



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Payne recognized for 55 years of coaching



Les Payne, assistant football coach for the Heppner Mustangs, hit his 55-year coaching milestone this year. —Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

Earlier this year, when the Oregon Athletic Coaches Association handed out plaques recognizing years of service, only three coaches in the state were recognized for reaching the 55-year mark—and one of them hails from right here in Heppner.

Les Payne has been coaching since 1968, and much of his career has been spent as assistant football coach for the Heppner Mustangs. If his name seems familiar, it might be because you've seen it in large letters over the entrance to the football field named after him. You might have heard it in the list of Heppner coaches that took the

Heppner football team to the state championship. Or, he might even have been your social studies teacher.

He was born in the 1940s in Auburn, WA, at the foot of Mt. Rainier. He played baseball and football growing up, but there was never any doubt about his favorite sport.

"I've been a football nut from the time I was a little kid," says Payne.

He graduated from Auburn High School in 1963 and went on to attend Yakima Valley College for two years. He played football at the junior college, which he says was a bit of a change from his high school experience.

"You go from a situa-

tion where you're one of the best," he recalls, "and then you go to college, and everybody's the best where they're from."

He finished his education at Eastern Washington University, where he played as offensive lineman for the Savages, later renamed the Eagles.

"Everybody just gets a little bit better as you go along," he says of playing at the university level. "I loved it. If I could do it all over again, I'd do it."

Though he loved the game, it was never his plan to go pro. Rather, he graduated from Eastern Washington in 1968 with a Bachelor of Arts in education, with a major in health and physical education and a minor in social studies.

He took a teaching position right out of college, starting as a social studies teacher in Tonasket, WA. He also took the role of head baseball coach, and thought he was going to be the assistant football coach. When the head coach left, though, the school gave him the roles of head coach in football, wrestling and baseball.

"I was a little bit apprehensive," he says. "I had to pay the bills. I was looking for a job. Not necessarily teaching and three head coaching jobs, but that's the way it worked out."

He also says he didn't have any personal experience wrestling.

"Auburn High School was a good wrestling

school, but I didn't wrestle," says Payne. "All my younger brothers wrestled, so I had some familiarity with it."

He stopped coaching baseball after only a year, but he taught in Tonasket for nine years, coaching football and wrestling the entire time.

He moved to Heppner in 1977. He says he finally got to use his major when he was hired to teach health at Heppner High School, as well as continuing to teach social studies.

He also took on the role of assistant coach for the Heppner Mustang football team, a position he has held ever since. There was no wrestling program in Heppner at the time, but he also served as assistant baseball coach to Dale Holland for a couple of years.

Payne credits head coach Greg Grant with the success of Mustang football, but football is a team sport, and there's no doubt that includes the coaches. In Payne's time as assistant football coach, the Mustangs have made it to the state championship more than once. In the last decade alone, the Mustangs have brought home two state championships and one runner-up trophy in 2A, as well as being in the top 25 teams in the state three times.

"The state championship years stand out above everything else, but every-

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## New circuit court site met with mixed feelings

By Andrea Di Salvo

Morrow County has selected a site for the planned new circuit court building, a decision that has met with mixed feelings among Heppner residents.

The county already owns the 2.2-acre lot, which is near the Morrow County Fairgrounds within the Heppner city limits. The property is currently zoned residential, so the county will need to get a conditional use permit from the city. The building is expected to break ground in 2025.

The new two-story building is anticipated to be about 21,280 gross square feet. Two parking lots are planned, a private parking lot with a north access and a larger, public parking lot accessed from Hwy. 74.

The planning for the new site for Morrow County Circuit Court has been a project spanning months, maybe even years. Former Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay had been the lead on building a

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## Fire season already fraught with close calls



The Lexington fire on July 1 as seen from the yard of Mark and Alaina Lemmon of Lexington. —Contributed photo.

By Andrea Di Salvo

The 2023 fire season has started with a bang, with wildfires already wreaking havoc in Morrow County and the surrounding areas.

The fire hitting closest to home for Morrow County residents so far is the July 1 fire on the western outskirts of Lexington. Crews responded to the fire around 3 p.m. on the afternoon of that "red flag" day, a day of low humidity, high heat and even higher winds.

Ione Fire Chief Virgil Morgan said the fire

was apparently started by a four-wheeler spraying weeds on the creek bottom. Driven by the wind, the fire jumped Hwy. 74 and burned toward town on both sides of the highway. It burned between 80 and 100 acres before firefighters arrested it on the outskirts of Lexington.

The area to the west of Lexington is in the Ione Rural Fire Protection District, but Morgan said Heppner firefighters were first on the scene. Heppner Fire Chief

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## Heritage Trail on track to get new signage

### Historic Boardman

By 1883, Castle Rock, located on the Columbia about one mile east of a lava formation that looked like a castle, was a major rail & river boat shipping point at the end of a freight road from the south. A ferry moved Morrow County hay across the Columbia to feed sheep on the Washington shore. Freight wagons took supplies south to the Heppner region, and wool and wheat north to the Columbia for the Portland market. The railroad reached Heppner in 1888 and the Castle Rock settlement declined. In 1916 the abandoned school building was moved to Boardman until a new one could be built. Backwaters of the John Day Dam now cover Castle Rock.



Boardman Depot

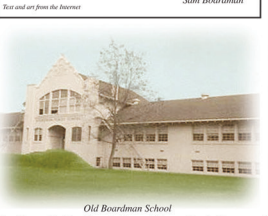


Additional homesteaders and business owners arrived after irrigation water was brought from the Umatilla River in 1916. E.P. Dodd of Hermiston platted a 40 acre townsite. By 1917, Boardman had replaced the freight station at Castle Rock, a few miles down the Columbia and the railroad section town of Coyote, a few miles upstream. In the early years, a train depot was located at Messner, between Boardman & Irrigon. In 1922, a new depot was built in Boardman.

Pump house for water well at Traveler Rest Area. Installed by Sam Boardman on original highway.

### Columbia River Heritage Trail

**Sam Boardman**  
Samuel H. Boardman migrated to Oregon as a young engineer, and envisioned the wonders irrigation would make on desert soil. Sam & Anna Belle Boardman were the original Boardman homesteaders in 1903. Not a tree in sight and 13 years passed before an irrigation canal carried Umatilla River water 20 miles to Boardman.



Old Boardman School

The artwork of one of the existing Columbia River Heritage Trail interpretive panels. The existing panels, which have been in place about 20 years, will get updated and replaced within the coming year. —Contributed

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Columbia River Heritage Trail (CRHT) will soon get a new set of interpretive panels, the Morrow County Board of Commissioners decided at its July 5 meeting in Heppner.

The board of commissioners voted to award the contract to update eight

existing interpretive panels for the Morrow County portion of the Columbia River Heritage Trail to Sea Reach Ltd.

Sea Reach, based in Sheridan, OR, was one of two companies that responded to the county's request for proposals. The contract also includes developing a new design and content for one of the panels, as well as a back-up set of eight panels.

Sea Reach's proposal for the project was \$27,510, or \$34,270 if the county wanted a site visit and custom illustrations. Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott told the board that the county has a \$10,000 AWS grant to fund the project, as well as other funding within the county budget.

They expect to wrap

up the project by April of next year.

Mabbott also told the commissioners that the county had digital files for seven of the panels, but that the eighth would have to be created from scratch. At the same time, all eight would probably be updated to some extent. Images of all of the interpretive panels are available for viewing on the Morrow County Planning Department website, which Mabbott says will be updated periodically.

"It's really interesting. It looks like a great project," said Sykes. "It's going to be done first-class. I like it."

Morrow County Commissioner Roy Drago Jr. asked what the life of the panels would be.

"Is there any kind of warranty for how many

years it stays legible, with the sun and the wind and the sand that we have, and the area this is going to be at?" Drago said. "I've seen the ones out at Wells Springs, and they're pretty difficult to read these days."

Mabbott replied that she didn't know, but she expected at least 10 years, maybe longer. She said the existing panels have been in place for 20 years and, while weathered, are still legible.

"Unfortunately, vandalism has completely destroyed one of them," she added. "That's also why we ordered duplicates and budgeted, so if we have something like vandalism, we can just pull the top part off and replace it."

Also at the meeting, Morrow County Public

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## County hires new administrator



Matthew Jensen

Morrow County has hired a new county administrator, the county announced this week. Matthew Jensen will begin his new position in Morrow County Aug. 14.

"We're excited about it. The opportunity to enjoy small town America again is something we look forward to," said Jensen. "There's a hominess you can enjoy in small town America."

He will bring with him

his wife, Julie, and their youngest son, who will be going into eighth grade this fall.

Jensen currently works as the city manager for West Haven, UT, a position he has held since 2020. Prior to that, he worked for three years as administrator and treasurer for the Village of Perry, NY. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public administration, both from the University of Utah.

He says being in an agricultural-based community with wheat and ranching hearkens back to his own childhood.

"I'm excited to come serve the people in Morrow County and hopefully work on some good things," he said.

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