



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Celebrating Irish Heritage: Currins named Grand Marshal of Heppner St. Patrick's Parade

By Chris Sykes

The history of the Currin family is a testament to the spirit of perseverance and community that shaped the American West. The Currins, hailing from Ireland, ventured to America in the late 1700s following the Irish Revolution. Led by Major George Currin, a veteran of the War of 1812 and a prominent figure in Virginia's political landscape, the family needed a fresh start in the vast expanse of the American West.

In 1845, after enduring a grueling five-month, 2,000-mile journey along the perilous Oregon Trail from Missouri, the Currins finally found their sanctuary in Oregon. The Currins, along with Hugh and William Fields, nephews of George and Hugh, founded Currinsville near Estacada, Oregon. This early settlement marked the Currin's commitment to the land and community, as they worked to build a thriving community amidst the rugged frontier. Their pioneering spirit was not just about conquering the land but about fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support among the early settlers.

The narrative of the Currin family took a significant turn in 1876: George J. Currin, Major Currin's grandson, moved to Morrow County and acquired the Little Butter Creek ranch. The Currins initially raised sheep but switched to cattle after World War 2 due to labor shortages. This decision marked a new era of ranching success and growth for the Currin family, establishing their legacy as leaders in the region. George J. Currin's vision and determination transformed the ranch.

Education played a cru-



1960s on the Currin Ranch (L-R) George, Helen, Ron Sr., Steve, Tom, Ronnie (Ron Jr), Tony, and Mike.

- Photo contributed by Steve Currin

cial role in the Currin family's ethos, with George J. Currin being one of the early students at Oregon State University. This commitment to education underscored the family's belief in progress and excellence, traits that would permeate through generations.

As the ranch flourished under the stewardship of George J. Currin's sons, Ed and Hugh, the Currin name became synonymous with dedication, hard work, and commitment to the land. Their efforts ensured the ranch's success for years to come, solidifying the Currin legacy in the realm of ranching.

However, the Currin family's legacy is perhaps most enduringly defined by their commitment to community service and philanthropy. Their active participation in local organizations, serving as leaders, volunteers, and benefactors, has touched countless lives and left an indelible mark on Heppner and Morrow County.

As the calendar turned from the vibrant, tumultuous years of the early and mid-20th century, the Currin family's saga unfolded

with the same resilience and pioneering spirit that had defined their ancestors. Situated in the heart of Morrow County, the Currin family not only thrived in their traditional roles as ranchers and farmers but also expanded their influence and legacy into new realms of rodeo prominence and community service, demonstrating a commitment to their heritage and the broader community.

The Currins' influence extended beyond the confines of their ranch. Both Ron and Tom actively participated in the Pendleton Round-Up and Morrow County Fair and Rodeo events. Ron Sr. won the wild horse racing competition at the Pendleton Round-Up in 1959 and 1960, and he frequently took part in other rodeo events. In 1960, he won the Morrow County Amateur Calf Roping saddle at the rodeo, and that year claimed the Morrow County all-around title. Tom has been a volunteer at the Pendleton Round-Up for 55 years and was inducted into the Round-Up Hall of Fame in 2010.

In the 1960s, the Currin

family experienced significant growth and change. Led by Ron Sr. and his wife, Judy Lazinka Currin, who had been crowned queen of the Round-Up in 1958, the family's ranch operations expanded further. They embodied the values of hard work, commitment, and community spirit, which had become synonymous with the Currin name. Ron Sr. was not only a respected figure within the community but also a notable presence within the rodeo world.

During these years, the Currin children—Ron Jr., Tony, Mike, Steve, and Jennifer—grew up fully immersed in their family's rich ranching traditions and the thrilling world of rodeo. Each sibling followed their own unique path within this legacy, contributing to the family's history in various ways.

Ron Jr., closely following in his father's footsteps, found his success in rodeo. He went on to capture the Pendleton Round-Up All-Around Championship in 1993 and the Steer Wrestling title in 1995. Ron Jr. later ventured into the cattle trading business, leaving a lasting impact on the industry. However, his untimely death from bladder cancer in 2021 was a heartbreaking loss for the Currin family and the rodeo community at large. Ron and his wife Rayanne had a son Riley, and a daughter Rayna.

Tony Currin, a resident of Dayton, Washington, currently runs his own successful cattle operation. Tony graduated from Heppner High School in 1981 and went on to attend Blue Mountain College and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. In 1987 and 1989, he won

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## Wee Bit O' Ireland this weekend

See PAGE SIX for a full schedule of events.



March 14 - 17th, 2024 Heppner's Wee Bit O' Ireland celebration returns this weekend. - Contributed Photo

## Murray announces retirement from MCHD board



John Murray

After serving on the Morrow County Health District Board of Direc-

tors for an impressive 23 years, John Murray has announced his retirement. Murray shared this news with his friends, family, and well-wishers through a Facebook post made by the MCHD. There will be a retirement party March 19th, from 5pm-7pm at the Gilliam & Bisbee Building to celebrate John Murray for his years of service on our Board of Directors.

## Irish Coffee Hour and CEILI, programs planned for Saturday, March 16th at Elks

The Irish Coffee Hour is scheduled from 10-11:30 a.m. which will include great music from "Whiskey for Breakfast, an introduction of 2024's Grand Marshals which will be the Currin families, and Joe Lindsay with his rendition of the Grand Marshal song. Don't be surprised if Joe Lindsay sings a song or two and you might see a few of our local Leprechauns drop by to help kick off our great St. Patrick's celebration and even possibly dance at some of the music during their visit!

The Irish Brogue Contest will give you, the audience, a chance to tell the best "Blarney" stories for a chance to win some gold coins! So be thinking of something "appropriate" to share! The audience will vote on the three winners.

The CEILI is scheduled from 2-4 p.m. and we know that "Whiskey for Breakfast" and Joe Lindsay (and any friends and family he brings with him)

will provide some great entertainment with plenty of music and laughter! We will have local talent, Mikalie and Hadlie Duncan sing a few Irish songs for our enjoyment and our main entertainment for the weekend, "Tiller's Folly" will be stopping in around 3 p.m. to sing a few of their songs to get us all warmed up for their great concert starting at 7:30 p.m. in the Gilliam and Bisbee Building!

Come enjoy the evening and enter your name to win some green!

All the performers will be filling our ears and hearts with lots of Irish songs and of course, they will want you to join in! We are sure you will want to clap your hands, stomp your feet, have a few laughs, and even dance if you want as we enjoy some great Irish music and entertainment. Come and enjoy the Irish Coffee Hour and CEILI upstairs and the Elks Lodge! We are looking forward to seeing you there!

## Circuit court building site may change after all

Interim ambulance service takes effect this week

By Andrea Di Salvo

The controversial proposed site for the planned new Morrow County Circuit Court building may be out the window following last week's county board of commissioners meeting.

At its regular meeting in Heppner last week, the Morrow County Board of Commissioners learned that the location for the new circuit may be more flexible than originally thought. That may, in turn, open the field to sites that were originally discarded, such as the Heppner mill site owned by the Port of Morrow.

"This was a surprise," said Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen at the meeting. "That changes things."

Since taking over the process early last year, commissioners had interpreted the Oregon statute governing courts to mean that the courthouse must be located within the Heppner city limits. A March 1 letter from Sixth Judicial District Presiding Justice Daniel

Hill has overturned that assumption, saying the court does not have a position on the building's location.

The discussion was sparked by concerned residents directly reaching out to Hill, not from a request by the BOC to move the courthouse out of Heppner.

Given the pushback against the current site, the commissioners seemed happy to accept alternatives. About 40 residents attended a board of commissioners listening session on the topic on Feb. 27 in Heppner, and many expressed concerns over the impact on the fair and rodeo. Many citizens have also expressed concern over the proximity to Heppner Elementary School.

The timing is good, too, since the county's attempts to secure additional fair and rodeo parking recently fell through. Jensen said he wants to go back and review all the initial suggestions again but says the site of the old Kinzua Mill outside of Heppner is at the top of the

list. The land is owned by the Port of Morrow.

Jensen said the site outside the Heppner city limits is attractive because it will have less negative impact on Heppner residents. At the same time, he said it would have challenges of its own, mostly because it falls outside the city's infrastructure, such as sewer and water.

"However, it would be a nice place to hopefully invite some development," Jensen said.

If the site is selected, Jensen said the building would most likely be placed north of the highway near the OSU Extension building, since the area below the highway is still considered in the flood plain. The floodplain has been a barrier to construction in that area for many years.

As for the sudden change of direction, the crux of Hill's letter is that Oregon statute does not specify the courthouse has to be in the county seat. At the same time, the current

Chief Justice Order (CJO), dating back to 1998, does designate the county seat as the principal location.

However, in a letter to Hill, also on March 1, Oregon Chief Justice Meagan Flynn said that wasn't the intention behind the order and that she would be working on a new CJO to "reflect the various ways in which our courts conduct

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