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Sheriff Matlack announces retirement

Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack

Recommends Undersheriff John Bowles replace him



Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack

Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack announced his retirement last week after 18 years on the job.

“My time as Sheriff has been some of the most exciting and rewarding times in my long law enforcement career,” Matlack said in a letter to the board of commissioners. “It has been a wonderful experience and I know I will miss it very much.”

His retirement will take effect Nov. 1.

The sheriff is an elect-

ed position, and upon his resignation the Morrow County Board of Commissioners will make an appointment to fill out the remainder of his term. Matlack recommended they choose Undersheriff John Bowles.

“Over his years as Undersheriff John has been trained and exposed to all the various duties of Sheriff and it is without doubt or reservation that I recommend him as my replacement,” Matlack said.

Bowles has been employed with the sheriff’s office for 21 years.

After receiving the letter, at last week’s meeting, Commissioner Don Russell said he had received an email from Boardman Police Officer Mark Pratt, who also wished to be considered for the job. At the same time, Russel brought up a concern about nepotism in the sheriff’s office, where Bowles’s wife is also

employed.

“I appreciate everything sheriff Matlack has done for the county over the last 18 years, but I do have a concern that I would like our HR (human resource) director to look into,” Russell said. “We are in the middle of a \$750,000 lawsuit over a nepotism agreement. And it’s not lost on me that both the suggestion for the replacement of the sheriff and their spouse work for the county and it will create potential nepotism,” he concluded.

The county currently has a lawsuit against it from former administrator Darrell Green over a nepotism dispute when both he and his wife worked for the county. Both were fired and Green subsequently filed a \$750,000 lawsuit over what he said was an unjust firing.

Before the commission made its decision on a replacement and possibly naming Bowles, Russell



Morrow County Undersheriff John Bowles

asked Human Resource Director Lindsay Grogan to “look into that and talk with our legal counsel and see how we work around this. I don’t want to set us up for the same thing,” he added.

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay commented that is not the only instance in the county.

“We have the same situation in the assessor’s office,” she pointed out.

Radie gives optimistic nitrate water report

Debbie Radie, Vice



Debbie Radie

President of Operations at Boardman Foods, and the person heading up a business coalition

formed to address nitrate contamination in north county water wells, gave an optimistic report on these efforts at the county commission meeting last week.

Concern over the nitrate contaminated water in the Boardman- and Irigon-area private water wells came to a head several months ago after a large state fine was levied against the Port of Morrow for excessive nitrate dumping. Following the fine and subsequent media attention over unsafe drinking water, concern over the health of those effected heightened.

Radie was instrumental in putting together the

coalition of businesses, including food processors and agricultural interests in north county. The group put up money and supplied volunteers to provide well testing and purchase and install well filters at effected homes.

“Boardman foods helped set up four sites for water testing and we did 300 people in a two-to-three-week period,” she told commissioners.

Radie said this effort along with other testing by the county resulted in 500 well-water tests being done. She said 200 homes in Morrow County that needed clean drinking water and had wells that tested higher than the government danger limit of 10 ppm (parts per million) were identified in that testing.

Radie stated the coalition has been successful in putting up money for the testing and installation of filters even when the state

did not come through with funding.

“We did not want to wait for state funding because the state had determined that this was not their issue,” she said. Although she acknowledged the state has since begun putting up funds, it was the coalition that earlier stepped up to help.

“There is \$121,000 in an account with the BCDA (Boardman Community Development Association) for water filters for everyone,” she reported. “Of the 200 people (identified) everyone that needs a filter should have one. Everyone that needs help with installation should have that,” she said, adding that it should now be a “quick turnaround” getting those with contaminated wells filtered water “at their sink with clean drinking water.”

Radie believes with the short-term problems getting under control the coalition

will continue to work on the nitrate problem.

“On the long-term issues the coalition will continue to support and get people to voluntarily work together, which was what the LUBGWMA (Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area) was originally set up for,” she stated. The LUBGWMA was formed in 1990 to address high nitrates in the North Morrow and Umatilla County areas.

“We are not going away,” Radie said emphatically. “The business community is continuing the work and looking at what has already been done and what needs to be done to make improvements. A lot of people have been working very hard. With our state and local partners and the business coalition, we will continue to support the needs of Morrow County residents who do not have safe drinking water.

“We do care about our community, and we are the ones that have stepped up with funding and volunteers and we are going to continue to support Morrow County. There are very positive things happening in Morrow County,” Radie concluded.

Di Salvo returns as G-T Editor



Andrea Di Salvo

The Heppner Gazette-Times has hired Andrea Di Salvo as its news editor, replacing former editor Bobbi Gordon, who retired earlier this year.

Di Salvo, a homeschool graduate, was born and raised in the Heppner area. She attended college in the Seattle area and then graduate school in Virginia. She obtained her master’s degree in journalism from Regent University in 2002.

It was in Virginia that she met and married her husband, Carmelo. After living in Virginia for sev-

eral years, the Di Salvos returned to Morrow County in 2008. They now live in Lexington with their three children, Moira, 14, Frank, 11, and Sofia, 9.

Di Salvo, 44, is no stranger to the Gazette; she previously worked for the newspaper from 2011 until 2017. She says she loved interacting with the community during those six years and is eager to be back in the mix.

“Working for the Gazette feels like being back with family,” Di Salvo said. “I’m excited to jump back in.”

Clerk receives recall petitions

Signature petitions seeking a recall vote on two Morrow County commissioners were filed with the county clerk Monday, and petition sponsors believe they have enough valid signatures to force a county-wide vote.

Turned into the clerk on the deadline day were 729 signatures for the recall vote of Commissioner Jim Doherty, and 692 for a recall of Commissioner Melissa Lindsay. To proceed with the county-wide vote the clerk will now examine the petitions for the required 564 valid signatures needed to proceed with the election. If the required signatures are validated, then each candidate will be given five days to decide if they want to move forward with the vote or resign. The clerk will then have 30 days to hold the election.

The recall effort was started in July by two Heppner residents. Carol Mitchel initiated the recall petition against Lindsay. Reasons given were that Lindsay had violated the public trust of the people who elected her.

“Commissioner Lindsay has violated that trust in many ways, one being by intimidating county employees, resulting in either their firing or leaving their jobs under duress. Commissioner Lindsay has repeatedly exhibited unprofessional behavior in her role as a public official. Commissioner Lindsay’s actions have created county wide disapproval with other government and charitable

organizations refusing to listen to them,” the petition said. “The action of the firing of the Morrow County Administrator, with no transparency, refusing to let the public speak, or answer the administrators’ questions about why he was sitting there, made it clear that in the remaining time of her tenure, this behavior would continue and could cause added financial burdens to our county. To prevent irreversible damage, an immediate recall is the only answer,” the petition stated.

Annetta Spicer filed the recall petition against Doherty. That petition stated “Commissioner Doherty’s decisions are not in the best interest of the Morrow County citizens. He is not open and transparent in his actions as commissioner, making decisions in secret and outside of public purview and without the inclusion of the third county commissioner. Commission meetings are not held in accordance with public open meeting law requirements. Doherty does not cooperate with other public and private agencies to the detriment of Morrow County citizens. His decisions regarding Morrow County employees have demoralized county employees and has been detrimental to a functional county government. Decisions are not made in the best interest of county taxpayers resulting in fiscal detriment to the county,” the petition read.

Muddy start to Homecoming Week



Ione High School kicked off its Homecoming Week with Mud Wars on Monday, Oct. 10. The Ione senior class reigned supreme in the evening’s muddy conflict. -Contributed photo

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