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VOL. 144 NO. 49 8 Pages Wednesday, December 11, 2024 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## Two great coaches, one awesome legacy



Greg Grant and Les Payne (center) surrounded by former players proudly holding trophies from past championships, celebrating decades of success and an enduring legacy. - Photo by Petra Payne

By Chris Sykes

The Gilliam and Bissbee Building was filled to capacity Saturday night as the Heppner community came together to celebrate two legendary coaches, Greg Grant and Les Payne, at a Retirement Celebration honoring their extraordinary contributions to Mustang football and the town of Heppner.

An estimated 250-300 people, including former players, past and current coaches, and even rival coaches, gathered to pay tribute to these two men who have left an indelible mark on the sport and the community. The event featured heartfelt speeches, a moving slideshow showcasing their coaching careers, and a standing-room-only crowd that reflected the immense respect and admiration they've earned.

Honoring Decades of Dedication

Les Payne began coaching in Heppner 48 years ago, while Greg Grant recently concluded his 35th year. Both men led the Heppner Mustangs to remarkable success over the years, and their legacy is cemented not only in the memories of their players but also at the facility where the Mustangs play, now known as Les Payne Field at Greg Grant Stadium.

The evening's program was a mix of humor and heartfelt moments, led by

master of ceremonies Ken Grieb. Speakers, including Joe Armato, Stephen Matheny, Josh Coiner, Jeremy Rosenbalm, members of the 2015 State Champion team, and Superintendent Matt Combe, shared stories of leadership, inspiration, and the profound life lessons both coaches imparted.

Les Payne, the second-to-last speaker of the night, reflected on his nearly five-decade career with heartfelt gratitude. He thanked his family, players, fellow coaches, Greg Grant, and the Heppner community for their unwavering support throughout his journey. Les recounted his early days in coaching, the personal and professional growth he experienced over the years, and the enduring support that fueled his dedication. He spoke fondly about his long commutes to Heppner, emphasizing how much he loved coaching there and affirming that he never wanted to coach anywhere else. Les also gave a special, heartfelt thanks to his wife for her unwavering support and understanding, acknowledging the sacrifices she made that allowed him to pursue his passion for coaching.

Greg Grant spoke last, beginning by thanking his wife and expressing heartfelt gratitude to his family, coaching staff, players, and the Heppner community for their unwavering sup-



Greg Grant and Les Payne stand together after accepting their commemorative jerseys, marking the culmination of their legendary coaching careers. - Photo by Petra Payne

port throughout his 35-year career. He reflected on the relationships and memories that made his coaching journey so meaningful, candidly acknowledging how demanding he could be at times and offering sincere thanks to those who stood by him. He gave special recognition to Les Payne for being by his side

throughout his entire coaching tenure. Grant concluded by affirming that there was no other place he would have rather coached than Heppner.

The highlight of the evening came when both coaches were presented with jerseys featuring the

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## Price tag for Boardman circuit court site causes 'sticker shock' for county officials

BOC chair Sykes calls for revisiting the design

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners and county staff experienced what they called "sticker shock" over the latest cost estimate for the new Morrow County Circuit Court building planned in Boardman.

Representatives of Alliance Management and Construction Solutions and architectural firm DLR Group attended the Dec. 4 board of commissioners meeting in Heppner to give an update on design progress, costs and next steps.

It was business as usual until DLR Project Architect Kelli Stewart got to the cost estimate—\$50 million total cost, for which the county will be on the hook for around \$33 million.

"I've got sticker shock," admitted Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen. "I know that those numbers are very conservative. The size of those numbers, though, makes me question my proposal to have the justice center located there."

Morrow County knew from the outset that it had to come up with at least \$12.5 million. The county had previously received a \$12.5 million matching grant from the state for construction of the circuit court building. The state later added another \$1.5 million, but the total of \$25 million has been the number tossed around since then.

However, with uncertainty and changes to the site, it seems no one has

ever come up with a firm estimate before. Alliance and DLR representatives said they new the county would spend at least \$25 million on the project, but that the figure used so far in discussions was "just a number."

"We discussed early on that we knew there was going to be other buildings that were going to be added on. It wasn't like we didn't know it was going to go above \$25 million," said Doug Carl of Alliance. "When it was potentially at the mills site that we were looking, there might be a \$4 or \$5 million utility project, you know, so we just didn't know. So now we're at a spot where something could be defined."

Carl, Stewart and the

others said that part of the rise in cost was from inflation during the prolonged design phase, while part of it was due to added square

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## Santa Claus is coming to...Lexington



Santa Claus. - Photo by Rudolph

Santa is coming to Holly Rebekah Lodge in Lexington on Saturday, Dec. 14, to have breakfast with kids ages zero to 99.

Due to his busy holiday schedule, Santa will arrive in Lexington at 9 a.m. and will only be able to stay until 11 a.m.

"We feel lucky that he will be able to come, even if it is just for two hours, during his busy time of the

year," said a Holly Rebekah spokesperson.

Breakfast consisting of pancakes, scrambled eggs, two link sausages and drinks will be served for only \$5. Cinnamon rolls will also be available for \$3.

Juli Kennedy will be taking pictures at no cost during breakfast. The lodge is located at 135 Main Street.

## Fair and rodeo again seeks royalty

Applications available for 2025 fair and rodeo queen



After a 10-year hiatus, the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo is again seeking a queen to reign in 2025.

-Contributed photo

After a 10-year lapse, the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo is again accepting applications for a Morrow County Fair and Rodeo Queen.

The application is open to students between the ages of 14 and 19 in Morrow County and neighboring counties.

"This is a great op-

portunity for a young person to represent Morrow County not only during the week of fair in August, but also at various other events throughout the year," said Morrow County Fair Secretary Sue Gibbs.

These events include parades, rodeos, county functions and other festivities throughout Oregon in 2025.

Applications are available at the fair office, the SAGE Center, Green Feed and Morrow County high schools, as well as on the Morrow County website.

Completed applications can be mailed to Morrow County Fair, PO Box 464, Heppner, OR 97836 or emailed to [mcfair@morrowcounty.gov](mailto:mcfair@morrowcounty.gov).

Fair and Rodeo Queen applications must be post-marked by Dec. 31, 2024, or returned to the fair office no later than noon on Monday, Jan. 6, 2025. Applicants are

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## The Heppner Gazette is seeking your stories

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Then you might be just who the Heppner Gazette-Times is looking for.

The G-T is seeking contributors to send in news

that matters to you—youth events, local sports and interesting characters, for a start.

To connect with the newspaper, contact Andrea Di Salvo or Chris Sykes at 541-676-9228 or email [editor@rapidsolve.net](mailto:editor@rapidsolve.net).



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