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Board of commissioners' honors passing of former commissioner



Former County Commissioner John Wenholz.

By Andrea Di Salvo

Last week's meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners began with a moment of silence for the late John Wenholz. The Irrigon man had served as Morrow County Commissioner from 1997 to 2009.

"I was fortunate to know John," Morrow County Board of Commissioners Chair David Sykes said in a prepared statement. "I can tell you he loved Morrow County and put his heart and soul into this job."

After the moment of

silence and at the top of the docket Dec. 6 in Heppner were two proposed rate increases that would impact county garbage services. The commissioners held public meetings regarding increases to rates by both Miller and Sons Disposal and Finley Buttes Landfill.

Morrow County Public Works Administrative Manager Sandra Pointer told the commissioners it had been about three years since Miller and Sons had requested a rate increase.

"He struggles, as we all do, with equipment repair, equipment replacement, just the cost of everything with inflation going up," Pointer told the board.

Miller's rate increase will be between three and four percent and will raise the cost of a 300-gallon dumpster from \$82 to \$85, rural residential cans from \$26 to \$27, in-town residential cans from \$23 to \$24, roll-off truck from

\$105 to \$110 per hour, and dump rate from \$25 to \$26. Daily box rent will stay the same at \$6 per day.

Pointer said that Miller also hopes to use the extra margin to improve services.

Pointer said the Finley Buttes increase will be 5.5 percent. The landfill previously raised its rates at the beginning of this year after going several years without a bump in prices. New rates would affect truckloads, tires, appliances, and other large items. The cost to dump solid waste will rise to \$19.76 per ton with a \$16.88 load minimum, with the same per-ton charge of \$19.76 for construction and demolition waste.

County staff recommended accepting the increased rates. With no comment from the public, the county commissioners approved both rate increases. The rates will take effect Jan. 1, 2024.

Also at the meeting,

the county commission opted not to immediately move forward with offering a reward for information regarding the vehicle that had burned in Boardman Nov. 27. The pickup that burned belonged to Oregon Rural Action community organizer Rafael Romero.

While no one was harmed, ORA representatives believe it may have been an act of violence against the organization, which has been vocal in advocating for action regarding groundwater nitrate pollution in north Morrow and Umatilla counties. Morrow County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) regards the circumstance as suspicious, but so far there is no proof of criminal activity.

Morrow County Commissioner Roy Drago Jr. told the other commissioners that Umatilla County had approached him and suggested that each county

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Ione water tests positive for E.coli and Coliform



Image of E.Coli bacteria.

By Annalynn Black

According to the City of Ione website, On November 29, 2023, state regulated routine water tests, done every month, were conducted in the City of Ione. These tests are a regular part of the city's efforts to ensure the safety and quality of its water supply. However, on December 1, 2023, the city received concerning results from the sample taken at City Hall - it tested positive for Coliform bacteria.

In response to this finding, the City of Ione promptly took action to inform its residents. An urgent notice was posted on the official City of Ione website (www.cityofioneoregon.gov), and flyers were distributed at various locations including Ione City Hall, the US Post Office, the Ione Market and Deli, the Cardinal Café, Wheatland Insurance, and Ione Schools. Furthermore, the city requested a private individual to alert the public through a Facebook page named "City of Ione," although this page is not an official city channel. When asked by a reporter from the Gazette, City Administrator Elizabeth Peterson states

they will not be sending information out via mail due to the changing nature of the situation.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, the city sent three water samples to Box R Laboratory on December 4, 2023. The Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division, Drinking Water Services examined these samples and delivered the results to the city on December 6, 2023. Unfortunately, two out of the three samples were found to be contaminated. The repeat sample from City Hall tested positive for E. coli bacteria, while the sample from the city park tested positive for Coliform bacteria. The third sample taken from the city well, fortunately, tested negative.

Upon receiving these results, the city sought guidance from the OHA Drinking Water Services who advised them to flush the city hydrants. Hence, starting from 12:00 pm on December 6, 2023, the city began the process of flushing the hydrants, aiming to complete the operation by 11:00 am on December 7,

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10,000 Miles and 50 years of marriage



Sam and Mary Kay gearing up with their Prius.

By Chris Sykes

On their 50th wedding anniversary, Sam and MaryKay Bellamy took on a once-in-a-lifetime trip across the United States. They loaded up their Prius with their beloved Yorkies, Murphy and Job, and all the essentials for their 10,000-mile adventure. Their goal was to visit historic landmarks and monuments and visit family along the way.

Their first major stop was Keystone, South Dakota, where they stayed near the famous Mount Rushmore. Mount Rushmore was amazing she said. From there, they continued their travels to the iconic Niagara Falls. Mary Kay was amazed by the roar of the falls and taken back by the sheer force of the rushing water. Unfortunately, she realized she had forgotten her passport, preventing them from venturing to the Canadian side. They stayed on the US side and later found her passport back home.

Throughout their trip, Sam and Mary Kay stayed in various motels, spending almost every night on the road. Each morning, they packed up their belongings and set off toward the next destination. They mainly dined at local restaurants, indulging in whatever food they felt like having.

Before the trip, Mary Kay had concerns about spending long hours in the car. However, she found comfort in sitting on pillows, which not only eased the physical strain but also helped her see above the

low dashboard. She mentioned that the seats in the Prius sat so low that visibility became challenging.

Curious about how spending such an extended period together would impact their relationship, I asked Mary Kay if they got on each other's nerves. To my surprise, she replied that they got along incredibly well, even though MaryKay did run over a curb and ripped part of the bottom of the car off and Sam didn't even get that mad. When one of them wasn't driving, they would engage in conversations, read books, and enjoy the beautiful scenery. Sam, being a seasoned traveler and having visited China before the COVID-19 outbreak, wanted to witness the beauty of fall colors in the eastern and southern parts of the country. They visited historic Gettysburg, where Mary Kay, being a war history enthusiast, was captivated by the displays and the tragic story of the only woman killed during the battle. They then made their way to the enchanting Shenandoah National Forest.

Their journey eventually led them to Daytona Beach, Florida, where they spent a few days before heading to Winter Haven to visit their other son, Travis. They stayed at an Air B&B near Travis for a couple of weeks and said his family was doing great. Mary Kay did note that people in Florida drove like maniacs, and her son had to give her a driving lesson encouraging her to



Sam sitting with the 16th president of the United States

step on the gas pedal as she couldn't drive that slowly. However, she admitted to enjoying the slower pace of life before they headed east of Colorado.

Next on their route was San Antonio, Texas, where they enjoyed a romantic dinner atop the Tower of the Americas. The revolving restaurant provided them with a 360-degree rotating view of the city while Mary Kay ate the best steak of her life.

Their next major stop was Dallas, where they visited the ICR Discovery Center for Science and Earth History. The Discovery Center has engaging exhibits explaining the universe's origin, and how science aligned with the Bible. The animatronic creatures, special effects, and fascinating facts about DNA, human ancestry, fossils, rocks, dinosaurs, and astronomy.

Sam and MaryKay's love story began at a Halloween party in Carl Marquardt's barn in 1970. They dated for three years before tying the knot in 1973. Sam, originally raised in Sherman County, moved to Heppner when he was

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Mary Kay admires Mount Rushmore and the Oregon state flag. - Photo by Sam Bellamy

Irrigon home catches fire



Firefighters from Irrigon, Boardman, and Umatilla working together to extinguish the fire on the upper level of the house

Irrigon Rural Fire Department was dispatched to a residential structure fire on Tuesday, December 5th. Umatilla FD, Boardman FD, Morrow Co Health District Ambulance Crews,

Morrow Co Sheriff's Office, Oregon Department of Transportation, and the City of Irrigon Public Works showed up to help aid in any way needed.

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