

The Official Newspaper  
of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

**Heppner**  
**GAZETTE-TIMES**

U.S.P.S. 240-420

Morrow County's Home-Owned Weekly Newspaper

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All News and Advertising Deadline is Monday at 5 p.m.

For Advertising: advertising deadline is Monday at 5 p.m. Cost for a display ad is \$5.25 per column inch. Cost for classified ad is 50¢ per word. Cost for Card of Thanks is \$10 up to 100 words. Cost for a classified display ad is \$6.05 per column inch.

For Public/Legal Notices: public/legal notices deadline is Monday at 5 p.m. Dates for publication must be specified. Affidavits must be requested at the time of submission. Affidavits require three weeks to process after last date of publication (a sooner return date must be specified if required).

For Obituaries: Obituaries are published in the Heppner GT at no charge and are edited to meet news guidelines. Families wishing to include information not included in the guidelines or who wish to have the obituary written in a certain way must purchase advertising space for the obituary.

For Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor MUST be signed by the author. The Heppner GT will not publish unsigned letters. All letters MUST include the author's address and phone number for use by the GT office. The GT reserves the right to edit letters. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10.

# Health District hires new doctor

By April Hilton-Sykes

The Morrow County Health District Board approved a physician employment agreement with Rodney Schaffer, M.D., at their Monday night meeting in Irrigon. The agreement, contingent on Dr. Schaffer becoming licensed to practice medicine in Oregon, includes: a normal work-week of four to five days at Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner, with occasional fill-in at Irrigon Medical Clinic and Ione Community Clinic; shared emergency room call with other providers and care of Pioneer Memorial Hospital patients as needed and required if taking ER call.

The agreement is to "commence no later than August 1, 2022, and shall continue through July 31, 2025, unless either party gives 120 days' notice of termination or resignation," according to the contract.

Health District CEO Emily Roberts reported that "The district has open searches for permanent candidates with Merritt Haw-

kins, Pacific Companies, and Healthcare Recruitment Link" and "is currently recruiting" for the following provider positions: -Irrigon Medical Clinic-one family practice physician (MD or DO) and one DO (doctor of osteopathy) with a second interview that had been scheduled in February, one MD candidate with a Zoom interview scheduled in March and one advanced practice provider (physician assistant or nurse practitioner).

-Pioneer Memorial Clinic-One family practice physician (MD or DO) with one MD candidate under consideration and one advanced practice provider (PA/NP) also under consideration.

Kathleen Greenup, RN, chief nursing officer, told the board the "District has remained compliant with staffing plans at the hospital level. Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has granted the district four contract RNs-all oriented and working full time. PMH staff are happy to have the RN assistance and the OHA RNs are thankful to be in our "wonderful town." Greenup noted, "Three full-time RNS have been hired. The District is continuing to recruit for additional full and/or part-time RN hires."

Concerning COVID updates, Greenup said the district has "adequate personal protective equipment" and testing supplies at all locations," and "continues

to be able to offer community members inpatient and outpatient treatment options for COVID. There are ample doses available to continue all treatment options."

Greenup also noted Pioneer Memorial Clinic is "fully staffed" and they are looking forward to the clinic director starting in early April and Dr. Sirucek "began seeing patients via remote telehealth and feedback was well received."

Also at the meeting, Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney presented the following unaudited financial report which shows a \$103,760 gain for January, with \$1,284,717 in gross patient revenue, less \$116,742 in revenue deductions, plus \$218,296 in tax revenue and \$2,967 in other operating revenue for \$1,389,238 in total operating revenue, \$1,614,433 in total operating expenses, a \$225,195 loss from operations, a \$328,955 non-operating gain for a \$103,760 gain for the month.

In other business, the board:

-received a report concerning 2021 ambulance dispatches, response time, number of runs for Boardman, Irrigon, Heppner and Ione.

-approved a request for a defibrillator unit from the Morrow County School District for the A.C. Houghton Elementary School of office in Irrigon. The current

defibrillator will no longer charge, says ACH Principal Stephanie Ewing.

-received the following Pioneer Memorial Hospital and ancillary statistics for January: one admission, with one swing bed admission, eight admitted for observation, 680 total admissions with 80 emergency encounters; 1,674 lab tests, 89 x-ray/ultrasound tests, 38 CT scans, seven MRI scans, 42 EKG tests, one out-patient respiratory therapy procedure.

-received the following clinic reports: 240 provider visits to the Heppner Clinic, 358 provider visits to the Irrigon Clinic; 82 provider visits to the Ione Clinic; 130 provider encounters at PMH.

-received the following ambulance data: Heppner Ambulance had 23 transports for \$39,426 in revenue; Boardman Ambulance had 36 transports for \$80,363 in revenue; Irrigon Ambulance had 25 transports for \$49,936 in revenue; Ione Ambulance had no transports.

-received the following information: Home Health had 203 patient visits; Hospice had two admissions and two deaths; Pharmacy provided 2,185 drug doses for \$155,535 in revenue.

-held an executive session under "ORS 192.660 (2)(f) to consider information or records that are exempt from public inspection."

## DA's Report

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson has released the following report:

- Skyler Lee Kendrick was convicted of criminal trespass in the second degree and sentenced to 15 days in jail.

### Morrow County Health District Committed to Advancing EMS and Strengthening Services to Respond to Challenges



Morrow County, Oregon – (February 28, 2022) – Rural and frontier EMS agencies across the United States face many challenges. Chief among them include funding, staffing, recruitment and retention, access to specialty care, equipment, and training. Entities that provide EMS service must adapt to changing conditions and plan how best to serve their populations in response to shifts and uncertainties in the industry.

For over 70 years, a single Ambulance Service Area (ASA) has served Morrow County residents. The District's EMS dispatches ambulances from four facilities, including Boardman, Heppner, Irrigon, and Ione. With seven ambulances in its fleet, two stationed at Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner, two at Irrigon's fire hall, two at the Boardman ambulance hall, and one ambulance dispatched from Ione's fire hall, as well as a Quick Response Team (QRT) at the ready in Lexington, the District's EMS covers an area of approximately 2,000 square miles and an estimated 13,000 residents.

On average, MCHD EMS responds to 1300 requests for ambulance service each year, consisting of a combination of emergency and non-emergency scene responses; hospital to home transfers; inter-facility transfers; as well as stand-by and those that do not require patient transports. The District's EMS consistently meets and exceeds state and national standards for response times, and is compliant with CMS' rules for participation.

Rural and frontier EMS have a long and proud history of being staffed by community volunteers. However, this model is no longer considered viable for several reasons, including an increase in population size, such as the case with Morrow County, and a decrease in the number of volunteers available to answer calls. According to a National Rural Health Association report, rural ambulance services relied heavily on volunteers. Report findings showed that approximately 53% of rural EMS agencies were staffed by volunteers, compared with 14% in urban areas. However, more than 70% of those rural agencies reported difficulty finding volunteers.

To respond to changing and emerging EMS workforce issues, the District began transitioning its EMS service to a mix of paid positions and volunteers to provide more coverage across its service area.

The shift in staffing makes it possible to ensure full-time EMS responders are available 24/7 in Boardman, Irrigon, and Heppner. Ione continues to be served by part-time EMS staff while also having coverage from Heppner's ambulance service. In addition, the District has a contingent of part-time EMS staff to provide backup when needed in each location.

Change doesn't happen without planning.

The District has taken a phased implementation approach to ensure EMS staffing changes are fiscally sound and successful. In all, eight employed EMS personnel will be hired at each location. Employees will work two 12-hour shifts in their dispatch location, with two employees per shift. In October of 2021, Boardman EMS was first to undergo changes, shifting from a mix of full-time and volunteer employees to the fully paid model. The District has been able to fill six of the eight positions needed and is actively interviewing to fill the last two positions. The two open shifts available are currently covered by full-time and the occasional part-time employees on-call. Irrigon EMS will begin its transition on July 1, 2022, with Heppner expected to follow in July 2023. Emily Roberts, CEO of MCHD, said, "We're really proud of the hard work that has gone into the staffing redesign plan of our EMS. One of the many things that make this team exceptional is their ability to recognize what's required to ensure the long-term viability of this vital service provided to our communities."

The benefits of the move to a paid model are numerous. Aside from having full-time, highly trained EMTs ready to respond to emergency calls, the increased staffing allows the District to provide additional community services, such as:

- Health education at school and community events
- CPR training for schools and industry
- Targeted skills training for community members focused on topics such as heat exhaustion and COVID precautions
- Backup support at District locations, including Pioneer Memorial Hospital and the District's primary care and medical home clinics

"Morrow County Health District has and always will be committed to providing quality health care and emergency medical services to the residents of Morrow County," said Donna Sherman, MLT(ASCP)CM, EMT-I, EMS Director. "Our focus is protecting and advancing EMS services for all residents of Morrow County, and with that, collaborating with local partner agencies to ensure continuity of service, advancing and maintaining the skills of our responders, and upholding the level of professionalism our communities expect and deserve," Sherman added.

MCHD invites qualified applicants to explore EMS career opportunities listed on the District's website at HealthierMC.org. Also, follow the District on Facebook for the latest information about the phased EMS transition plan.

## Windmill blade off the side



A semi hauling a windmill blade went off the roadway on Highway 74 near milepost 15 Monday. -Contributed photo.

## Local bankers graduate

On November 17, 2021, the Oregon Bankers Association (OBA) celebrated the graduation of a talented group of bankers from both the OBA's Northwest Bank Operations School and Commercial Lending Boot Camp. While a number of participants joined for individual sessions of these programs, a core group engaged for the entirety of the programs and were presented with certificates of completion.

Both programs are examples of OBA's signature educational offerings, with the operations school offered biennially and the commercial lending program offered every 18 months.

"We'd like to congratulate all the graduates and look forward to the continued success of our Bank of Eastern Oregon and Bank of Eastern Washington graduates. We're pleased they've shown the initiative to learn more and advance their careers within the bank," said Becky Kindle, EVP and COO of Bank of Eastern Oregon.

Bank of Eastern Oregon graduates from the Northwest Bank Operations

School are Paola Cabrera, Ione, Jessica Peterson, Heppner, Jennifer Hall, Condon, Chelsie Messenger, Moro, Caitlin Rutherford, Fossil, and Savannah Stout, John Day. Bank of Eastern Washington graduates are Desiree Chappell, La-Crosse, Marissa Gutierrez, Pasco, and Karlie Thompson, Colfax.

Graduating from the Commercial Lending Boot Camp are Kendra Butterfield, Bank of Eastern Oregon, Caldwell, ID and Jay Hart, Bank of Eastern Washington, Colfax.

**Heppner's Wee Bit O' Ireland St. Patrick's Day Celebration is back!**

**After a long two years, the celebration kicks off on March 11!**

**The Heppner Gazette-Times will publish our special St. Patrick's Day pages in the March 9th issue. Do not miss this opportunity to reach local and visiting customers.**

**The deadline to be included is Monday, March 7 at 5:00 pm.**

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