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Irrigon county facilities open for business

"I invite folks to stop in and visit," says Commissioner Jim Doherty

By David Sykes

The ground was broken in October 2020 and now the new county offices are finished and open for the public's business in Irrigon. The new facility is located on the corner of NE Main and Second Streets, next to the old planning and justice court buildings.

The \$6.8 million mixed-use office space will house a multitude of county offices and departments including the Justice Court, Planning Department, Sheriff's Office, County Clerk, Surveyor, Veterans, District Attorney, Juvenile, Commissioners and Parole and Probation. The county seat will still be in Heppner and no offices will be closed there; the new Irrigon facility is just an expansion of service for the ever-growing north end of the county.

County commissioners were glad to see the facility up and running, including Chairman Jim Doherty. "This was a long time coming. I think one of the crowning achievements of this board of commissioners is our attention to the county governments infrastructure. The new building in Irrigon is reflective of our "coming of age" and a window of fiscal abilities to look to the future. It is the first of several dominoes to fall as we turn our attention to modernizing the courthouse and moving the health folks out of the



The new county office buildings have been completed and are now open for businesses in Irrigon



Justice Court Judge Glenn Diehl and Morrow County Sheriff's Deputy Dick Stokoe conduct business in the new justice courtroom. photos by Chris Sykes

old market store in Boardman," he told the Gazette-Times. "It's refreshing to be able to do these things and I am excited for our employees who are excited to move in to the Ir-

rigon office. I would invite folks to stop in and visit their offices," he added.

A formal grand opening date for the new 12,500 square foot facility has not yet been announced.

County Administrator Darrell Green said although construction on the new building is done the project is not complete until we are able to demolish the old Irrigon Annex

Area Ag and water expert urges unity following Port of Morrow DEQ fine

'The divide between the county and the port is starting to stick out.'

By David Sykes

A regional agriculture and water expert has called for unity between the Port of Morrow and county government following the recent announcement of a \$1.3 million fine against the Port for nitrate groundwater contamination.

Craig Reeder, who has a long history of working in the public eye on regional water and agricultural issues, told last week's County Commission meeting that now is not the time for finger pointing and divisiveness over the alleged violations and stiff fine imposed by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on the port. He said the county and port both need to come together to protect the area resources following these serious and important water contamination charges. "These issues have far broader reaching impacts, and the one thing we need to do is to come together as a community to support our resources and to pool those resources to fix any problems," Reeder told the commissioners. "The Port of Morrow is our Port," he said in urging the commissioners to set aside their differences and work together. Reeder said recent comments he's heard coming from county government are "very, very damaging" not only to the port but also area businesses and the regional economy.

Reeder was before the commission last Wednesday the day following a bombshell announcement that the DEQ had levied a \$1.3 million fine against the Port for "repeatedly over applying wastewater containing nitrogen to agricultural fields and failing to monitor those fields in the Lower Umatilla Basin." The DEQ said there were "thousands" of violations over a three-year period "resulting in approximately 165 tons of excess nitrogen being applied." The charge is particularly potent since the area has a long history of high nitrate in the drinking water alluded to in the DEQ announcement. "Groundwater is used as a primary drinking water source by residents in the basin, which spans northern Morrow and Umatilla counties. High levels of nitrate in drinking water are linked with serious health concerns, particularly for infants and pregnant women," the DEQ said.

Reeder said the information the DEQ put out was very sensationalized and started a "brush fire"



Ag businessman Craig Reeder

about contaminated water. A search of the internet by the Heppner Gazette-Times revealed the story is getting wide play across the Pacific Northwest from Seattle to Idaho and down into northern California with multiple newspapers, internet sites and television stations carrying the story. Reeder said the government's recent negative public comments were fanning those flames. "I am not here today to tell you there are or are not any problems, or that you need to squelch your opinions," Reeder said to the commissioners. "I'm just telling you there has been some communications (from the county) that have gone out post-filing by the DEQ that are potentially very, very damaging, to not just the port but to the broader base. The divide between the county, and I don't know if it's the county's position or just one person's position, but the divide between the county and the port is starting to stick out. We are starting to feel a counterproductive weight from that," Reeder warned.

Reeder did not identify or name the county communications he was talking about, and a review by the Gazette of public documents at least, showed only a reprint of the DEQ press release announcing the Port's fine posted on the county web site. Reeder said there were a number of regional businesses feeling the same way, and a letter had been written asking for unity between the port and county dealing with the water contamination charges. The letter had not been made public at that time, and an email sent from the Gazette to Reeder asking for a copy, had not been answered by press time Tuesday.

-See PORT OF MORROW- PAGE SIX

Boardman Police Chief named assistant city manager

Part of city's 'organizational restructuring'

Boardman City Manager Karen Pettigrew has named Rick Stokoe as assistant city manager to oversee the city's internal and external services functions, including finance, information technology, developmental services, public works and utilities, public safety and the human resources departments.

"The addition of Stokoe to the assistant city manager's position is part of an organizational restructuring that will bring additional executive capacity to the city's leadership team as community needs and service

demands evolve," said Pettigrew. "Most recently, he served and will continue to serve as police chief for the City of Boardman, and has more than 18 years of progressive leadership experience, including 18 years of budget development, control and 18 years of human resources management knowledge.

"Rick is going to bring a wealth of valuable experience and perspective at a critical time as our city government adapts and responds to new public service challenges and opportunities, and evolving work environments," Pettigrew said.

grew said.

Stokoe's selection for the new assistant city manager post follows a competitive nationwide executive search and recruitment. "I consider it an honor and privilege to continue to contribute making Boardman an even stronger, safer, better place to live, work and play for all residents, business owners and visitors," he said.

For a period of time Stokoe will continue to fill both roles as the police chief and assistant city manager. As the current city manager nears retirement, Stokoe, who has



Rick Stokoe

filled in as city manager a few times, will assist in the transition. Stokoe and his family have resided in Boardman for the last 11 years and have been an active part of the Boardman community.

Stokoe started his new position Wednesday, Jan. 5.

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