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## Missing boy found by Lankford



Sebastian Berntsen, the boy who was missing in the Heppner Hills. -Photo by David Berntsen.



Jim Lankford, Heppner resident who found Sebastian Berntsen. - Photo by Cindi Doherty



Some of the volunteers and search and rescue team located at the Pioneer Memorial Hospital -Photo contributed



The Helicopter that was doing an aerial search of the hills. -Photo Contributed

On the evening of June 8th, a distressing call was made to the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, reporting a missing 2 1/2-year-old Sebastian Berntsen. The child was last seen in the hills above the Rock Street area of Heppner at around 8:30 pm. With urgency, the Search & Rescue team was immediately activated, and a joint effort between the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Morrow County Emergency Management,

and Heppner Fire was initiated. The command center was established at Pioneer Memorial Hospital, where search plans were meticulously organized.

In a remarkable display of community support, the call for volunteers was answered by a wave of enthusiastic individuals. First Responders and around 40 dedicated volunteers were briefed on the situation and then deployed to specific search grids throughout the

night. The following morning welcomed even more kind-hearted volunteers to join the cause, resulting in approximately 100 people offering their time and efforts. In addition to those on the ground, several other resources were employed to assist in the search. Ground searchers utilized various methods, including foot patrols, four-wheelers, and side-by-sides. Life Flight, equipped with powerful lights, scoured the area from the air during the dark hours, while Two Bears Air, a helicopter from Montana, brought with it infrared cameras to aid in the search effort. Drones from Boardman Fire and Umatilla Search & Rescue were also deployed, and a group of horseback riders remained on standby if needed. It was a heartening sight to witness the coming together of friends, neighbors, and different agencies to support a family in need.

During the search operation, additional assistance

came from an unexpected source. The Life Flight helicopter, dispatched from LaGrande, circled the area with spotlights. This was in response to reports that a couple of individuals possessed night vision/thermal units that could aid in the search. One of the individuals who joined the crew was Cam Sweeney, a local from Heppner. Sweeney played a significant role in the operation and was equipped with a thermal optics unit. He was invited to board the Lifeflight Helicopter, from where he flew over Cross Hill in search of heat signatures. The main area of interest for their efforts was centered around the lake and the face of the Heppner dam, as explained by Sweeney.

After twelve anxious hours, it was Heppner resident Jim Lankford who ultimately found Sebastian. The young boy, seemingly unfazed by the terrifying

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## The new circuit court building will be built in the south end

Boardman off the table

By Annalynn Black

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners held their latest meeting June 5th, with several important topics on the agenda including where the new circuit court building will be built. The meeting started off with an update from County Administrator Matt Jensen about the ambulance plan. According to Jensen, the county has received applications from two ambulance providers and aims to have the plan implemented by July 17th. While the time frame is still being worked out, the commission is determined to meet this target.

Another pressing issue discussed was the nitrate problem. Jensen informed the commission that efforts are underway to facilitate discussions between state, federal, and local partners to address this issue. He recently attended a Boardman council meeting to discuss the county's involvement and assure them that Morrow County is taking a leadership role in finding solutions. The county is exploring options that could potentially be funded through state and federal programs, as well as donations and partnerships. Matt also mentioned reaching out to representatives from the West Glen community

to gather their input and see what they are willing to contribute towards the resolution. Jensen, trying to bridge the divide saying, "[we're] trying to build some trust and bridges that have come down over the last few years just because of the contentiousness of the issue." In a positive development, Boardman has shown openness to providing water and potentially sewer services for the West Glen area.

During the meeting, Commissioner Sykes raised the important point that the Port of Morrow should also be involved in these discussions, particularly with regard to the provision of water and sewer services.

The meeting then moved on to discuss the need for a search and rescue vehicle for the Morrow County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). The commission unanimously approved the motion to allocate \$101,608 from Title 3 funds for this purpose.

Next, attention shifted to the Circuit Court building. Jensen informed the commission that efforts were being made to secure written commitments from the Port of Morrow and the City of Heppner. He presented positive news, stating that the City of Heppner had already committed

\$800,000 towards infrastructure for the Kinzua Mill site. Additionally, the Port of Morrow expressed its willingness to donate \$100,000. The Port's preferred option for the project is to connect to the city water supply while establishing a separate sewer system. However, this would come at an annual operations and maintenance cost of approximately \$70,000 for lift stations or pressurized systems. The estimated cost for water and sewer infrastructure at the Southeast site is \$830,000, while the Northwest location would incur a cost of \$1,424,000. Environmental and geological considerations have delayed progress, and the estimated costs for these factors at the mill site and Boardman site are approximately \$700,000, and \$300,000 for the fairgrounds site.

Both Commissioners Drago and Sykes expressed that the Boardman site is not in their top two options, but when Sykes asked Wenholtz if he agrees he said, "I wouldn't but it's a democracy here and majority rules."

While the commission narrowed down the options to two sites, the Kinzua Mill Southeast and the Fairgrounds site, they

felt that more information was needed before making a final decision.

In a positive development, the commission received verbal confirmation that they were allowed to send a Geotech team to the mill site for surveys and assessments. Commissioner Sykes assures that it's important to note that this does not signify the county taking ownership of the site, but rather a necessary step to gather relevant data.

The commission approved a motion to conduct Geotech testing at the Southeast Mill site.

To be continued in next weeks edition.

## Recall signatures have been verified



Jeff Wenholtz



David Sykes



Roy Drago Jr.

The County Clerk, Bobbi Childers, has verified the signatures on the recall petition, confirming that it has qualified to be included in the ballot. According to the regulations, after the signature have been verified, the deadline for the public officer to resign or submit a Statement of Justification (SEL 352-Statement of Justification, 200 words or less) is: June 17, 2024, which is no later than the 5th day after the petition qualifies to the ballot. (the 5th day falls on Saturday June 15, which ORS 246.021 indicates the deadline will be the following business day, if the public officer resigns, the resignation is accepted by the election official, it

takes effect on the day it is offered. If the public officer does not resign within 5 days (SEL 352-Statement of Justification or Not), the election must be held no later than the 35th day after the last day for the public officer to resign. Childers said the special recall election will be held July 22nd.

According to a Facebook post by Stuart Dick on the Morrow County citizens for liberty and justice page, Morrow County Clerk, Bobbi Childers, has officially verified the signatures on the recall petition for each Commissioner. Stuart further mentioned that they had collected extra signatures for each Commissioner, with Sykes having 668, Wenholtz with 686, and Drago with 669. He also expressed gratitude towards Bobbi Childers and her diligent, integrity-driven staff for their unwavering commitment to the cause.

The Gazette reached out to the commissioners and received a comment from two commissioner. David Sykes said, "As a Morrow County Commissioner, grappling with tough decisions and com-

## 1996 - 1999 class reunion was all about the 90's



Heppner High graduates from 1996-199 posing for a picture at the Elks Lodge. - Contributed Photo

The 1996 - 1999 class reunion took place on Saturday at Hagar Park, followed by a dinner at the Heppner Elks Lodge later that night. The classes gathered at Hagar Park with their families for a few hours of games and conversation, before head-

ing to the Elks at 6 pm for dinner. 90's music played throughout the night, with Julie Watkins and Audra Bunch taking turns on the mic for some karaoke. The atmosphere was lively, with classmates moving from group to group, sharing laughter and stories.

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