



Health District wants new mediator in ambulance dispute

'Escalating atmosphere of bullying and intimidation'

Apparently hiring a mediator to help solve the ongoing ambulance service dispute between Boardman Fire Rescue and the Morrow County Health District, is not helping. At least not with this mediator.

In an Oct. 7 letter to the county commissioners Morrow County Health District board chair Marie Shimer said while the district endorses engaging a mediator to help settle the dispute, an atmosphere of verbal harassment has taken over the talks. "We strongly encouraged and advocated for a mediation process between the two agencies. This needs to happen in order to build strength back into our communities and county. What we did not advocate for was the atmosphere of verbal harassment that has developed over the last few months and has continued during the first two sessions of mediation and

has resulted in continued attacks towards both the mediator and MCHD (Morrow County Health District) staff," Shimer said. She did not elaborate on what those attacks were. Without naming anyone she added there was also "ongoing unprofessional and unethical behavior coming from other agencies."

All parties in the dispute say they hope to see an end to the on-going argument which has seen the two districts battle over who shall provide ambulance service in the area. The conflict has produced accusations, caustic statements and both sides hiring attorneys. The county government is involved since commissioners will be the ones approving any license for Boardman Fire's ambulances to transport patients. Elizabeth Heckathorn

Last month Morrow County hired a professional mediator in hopes of

solving the long-simmering dispute, and, for the job, Elizabeth Heckathorn looked good on her resume. "I believe my qualities as a mediator and my knowledge of the EMS (Emergency Medical Services) & Trauma system are the right fit at the right time for this opportunity with Morrow County's EMS system," she wrote.

When asked why the health district decided it did not want to continue with Heckathorn, and, instead, find a new mediator after only two sessions, administrator Emily Roberts said: "We appreciate Liz's knowledge and efforts. Unfortunately, the current process has not resembled traditional mediation and has resulted in an escalating atmosphere of bullying and intimidation. The rules of mediation, which were agreed to at the start by all parties, have not been followed or enforced. We

feel strongly that mediation is the best way forward and believe that a traditional mediation process, led by an impartial mediator, would bring clarity and resolution to the situation." Roberts said subsequently the health district's attorney has made efforts to engage Boardman Fire and Rescue's legal counsel to find another mutually agreeable mediator.

"We respectfully request that we step back from the current process and that the Board of Commissioners task both Morrow County Health District and Boardman Fire Rescue District to engage their attorneys in identifying a mutually agreeable mediator to continue this process following standard mediation protocols," Shimer said. "To continue the current process and to allow individuals to overrun the meetings and sabotage efforts with their personal agendas does not serve anyone in Morrow County," she wrote. Again,

-Continued to PAGE FIVE

County paid \$62,500 to settle employment dispute

Fired Health Dept. employee Debra Green agrees to drop all complaints

Fired Health Department employee Debra Green was paid \$62,500 last month to drop her employment complaints against the county, agreeing she would bring no further legal action against the county, newly released documents reveal.

Green was fired in July for what the county said were numerous policy violations, the severity of her misconduct and the "impact" her conduct had on county operations, read a July 26 letter to Green signed by Interim Public Health Director Robin Canada and Morrow County Human Resource Director Lindsay Grogan.

The allegations against Green came after she was investigated as part of a wider county-initiated probe into activities at the health department where she worked as a front office assistant. The extensive investigation, including numerous interviews with current and former health department employees, was carried out after Green became a whistleblower and reported to her supervisors, one of whom was her husband county administrator Darrell Green, that she had observed documentation falsification going on at the health department.

Investigators also said they had found no evidence to back up Debra Green's

claim of document falsification or retaliation.

Following her whistleblower complaint, Green charged that the county retaliated against her by increasing her workload and having her working out of class without paying a higher wage. She subsequently filed a complaint with the state Bureau of Labor and Industrials about the retaliation, saying it was done because she had engaged in whistleblowing activities and because of her family relationship as wife of the administrator.

Darrell Green was terminated June 28 for allegedly violating a nepotism agreement for his dealings with Debra while both were employed at the county. He has subsequently filed a \$750,000 lawsuit against the county in circuit court alleging unlawful employment practices, wrongful discharge and violation of the open meetings law. That case has not yet gone to trial.

In exchange for the \$62,500 payment Debra promised to "fully release and settle any and all claims arising out of Employee's employment with the County, including, but not limited to, claims for compensation, wrongful termination, constructive discharge, retaliation, harassment, or discrimination."

Recall petition validation results ready 'possibly next week'

Validating the signatures on the recall petitions filed against two Morrow County commissioners last Monday will not be completed until "possibly next week," County Clerk Bobbi Childers told the Heppner Gazette-Times this Monday. Childers says she had to take a break from the validation process to prepare for the ballot preparation

and mailing for the current Nov. 8 election. The ballots for that election will go into the mail on Oct. 19 or 20.

Turned into the clerk last Monday were 729 signatures seeking a recall vote on Commissioner Jim Doherty, and 692 for a recall of Commissioner Melissa Lindsay. To proceed with the county-wide vote the

clerk needs to examine the petitions for the required 564 valid signatures needed to proceed with the recall 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 recall election.

Bowles appointed new Sheriff

Replaces retiring 18-year veteran Ken Matlack



John Bowles

Replaces retiring 18-year veteran Ken Matlack Undersheriff John Bowles has been appointed as the new of Morrow County Sheriff, it was announced at last week's county commission meeting. He will fill out the remained of the retiring Ken Matlack's term. Commissioners voted unanimously to appoint Bowles, who has been with the sheriff's office over 20 years, starting out as a 911 call taker and dispatcher and reserve patrol deputy in 2002. He will begin his new position Nov. 1 and will serve the remaining two years of Matlack's term until a regular election in 2024.

"I'm humbled and honored to be appointed the 17th Sheriff of Morrow County," said Bowles. "We have a great staff at the sheriff's office that works diligently to provide safety, security and livability for all of Morrow County citizens, and I look forward to continue serving with them as county sheriff."

Bowles's background includes him growing up in Banks, OR and graduating in 1991. He served in the U.S. Army, and then went to work as a general contractor in residential and commercial construction and as a journeyman iron worker. When the Morrow County Sheriff's Office began providing parole and probation services in 2010, Bowles was selected as the parole and probation deputy. In 2011, he was awarded the prestigious Victor G. Atiyeh Award at the commencement ceremony for the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training's Parole Officer Certification program. This award is presented

to the outstanding student who displays exceptional professionalism, exemplary attitude and outstanding achievement in leadership and academics.

In February of 2016, John was selected by Sherriff Matlack to become the next undersheriff for Morrow County. The undersheriff is responsible for the overall management and operations of the office, consisting of an annual budget of over \$5.2 million, and 37 full time, five part-time and three seasonal employees. Bowles holds multiple certifications and serves on several committees, including Heppner City Council. In 2021 John was selected by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce as Man of the Year.

Undersheriff Bowles and his wife Kristen currently reside in Heppner, where they enjoy spending time with their children and grandkids. There was one other interested applicant for the job, Boardman police officer Mark Pratt.

Renowned pianist to perform in Heppner Saturday



John Nilsen

Yamaha Signature Piano Artist John Nilsen will appear in concert at the Heppner United Methodist Church this Saturday, Oct. 22, at 3 p.m. Nilsen is an "in demand pianist combining elements of classical, folk and jazz."

Born in Seattle in 1956 and raised in Portland, Nilsen began studying

classical piano at the age of six. He added guitar to his repertoire at the age of 14. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English from Southern Oregon College (Southern Oregon University) in 1979. In 1995, the university honored him with its Distinguished Alumnus Award in recognition of his accomplishments

in performing arts.

Nilsen recorded three successful piano records before founding his own Magic Wing recording label in 1987. Since then, he has recorded 17 of his own records as well as other albums, with more than a million copies sold worldwide.

Nilsen has performed in all 50 states and on four continents, and is currently recording his 21st CD. He also teaches songwriting residencies and speaks to students in school throughout the country, including his own local schools in the West Linn/Wilsonville, OR school district.

The Heppner United Methodist Church is located at 175 Church St., Heppner.

Boardman City Council changes Nov. meeting date

The Boardman City Council has changed its Nov. 1, 2022, meeting to Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022, due to limited staff availability.

The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. at the Board-

man City Hall council chambers and will also be available via video-conferencing service. The meeting link is posted at the city's website at www.cityofboardman.com.

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