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CREZ II disburses more than \$12 million throughout county

The Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) II board distributed more than \$12 million to Morrow County organizations and tax districts last month. The board reviewed the enterprise zone financials at its Jan. 23 meeting in Boardman and discussed distribution of the \$12,343,637 it received from the businesses located in the CREZ II boundaries. In most cases, amounts aligned with last year's figures.

One notable exception is the funding for Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG). Ione Community Agri-Business Organization (ICABO) had requested that it directly receive funds that would normally be distributed to the city through WCVEDG, and the CREZ II board approved that request. As a result, WCVEDG received 19.5 percent less than it did last year, \$592,699 rather than \$736,273, while ICABO received the difference at \$143,573.

In other disbursements, Irrigon and each of the Willow Creek Valley cities each received \$200,000 for community infrastructure development. The City of

2022 CREZ II Disbursement by Entity	
Boardman Cemetery	1,584.92
Boardman Central Urban Renewal Agency	4,427.35
Irrigon Cemetery	8,143.45
CREZ II Zone Manager Expense	9,451.15
Irrigon Park	32,358.67
Umatilla Morrow Radio & Data District	23,010.08
Oregon Trail Library	34,324.33
North Morrow Vector Control	25,699.52
North Morrow Vector Control Local Option	13,628.59
Morrow County Unified Recreation	61,704.79
Intermountain ESD	83,308.83
Blue Mountain Community College	132,097.57
Boardman Park	95,979.53
City of Heppner	200,000.00
City of Ione	200,000.00
Town of Lexington	200,000.00
Morrow County Health District	231,875.52
Morrow County Health District Local Option	53,151.44
Boardman Fire & Rescue	422,975.51
Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group	592,699.93
ICABO	143,573.27
Morrow Education Foundation	1,117,398.28
Boardman Community Development Association	1,144,936.00
City of Irrigon	1,152,790.80
Morrow County	2,012,786.49
Port of Morrow	2,012,786.51
City of Boardman	2,332,944.87
TOTAL	12,343,637.40

Boardman, as one of the enterprise zone's sponsoring entities, received a total of \$2,332,944 in sponsor allotments, bond payments and other payments. The other two sponsoring entities, Morrow County and the Port of Morrow, each

received \$2,012,786 in allotments. A detailed list of disbursements from the 2022 CREZ II accompanies this article.

In other business, the CREZ II board named Boardman representative,

mayor Paul Keefer, as chair and Morrow County representative, county commissioner David Sykes, as vice chair. The CREZ II board is made up of two representatives each from Morrow County, the Port of Morrow and the City of Boardman.

Community Counseling Solutions discusses successes, struggles with commissioners



The Community Counseling Solutions office in Heppner. -Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

Community Counseling Solutions Executive Director Kimberly Lindsay shared the program's successes and struggles with the Morrow County Board of Commissioners during a report to that board earlier this month. At the top of the list of struggles is the inability to find enough clinicians in today's hiring climate.

"There is a lot of work that we do. COVID has really impacted our ability to hire clinicians, I think," said Lindsay. "Behavioral health was one of the hardest hit."

She told the commissioners that a lot of CCS's work is required to be in person, but when COVID restrictions were lifted, clinicians didn't necessarily want to go back to in-person work.

"There is a lot of clinical work, community mental health program work, that is entirely online now. You can have a visit with your counselor on your phone, and a lot of counselors like to do that," she said. "I think CCS was fortunate that we didn't have the same exodus as some other community mental health programs."

However, she added that they were able to create additional positions due to new funding, but that CCS had not been able to fill those positions because they are largely in-person based services. "So we're really struggling right now in filling those clinician-level positions."

Because of that, she said, the access for Morrow County has become more concerning. Everyone, she said, is seen immediately, or triaged, to assess their need. Before COVID, patients who were not in critical need were able to get in for assessment in Heppner in a week or a week and a half, and in Boardman in two to three weeks. Now, it averages three weeks in Heppner and up to two months in Boardman.

She said some clinicians have 60 or 70 people

on their caseloads, which doesn't equal great care. She said the clinicians want to do a good job, so if they continue to pile on new patients as some programs have done, those clinicians will leave.

"So we're choosing to put a cap on the upper end of the number of people. We're choosing to provide good care to those we are seeing. We are creating space for the people who are high acuity," she said, "but the end result is that people are having to wait longer to be seen."

"If you know anybody who has a master's degree in behavioral health, send them our way," she added.

Lindsay also provided an overview of the role of CCS and its relationship with the county. In the 1963, the Kennedy Community Mental Health Act moved responsibility for mental health authority to the states. The State of Oregon moved that responsibility to the counties and said each county is a local mental health authority. The county can either operate a county mental health program or contract it out to a nonprofit.

Morrow County created and operated a mental

health program in different forms until 2007, when the commissioners authorized the formation of a nonprofit, feeling that would better serve the needs of the county. Since then, CCS has changed and grown, expanding from Morrow County to contract with Morrow, Wheeler, Gilliam, Grant and Umatilla coun-



Kimberly Lindsay ties, with an 11-person board made up of representatives from the five counties.

Lindsay said the core service of a community mental health program is a

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St. Pat's Celebration March 17-19



Heppner's St. Patrick's Celebration will return March 17-19 this year. -File photo

The 2023 St. Patrick's Wee Bit O' Ireland Celebration is scheduled for Friday, March 17, through Sunday, March 19.

Any business, nonprofit or church group that is planning an event or activity during the St. Patrick's weekend is asked to contact Shelby Matthews at the Heppner Chamber of Commerce office at 541-676-5536 or heppnerchamber@gmail.com so they can be

included in the printed program. Deadline to submit your events and activities is Friday, Feb. 10.

This year's St. Patrick's Day Celebration will include most of its traditional activities, along with some new, and some older, revitalized events. All entertainment will be free, with sponsorship from Morrow County Unified Recreation District.

Heppner teen shares love of anime through local club



Participants in the anime club gather in a corner of Flood Town Books last Saturday. Sam Lamb (upper right) is joined by (clockwise from bottom) Dylan Sherrer, Xavier Saucedo, Julian Saucedo, Moira Di Salvo and Hannah Brannon. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

By Andrea Di Salvo

Saturday morning at Flood Town Books in Heppner, a small group of tweens and teens clustered to discuss one of their favorite topics—Japanese anime. The anime club

meets weekly in Heppner to talk about old favorites, new finds, interesting plots and anime-style art.

It may seem like a strange topic to find in a small town in the middle of

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County awards assisted living facility \$150K

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners recently approved \$150,000 to aid Willow Creek Terrace (WCT) assisted living facility.

Willow Creek Terrace Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer Jeff Bailey appeared before the board as a follow-up to a discussion in December, at which he had told the commissioners-elect that Willow Creek Terrace was struggling both financially and with staffing. The assisted living facility's difficulties stem from COVID-19 restrictions but are also exacerbated by current inflation and a difficult hiring market.

Morrow County Finance Director Kevin Ince said he was comfortable with giving funding to WCT and suggested the mon-

ey come from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, since those funds were originally intended to help with COVID-related impacts.

"This is well aligned with the original intent," Ince said.

Bailey informed the board that, as of December, this is the first time all of the rooms in the assisted living facility have been rented sine before COVID.

"It's been a long haul," Bailey said. "Two years of not being able to even interview tenants."

He also told the commissioners that WCT had recently hired a new administrator, who would be starting soon. Ince recommended awarding the \$150,000 through a grant agreement.

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