

# Health district \$4.3 million lawsuit

*-Continued from PAGE ONE*  
 transition from volunteer to paid EMS staff, in order to accommodate increased county demand on ambulance services.

Another MCHD concern is the potential loss of cost-based reimbursement for its ambulance services. The health district says the loss of that funding, an estimated one million dollars per year, could threaten ambulance services throughout the county, as well as costing lost jobs associated with those services.

So, as an alternative to the injunction, the health district is asking for the county to pay the difference between cost-based reimbursement versus actual reimbursement for the next three years, to the tune of \$3 million, plus \$100,000 potential loss of hospital revenue and \$1.1 million in damages, for a total of 4.2 million.

The lawsuit also makes allegations of conflict of interest against Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz, saying his position on the Good Shepherd Health Care Board of Trustees caused him to act against the best interests of Morrow County residents. While Wenzholz was not listed as a defendant in the lawsuit, the health district has "reserved the right to assert direct claims against Wenzholz," according to paragraph six of the document.

The lawsuit also seeks a restraining order and injunction against BFRD and Hughes, which would prohibit the fire department from engaging in ambulance services in Morrow County.

Monetary claims against Hughes and Boardman Fire include the \$3 million for estimated cost-based reimbursement, damages in the amount of \$1,203,350 for tortious interference with business relations between the health district and the county, plus an additional \$169,000 in fines for what the health district says are multiple violations of the 1998 ASA plan.

Tortious interference refers to one party interfering with an advantageous business relationship of another party, causing economic harm.

Even before the filing of the lawsuit, Morrow County had engaged attorney Bob Blackmore to help it navigate the legal complexities of the ASA plan. Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson told the Gazette-Times that the lawsuit has been given to both Blackmore and county insurance provider City-county Insurance Services (CIS) for review. Boardman Fire is also in the process of consulting with its lawyer.

Look for more information in next week's Gazette-Times.

# South Morrow scholarship applications due May 24

South Morrow County seniors who are interested in obtaining scholarships are invited to apply by May 24. Scholarships, including the Coach Del LaRue Scholarship, are available through the South Morrow County Scholarship Board.

The South Morrow County Scholarship Board will award scholarships to Heppner High School and Ione Community School seniors based on academic achievement and school/community/work involvement. Students must have a 2.5 GPA or higher to apply.

Students must be continuing their education at a community college, trade school or four-year college or university. Funds are to help students pay for tuition, program fees, books, supplies, rent and other expenses. Multiple scholarships will be awarded. If selected, students will need to submit their current college class schedule or verification of enrollment.

The Coach Del LaRue Scholarship was developed in memory of Del LaRue, a long-time teacher and coach at Ione High School. LaRue had a passion for coaching basketball and track and loved seeing students set and achieve their goals. After retiring from teaching, LaRue continued

to coach track for 12 additional years; during that time, he helped many student athletes achieve their goals and was honored as National Track Coach of the Year.

This fund awards one \$1,000 scholarship to a college-bound Ione High School Senior based on demonstrated academic achievement and community involvement, and with preference given to students who have participated in the Ione High School Track Program.

Students must be continuing their education at a community college, trade school, or four-year college or university. Applicants must have a minimum 3.0 accumulated GPA and show involvement in community/school activities.

Applications will be accepted and awarded by the South Morrow County Scholarship Inc. Board of Directors using the Coach LaRue Scholarship Google Form Application. Applications must include a transcript and activities/work experience sheet.

All applications are due by 4 p.m. on May 24. Anyone with questions or wishing to apply may contact Brandi Sweeney at brandi.sweeney@morrowsd.org.

# Merkley, Booker introduce legislation to create pollinator habitats around solar projects

Oregon's U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley is one of the driving forces behind the Pollinator Power Act, which would give priority to solar projects that include habitats for pollinators like this honeybee. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

Merkley, Booker introduce legislation to create pollinator habitats around solar projects

Washington, D.C.—Recently, U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the Pollinator Power Act, new

legislation that aims to help reverse the decline in pollinator populations by incentivizing pollinator habitats surrounding new solar projects carried out through the Rural Energy for America Program.

"Pollinators are critical to maintaining life as we know it, and as our nation embarks on a huge expansion of solar energy, we have a great opportunity to create new pollinator habitats at the same time," said Merkley. "New pollinator habitat is critical to reversing scary declines in pollinator populations, and

# Heppner FFA holds annual banquet



Retiring officers of the Heppner FFA Chapter. "They have served our chapter and community while balancing family/friends, school, jobs, athletics, youth group, NHS, ASB and 4-H," says Heppner FFA Advisor Beth Dickenson. L-R: Secretary Keeley Nairns, President John Lindsay, Vice President Morgan Cutsforth, Treasurer Irelynn Kollman and Sentinel Paul Lindsay. -Contributed photo



The Heppner FFA Chapter held its annual banquet Thursday, May 11. Included in the evening were awards, recognition of outgoing chapter officers, induction of new officers and, of course, lots of food and laughter. -Contributed photo

# Heppner holds WalkMS



Participants in Heppner's 2023 WalkMS pause at Les Schwab Tire Center for photos and a donation. Pictured are WalkMS participants with Heppner Les Schwab employees, while WalkMS coordinator Barb Orwick receives a donation from Les Schwab manager John Gould (far right). -Contributed photo



WalkMS participants at Heppner City Park. -Contributed photo

The Heppner contingent of WalkMS met at Hager Park the morning of April 29 to raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. The group collected more than \$4,000 during the fundraiser.

The group started with about 16 individuals, who walked to Les Schwab Tire Center for pictures and a donation to the society.

The walkers continued to Heppner City Park, picking up participants and more donations along the way. Once there, more pictures were taken of the

group, which had grown to about 30 people.

Bucknum's Tavern provided brunch for the hungry walkers to end the morning.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society sponsors WalkMS to raise money to help research to end this disease. The society also provides funds for affected victims to help with physical therapy, support groups and even house remodels.

Anyone who hasn't donated but wants to may contact Barb Orwick at 541-256-0455.

# Morrow County receives \$725K in transit funding

Three transportation awards to benefit Morrow County are among the more than \$28.5 million the Oregon Transportation Commission approved at its meeting last week, the Oregon Dept. of Transportation announced Tuesday.

Morrow County will receive \$484,000 for a Boardman/Port of Morrow circulator, as well as \$241,600 for a Heppner to Boardman connector. Also partly benefiting Morrow County will be the \$803,796 awarded to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation for a Hermiston to Boardman connector.

The funds come from the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund's (STIF) discretionary program and are used to sup-

port bus service, maintain and purchase vehicles, build bus charging stations and more. Funding for these programs comes from federal programs and a .01 of 1 percent state payroll tax.

ODOT reports that it received 75 applications requesting \$35.5 million. That's approximately \$1.25 in proposals for every available dollar, which the agency says reflects high need for public transportation investments compared to funds available.

In making its recommendations to the commission, the Public Transportation Advisory Committee considered input from transit districts, public transportation key audiences, Area Commissions on Transportation and others.

# Hopeful Saints youth to host 'Sundae Sunday'



Youth enjoy the campfire at the Asencion Camp. Hopeful Saints youth are raising funds to attend camp this summer. -Contributed Photo

The youth of Hopeful Saints Ministry will be hosting an ice cream sundae fundraiser this Sunday, May 21, from 11:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. The youth will be set up in the Hopeful Saints church yard on the corner of Church and Gail streets. They will be serving up dishes of ice cream with all the traditional toppings to raise funds for the ministry's camp scholarship fund.

Funds raised will help with the costs of youth attending Ascension Camp in Cove this summer. Hopeful Saints has several youth registered for camp—five attending Senior High Camp, one attending Beginners Camp, four attend-

ing Discovering Camp and two adults attending in leadership.

Ascension Camp is a place apart to "connect with God's sacred mystery, celebrating the dignity, diversity and oneness of all creation." Ascension Camp offers age-specific camps for preschool through adult education/formation. Anyone who would like more information about the camp may call the church office at 541-676-9970 and leave a message for George Nairns, and she will return the call.

Donations for camp scholarships may also be mailed to Hopeful Saints, PO Box 246, Heppner, OR 97836.

# FFA plant sale continues Thursday

The Heppner FFA chapter and plant science class will be extending their annual plant sale to this Thursday. The Heppner High School greenhouse will be open this Thursday,

May 18, from 1-5 p.m. to sell all remaining plants

The greenhouse and plant sale is a project of the FFA chapter/plant science class.

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