juan Talo, while I am gone and makes it so I am able to do this," she says adding that "young Juan Talo already has rugby in his blood." All of Heppner was supportive of her too. "The whole community has helped make me who I am. The church and teachers all encouraged me, and I wouldn't be where I am today without the community I came from behind me," she says.

But she says the biggest motivation for her drive and competition comes from the influence of her father Juan, who coached her during high school. When asked what he would think about her making the rugby team and possibly heading to the Olympics, San Juanita gets a little emotional. "It brings tears to my eyes to think about when he coached me," she recalls. "He said, 'she may not be the most talented player out there, but no one works harder than her. And that is what makes me so proud of her,'" she remembers. Her father passed away from cancer in 2000 when San Juanita was 17 years old.

She recalls that softball was always her best sport and once at the all-star game someone asked her dad if San Juanita would be playing college softball. "He said if she works hard enough she can play wherever she wants. To be able to play on Team Mexico with his name is one of the greatest things I have ever done. It brings tears to my eyes," says San Juanita.

# Economic development group reviews community investments

\$429,829 went to businesses - \$230,168 to housing rehab



WCVEDG board members (L-R) Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth, Bank of Eastern Oregon President and Chief Executive Officer Jeff Bailey, Howard and Beth Bryant Trust Administrator Kim Cutsforth (WCVEDG Chair), Bank of Eastern Oregon Executive Vice President and Chief Credit Officer Ed Rollins, and Nancy Snider attended last week's annual meeting. -Photo by David Sykes.

**By David Sykes**  
The Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) used its annual meeting last week to review investments it has made into the south county area and tell of its plans for the future. The main areas WCVEDG has made investments in is housing rehabilitation and business enhancements, Chair Kim Cutsforth told the crowd using a PowerPoint presentation.

A total of 28 homes have benefited from the rehabilitation grants to make improvements to ex-

isting single-family and multi-family stick-built dwellings in the Heppner, Lexington and Ione area. The grants are made in an effort by WCVEDG to increase the available housing units. South county has been in the middle of a chronic housing shortage for some time, a situation the WCVEDG board of directors recognized as an economic impediment to the area. If local businesses cannot provide adequate housing they will have a difficult time attracting employees and growing. WCVEDG has paid out a

total of \$230,168 with an additional \$136, 715 in the pipeline and committed.

WCVEDG receives its money for the grants from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone, a special business zone set up to administer tax breaks for businesses locating in the county. Money is collected from this business in lieu of regular property taxes, which would be much higher without the tax break incentives. WCVEDG has also been receiving \$25,000 in funding from Morrow County which in turn receives over \$75,000 in eco-

nomics development funds from the state of Oregon from lottery money.

On the business incentive grant side WCVEDG has awarded \$429,829 in grants to local businesses to help "stimulate private investment, expand the tax base and provide job opportunities and encourage business owners to expand, re-locate and invest in the appearance of their property," according to a PowerPoint presentation at the annual meeting. "The Business Incentive Grant Program may contribute up to a maximum of \$25,000 or 50 percent of the project,

-See ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP/PAGE TWO

YOU'VE BEEN WAITING ALL WINTER FOR THIS MOMENT.

## SPRING SALES EVENT

GOING ON NOW

REBATES UP TO \$1,000 ON 2020 MODELS

TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLY

POLARIS SPRING SALES EVENT

Morrow County Grain Growers

CALL 541-989-8221 EXT. 204 FOR MORE INFORMATION

WARNING: Polaris® off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and call belts or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-942-3754 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2021 Polaris Inc.

POLARIS OFF ROAD