



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES



First snow hits



Isla Trahan, 4, enjoyed the first snow to hit the area on Monday. -Contributed photo.

City dedicates Thomson Square



The dedication ceremony for Thomson Square in Heppner was held December 18 with members of the Thomson family attending. -Photos by Kathleen Cutsforth.

Heppner held a dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony for Thomson Square on Saturday, December 18. Members of the Thomson family, Bruce and Phyllis Thomson and their daughter, Stacey; and Meredith (Thomson) Walters and son Aaron attended the ceremony.

"The Thomson family is grateful and honored that the city dedicated the area where the store stood for so many years," Meredith Walters told the Gazette.

According to family, James George Thomson Sr. arrived in Heppner in 1892 and shortly thereafter established the Thomson Bros.



Thomson Square marker installed.

grocery and department store. James G. Thomson, Jr. began working at the store in 1926, then in 1946 he and his wife, Madge, purchased the business and remodeled the building. They retired in 1979 and the business was sold. In May 1983, a fire engulfed and destroyed the building.

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CREZ ponders division of money

Has \$9 million to disburse

By David Sykes

The Columbia River Enterprise Zone II (CREZ II) met last week to begin discussing plans to divide up nearly \$9 million in payments in lieu of taxes it received this year. But in the end the board decided to wait another month before making any decision.

Before postponing their decision however, the nine-member board, made up of three representatives each from the Port of Morrow, Morrow County and the City of Boardman, heard multiple requests from entities and groups across the county seeking a piece of the funds.

The main decision facing the board appears to be should it continue with its past strategy of disbursing much of the money through local economic development groups or begin taking individual "asks" from groups and organizations around the county. And at last Friday's meeting there was no shortage of those asks.

For example the new broadband team asked the board for funds to match for state and federal grant money to build out broadband in the county; the Workforce Partnership wants money for worker relocation program; the Morrow County Health District is seeking money for an urgent care building in Boardman; Columbia River Community

Health asked for money to expand its facility with more exam rooms; Boardman police are seeking funds to build a 10-lane 50-yard indoor shooting range; the District Attorney asked for money to hire a special investigator; Boardman Fire and Rescue wants a new training facility and the cities of Ione and Heppner are looking for infrastructure funding. In all, CREZ chair Don Russell said there was about \$4.5 million in "asks" from these groups.

In the past the CREZ board has resisted accepting money requests from individual groups and entities, not wanting to be in the position of deciding what does and does not get funded. Instead, the board funneled much of the money to economic development groups in Boardman, Irrigon and south county and let those groups field requests and disburse funds locally in their respective communities. CREZ chairman Don Russell indicated he likes this system and urged the board to continue with this method of money disbursements.

If it does continue funding the economic development groups in the past it has used a formula based partly on population. If this

policy continues the board will need to decide what population percentages to use in this distribution formula.

In a break from previous years, however, last year the board gave money directly to its three "sponsoring" entities, the Port of Morrow, city of Boardman and Morrow County. It also gave \$200,000 each to Ione, Lexington and Heppner suggesting the money be spent on infrastructure. The CREZ has always sent funds directly to the county education fund fulfilling its pledge to support education in the county. It also purchased a large fire engine for the Boardman Fire District



CREZ II Chair Don Russell

in support of public safety. The CREZ II has been operating and disbursing funds for the past ten years and in the beginning defined four categories for how the money would be spent: Education, public safety, housing and community enhancement. Last year it added a fifth, infrastructure.

CREZ receives these large amounts of money each year from businesses who locate in the enterprise zone located in north county at the Port of Morrow near Boardman. These businesses receive generous property tax breaks and instead of tax property taxes, pay money directly to the CREZ, which then decides how the money

will be spent. CREZ II last year came to an end and will no longer be accepting new businesses, however it will continue to receive and disburse large amounts of money for the next 15 years.

A new CREZ III has been authorized by the state of Oregon and covering the same area, however it has so far not made any tax deals with new businesses. Amazon Web Services has built large server facilities in the area taking advantage of the tax breaks and is expected to continue building there. Lamb Weston, Tillamook Cheese and other companies also are located in the enterprise zone and take advantage of the tax breaks.

At times there has been criticism of the generous tax breaks given the companies, prompting Russell to remind people that some of those businesses most likely would not be in Morrow County at all without the enterprise zone. "The entities (businesses) are making payment in lieu of taxes that is significantly less in some cases than the tax revenue they would pay if they were on the books at full book," Russell said at last week's meeting. "But would they be here if they were on for full book? Probably not because there are 70 enterprise zones in the state of Oregon, and they would go somewhere else in the state of Oregon or Washington," he pointed out.

Lexington starts planning for next year's May Day celebration

By David Sykes

The town of Lexington held its first organizational meeting last week to plan for its second annual May Day celebration. Mayor Juli Kennedy told the town council at its December meeting last week that there was a "good turnout" at the meeting where nine people came to plan for next year's event. Kennedy said there were a lot of good ideas discussed and she urged everyone who wants to help to attend the next meeting Monday, Jan. 10 at 6 p.m. at Lexington Town Hall. "If we are going to do all the things we decided to do last night we are going to need all hands on deck," the mayor said. "Anybody that wants to get involved please come; that would be wonderful," she said of the January meeting. The first May Day celebration last year featured a parade and various activities.

In other business at



Participants in the first May Day celebration parade last May. -File photo.

last week's council meeting, Josie Miles gave a fire department report. Miles said the fire department has been doing joint first aid training with the Ione Fire Department. She also reported that the department received a new brush rig from the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) fire pool, a 2005 Ford F550 Dodge. The Dodge has been in service in Lexington since 1990 and will be decommissioned and returned to ODF.

The council also heard a report from town maintenance man Curtis Thompson who said the new chlorine unit is working well. He also said he checked on the emergency generator at the well and it is functioning properly as it should.

Recorder Janette Eldridge reported the town audit has been completed and she presented each councilmember with a copy. She also said the town has received a contract from Anderson Perry Engineers for an agreement to do work

for the town. They will be doing an assessment study of the town's water and sewer systems. Eldridge said she had also turned in a request to Business Oregon for a \$40,000 grant to pay for the two studies.

G-T closed Christmas Eve

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed for the Christmas holiday on Friday, December 24. Normal business hours will resume Monday, December

27. David, April, Bobbi and Giselle, the staff at Heppner Gazette-Times, wishes everyone a very merry Christmas.

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