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Key organizers honored as grand marshals in Great Green Parade

By Andrea Di Salvo
This year's Great Green Parade will be led by not one, not two, but eight individuals who have been key in the Heppner St. Patrick's celebration.

In fact, it is "key organizers" Diana Ball, Dave Sykes, Claudia Hughes, Cara Osmin, Sheryll Bates, Doris Brosnan, Bill Hutchinson and Judie Laughlin who will be honored at the Wee Bit O' Ireland celebration for their roles in both starting the celebration and keeping it going strong all these years. According to the memories of some, the first recognition of St. Patrick's Day in Heppner was a stew feed at the Catholic church.



Diana Fulleton Ball

Most consider the official founder of the current celebration to be Jim Farley, who started the ball rolling with a KUMA Coffee Hour at Farley Motor Company.

Farley was honored as a grand marshal in a previous parade.

Along the way, though, it took some heavy lifting by many dedicated individuals to fulfill the vision of what St. Patrick's Day could really mean to Heppner.

Some are life-long residents, while some have come and gone (and sometimes come back). Their ages range from 66 to 79, along with a "Really?" and an age range between 16 and 100, "depending on the day!" Almost all of them have been involved in some way since the very beginning.

How they got started

Bill Hutchinson, now a John Day resident, lived in Heppner for seven years. He may have gotten involved because he's a natural-born leprechaun—almost. His birthday is March 18.

"I just missed being a leprechaun by one day," he says.

He got involved in St. Patrick's Day the second year he was in Heppner. He says he noticed the first



Bill "Hutch" Hutchinson became a Heppner St. Patrick's Day icon in his leprechaun outfit. -Contributed photo

year he was here that the Catholic church had a stew feed. The following year, he decided to put a lucky number contest in his Nickel-style paper.

"It was a promotional thing," he said. "I was trying to promote the local merchants."

Hutchinson remembers that Farley then started with the KUMA Coffee Hour. From there, he and other key organizers started a committee through the chamber of commerce. He was chairman of that committee until he moved away 40 years ago. By the time he left, they'd increased the celebration to three days and included other events like the parade the sheep dog trials.

"We had a good thing going, especially when you



Claudia Hughes (left) and Cara Osmin have been in the thick of the Wee Bit O' Ireland Celebration for years. -Contributed photo

figure we started out with a stew feed," he said.

Claudia Hughes says her first experience with Heppner's St. Pat's celebration was in Jim Farley's showroom around 1980, when he invited Ted Smith and Joe McLaughlin to bring KUMA to Heppner. She remembers that the early Irish families whose ancestors arrived in the mid- to late-1800s were invited to attend. Her husband's father and aunt, Ebb Hughes and Anita Lutchter, were interviewed about their Irish roots along with several other Irish families. "I was hooked then!" says Hughes. "Little did I



Eb Hughes, Heppner and sister Anita of Milton-Freewater go on the air with KUMA. More St. Patrick's Day features on p. 6

A newspaper clipping of the first KUMA coffee hour at Farley Motor Company 1981. -Contributed photo

know that I would one day chair and co-chair the event for some 15 years."

David Sykes also got involved soon after moving to Heppner with his family 42 years ago. He says he got involved the first year of the KUMA Coffee Hour because he knew Farley.

"He was a good guy and I wanted to help him get it going," says Sykes.

Meanwhile, Diana Fulleton Ball, who worked as a committee member for 19 years, blames Sykes for her first involvement.

"I worked for David Sykes at the Heppner Gazette-Times," she recalls. "He was involved as chairman and very kindly 'volunteered' me to 'help.' From then on I was involved in one way or another."

She says he involve-



David Sykes

After moving outside the city limits in 1991, Osmin was no longer mayor, but her involvement continued.

"Claudia Hughes was the chamber director then, and so we collaborated with the effort," she says. Osmin took over the Coffee Hour, which was then being broadcast from its current home at the Elk's Lodge the Saturday morning of the celebration. "We had lots of music, fun, jokes, laughter and more music."



Doris Brosnan

Doris Brosnan and her husband were raised in Heppner, gone for nearly 30 years, and then returned in 1994 after their retirement. She says they attended the celebration before they moved back, and even have a memory of a rarely warm and sunny celebration in which some of the cousins in the next Brosnan generation entered the bed race.

"I was targeted by

-Continued to PAGE EIGHT

Mustangs finish season fifth in state



The Heppner Mustang basketball team with its fifth-place trophy from the 2A state championship tournament. -Contributed photo

The Heppner Mustang boys basketball team finished its season with a fifth-place trophy at the OSAA 2A State Basketball Tournament this past weekend. The Mustangs finished the season with a 21-7 record. The team also brought home the highly-coveted sportsmanship award and trophy from the tournament. The team, band, fans and large student cheering section can all be proud of that accomplishment.

Heppner started the tournament by playing the number-one team in the state, the Mannahouse Academy Lions of Portland, who had a record of 25-2 coming into the tournament. Both teams started out slowly and the game was tied 7-7 at the end of the first quarter. Mannahouse outscored the Mustangs in the second quarter to lead 19-15 at halftime.

A close third quarter *-Continued to PAGE SEVEN*

County transit plans may hit speed bump with new FTA grant requirements

By Andrea Di Salvo

The future of transit in Morrow County may have hit a bump in the road last week when the Morrow County Board of Commissioners learned of new requirements for an FTA grant being sought to help fund the project.

Morrow County Transit/The Loop Manager Benjamin Tucker and consultant Nick Ducote of Ducote Consulting had been working together to write a grant application for a Federal Transit Administration 5339 funding for planned buses and bus facilities in Morrow County but told the board last Wednesday that they hit a snag when they learned of new grant requirements.

Ducote explained that the 5339 grant opportunity comes out on a cycle once every 12 to 18 months. The grant provides opportunities for equipment, facilities, passenger shelters, signs and vehicle expansion projects.

"Each time it comes out, the executive branch and the legislature of the federal government set different priorities of what they may want this money to focus on," Ducote said. "Or, really, what it comes down to, is extra requirements to put on the county in making its application."

In this case, Ducote said, neither he nor Tucker was aware that the FTA wants the county to have a zero-emission vehicle transition plan for new buses and bus facilities. Ducote said it looked like that conversation hasn't even started at the county level.

"So we were a bit stumped by how to tackle that and move forward given that application materials are due in seven work-

ing days, and we found out about it yesterday evening," he said.

"Essentially, if we submit the application as we currently have it without that plan in place," added Tucker, "they're not even going to review it."

Tucker said the deeper conversation needed to be what a low- or no-emissions vehicle scenario would look like and how it would play into this county and region.

"It is just a plan on how you intend to transition," Tucker said. He said first steps could include consulting or demonstrations of electric vehicles. He said it wasn't specified that vehicles be electric as long as they were low- or no-emissions, but electric seemed to be the big push right now. There is also no set timeline for when the plan needs to take effect.

Otherwise, they said, they have done the cost analysis of building The Loop facility, and that does include a lot of "green" aspects, such as electric vehicle chargers for the park-and-ride and solar panels for the facility. The planned facility will include a bus barn with two to three bays, one bay for washing buses and office space for drivers and dispatchers.

The project also includes a transit center for passengers to connect to other transit providers.

The cost of construction currently comes in at \$5.1 million. With the required 10 percent match by the county, the county would have a cost of \$514,100 and would ask for a grant of \$4.6 million.

Tucker had been planning to bring the application before the board for approval before getting the news *-Continued to PAGE SEVEN*

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