



## Young entrepreneurs bank on pigeons' ability to come home

'Pigeons Come Home' will offer bird flights for special events



Mack and Keller Sweeney showing off their racing pigeon. - Photo by Cam Sweeney

By Chris Sykes  
Heppner brothers Mack and Keller Sweeney have embarked on an exciting venture with some new-found feathered friends—racing pigeons. Mack, nine, and Keller, 10, recently acquired some homing pigeons from a family friend. As their fascination with the pigeons has grown, they have decided to take it beyond a hobby and turn the birds into a family business.

"My uncle was telling us about how popular homing pigeons are down south, then a family friend gave us some pigeons for fun," said Keller. They have a couple of

different varieties, including racing homers and king pigeons. They have 13 pigeons but have only named seven—creative names of their favorites include Oreo, Yankee, Shlike, Reo, Yeller, Spots and Spots Jr.

Mack and Keller keep their pigeons in a four-foot by 10-foot pen. They say the birds sometimes like to stand on one leg. They're not cuddly pets; Mack says they don't really like to be petted.

The boys feed the birds hardened corn with some grit for digestion.

The boys' pigeons are three to four months old right now, but racing pigeons have an average lifes-

pan of nine to 15 years, with some living more than 20 years. In comparison, most feral pigeons live only three to five years.

Mack says it takes two months to train the birds.

"They spend the first 3 weeks in the cage at home to get oriented, then we move the cage farther and farther away," adds Keller.

The first time they let them out of their pen, Mack and Keller say they were a little nervous that the pigeons wouldn't come back, but the birds did three circles and came right back.

Training is done by getting them acquainted with their home base, then moving farther away and

getting their internal compass," says Mack. "It's like having your own air show."

The farthest Mack and Keller have taken their birds is 12 miles away, and they did come back. Mack and Keller say their father, Cam Sweeney, let the birds out in Heppner and they raced them back to their home on Upper Rhea Creek. The pigeons beat them home.

The top speed of a racing pigeon is over 60 miles an hour, but that will depend on the bird's base line speed and wind direction. Homing pigeons have been released more than 1,000 miles away and have found their way home.

Because of this skill,



Keller Sweeney releasing his homing pigeons for a test flight. - Photo by Angie Hanson

letting them fly home. First, the trainer takes them one mile away. After waiting a week, they go two miles, then five miles, and so on.

"They come right out, do five or 10 loops in the air

humans have used pigeons for communication from the time of the ancient Romans all the way up to World War II. Until the introduction of telephones, homing pigeons

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## HHS alumni attend multi-year reunion



Class of 1970. Front L-R: Cindy Harsin Heesackee, Rob Abrams, Gary Munkers, Molly Becket Rill, Judy Gentry Towner, Kathy Melby Timms, Sandy Matthews Greiner and Bill Greenup. Middle row L-R: Hal Bergstrom, Pat Kilkenny and Lee Huson. Back L-R: John McCabe, Pat Sweeney, Trisha Keithley Sweeney, Linda Echman Hays and Bill Schlichting. -Contributed photo

Last week, 88 Heppner High School alumni from the classes of 1970-1973 attended a reunion that had been several years in the making.

The idea for the reunion began in 2021, as HHS alumni considered having one large 50-plus class reunion. Plans were derailed due to Covid-19, however, and planning for the reunion didn't get underway until the fall of 2022.

The planning committee, consisting of Molly Rill (class of 1970), Ron Sherman and David Gunderson (class of 1971), Patty Matheny and Gary Watkins (class of 1972), and Tricia Gunderson, Barb Watkins and Kelly Hale (class of

1973), worked tirelessly to make this reunion a reality.

The reunion kicked off Friday, July 14, with a meet and greet at the Elks. The following day, the excitement continued with a morning of golf. The main event took place at the Elks on Saturday evening, featuring a program, dinner and dancing.

One of the highlights of the evening was provided by Tami Meador Sneddon. She shared a home movie filmed by her mother, Inez Meador, who was a seventh- and eighth-grade science teacher. The film showcased the youthful faces of the class of 1973 conducting an egg drop in Meador's class. Sneddon

also brought along a book of poems written for her mother by students during that era, encouraging everyone to find their own and take it home as a memento.

The reunion was made even more special by the presence of honored guests, including teachers Dale Conklin and wife Linda, Dean Naffziger and wife Teresa, and Steve Brownfield and wife Luanne. Their attendance added a touch of nostalgia and gratitude for the educators who had played a significant role in shaping the lives of the alumni.

The evening was filled with laughter and heartfelt speeches, with Gary Watkins serving as the master

## Ethics cases dropped against some Morrow County officials

By Andrea Di Salvo

The stress of an ethics probe is over for three Morrow County public figures recently investigated for alleged violations. The Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) voted July 14 to dismiss allegations against Windwave co-owner Gary Neal and Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz and came to an impasse regarding Boardman Fire Chief Michael Hughes.

Gary Neal

Gary Neal, formerly of

Boardman, was the Port of Morrow general manager from 1989 until December of 2018. He also served on the Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) board. The alleged ethics violation came from his additional role as one of the owners of Windwave Technologies, a fiber-optic service provider in Morrow County.

A complaint lodged with the ethics commission Sept. 13 of last year alleged that Neal may have violated Oregon Government Ethics

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## Irrigon takes tentative step toward land sale to irrigation district



A West Extension Irrigation District Canal in North Morrow County. -Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

The West Extension Irrigation District (WEID) may purchase land owned by the City of Irrigon for a new antenna tower, as long as some land-use hurdles are overcome.

At its July 18 meeting, the Irrigon City Council directed city staff to continue discussions with WEID regarding the possible purchase of city-owned land behind the WEID office. Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist told the council that the parcel was purchased for \$10,450 several years ago to obtain sewer easements. There is a sewer main that runs along the southern portion of the lot, but the land is otherwise undevelopable as a single lot.

However, WEID needs more land to build a 55-foot antenna to connect all the wireless systems that

control gates and other automated canal functions. The land would also contain a 30- by 15-foot secure storage facility.

A letter from the irrigation district said the tower, which would probably be placed in the middle of the city's current parcel, is "critical" for operations.

"We have automated gates that run all along the canal," WEID District Manager Bev Bridgewater told the council.

When asked if the tower would interfere with residents' cell phones or internet, Palmquist replied that it would not. The tower's signal would be low voltage and would have its own frequency.

Palmquist was not, he said, asking for a final decision on whether to sell the land to the irrigation

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## Ione cameras scheduled for installation

The City of Ione has announced that LTT Partners should be installing the new Verkada camera surveillance system next week. Installation of the surveillance system had been delayed while the city awaited SIM cards for the new cameras.

Ione City Hall also reports that it has received several inquiries regarding the formation of a neighborhood watch. Anyone interested in undertaking the organization, please contact Ione City Hall to be put in contact with interested parties.

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