



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢



VOL. 145 NO.7 8 Pages Wednesday, February 12, 2025 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

New coordinator takes helm at Neighborhood Center



Nikki Clark

By Andrea Di Salvo

Visitors to the Neighborhood Center in Heppner will now be greeted with a new, but maybe familiar, smiling face. Nikki Clark has taken over as Neighborhood Center Coordinator as of last month.

The mother of four has a long, if intermittent, history with Heppner. She was born here to parents Matt and Charlene Clark. She attended school in Heppner and spent the first several years of her life on her family ranch, the Horseshoe Hereford Ranch near Ruggs.

She was seven when she moved away with her mother but says she returned to visit her father and Clark relatives during vacations.

“There’s a lot of us in different age groups that are around still,” she says.

From there, life took her to various places, though “mostly Texas,” she says. They lived in Arlington, TX from the time she was in sixth grade until her junior year of high

school. They then moved to Oshkosh, WI, where she graduated from high school.

After high school, she and her daughter, Tatum, moved to Texas. She was then married and had three more children, daughters Serenity, Aubriana and Sophie Rose Rodriguez.

In 2011, Clark and Sophie Rose went to a wedding in Oregon. It was shortly after that visit that her family decided to move to Heppner.

“We sold everything and came out here. It was the best thing we ever did,” Clark says.

The family made a home here for several years. In 2015, Clark took a job as the secretary for the Episcopal Church and later a position with Morrow County Healthy Families, a job she held until 2017.

In that role, she visited new or expecting mothers in their homes, connecting them with much-needed resources. It was a job that, in many ways, prepared her for work at the Neighborhood Center.

“I know there is a need in this community. This is a place where you can come, your friend can come, and no one will judge you. Someone will help,” says Clark. “We all just scoop up each other and help, and it’s beautiful, and that’s what it’s like to work here.”

It wasn’t an immediate connection, though. Clark and her family left the area

in 2018, but it seemed Heppner wasn’t done with her. Six years later, she would be back.

She came to Heppner to visit over the holidays. Aside from her Clark family connections, the location is somewhat central to Washington State University in Pullman and Oregon State University in Corvallis, where three of her daughters have attended.

She planned to leave town on Jan. 11.

“But Heppner asked me to stay,” she says.

Actually, it was Heppner woman Barb Orwick who saw Clark at their church coffee hour and asked what she was doing for work. Clark told her she was open to possibilities.

“I might have an opportunity for you,” Orwick had said.

Of course, that opportunity was the coordinator position at the Neighborhood Center. Rather than leaving Jan. 11 as planned, Clark began in her new role Jan 14.

The acting coordinator role had been held by Kelly Fritz until Nikki became the new coordinator.

“Kelly has done a phenomenal job keeping this place together,” Clark says.

With Clark in the role of full-time coordinator, the Neighborhood Center has returned to its regular hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“So we can serve more

people, we can help more people,” says Clark. “Helping the community any way we can.”

Clark says she is excited to serve the community and wants to let people know about all the resources the center has.

“My cup overflows,” says Clark. “Being with and without over my lifetime, I’ve given and received,” she says, adding that she is grateful to be where she is now.

“We have the resources here. We are here and we can help,” she says.

For instance, most people are familiar with the Neighborhood Center’s thrift store and food pantry. The food pantry will provide one food box per month for those who need them.

However, the center also offers emergency assistance including fuel, shelter and clothing. A weekly Wednesday bag sale lets shopper fill a grocery bag with clothes for only \$15 while also helping to fund the Neighborhood Center’s food pantry and other assistance programs.

Clark says she is thrilled both to be at the Neighborhood Center and back in the arms of the Heppner community.

“It’s really been a big God thing for me,” she says. “It’s almost like coming full circle. I’m so happy to be here.”

Matheny places second at state hoop shoot



Scout Matheny of Heppner placed second in the girls’ eight- to nine-year-old age group in the state hoop shoot competition through the Oregon State Elks Association. -Contributed photo

Scout Matheny of Heppner represented the Heppner Elks Lodge and the East District at the Oregon State Elks Hoop Shoot competition on Feb. 8 in Silverton, OR. Competing in the girls’ eight- to nine-

year-old age group, she placed second in the state.

Scout shot 12 of 25, tying with another participant and forcing a shoot-off. Both girls made three of five shots, leading to another round of five. In the intense competition, Scout outscored her opponent to claim second place.

“I was pretty nervous, but it was a lot of fun!” Scout said. “Also, I got to talk to the other girls and make friends.” She expressed pride in representing her area and participating in the event.

Her mother, Chelsea Matheny, shared her excitement in a Facebook post: “We are so proud of this girl. She was cool and calm in a very intense shoot-off for second place.”

Scout is the daughter of Stefan and Chelsea Matheny of Heppner.

Library district shares dreams for Heppner library

Possible expansion could include new facility at Heppner City Park

By Andrea Di Salvo

Oregon Trail Library District is looking to expand in Heppner, and Heppner City Park may be one spot that’s in the running for a new building.

If that does happen—and that’s a big if—it’s still a long way off. OTLD Director Kathy Street and board member Bill Kuhn were at Monday’s city council meeting to put out feelers regarding such a move.

“We’re just launching ourselves,” Kuhn said. “The library district is in its very initial conception of what we want to do.”

Street and Kuhn told the Heppner City Council that OTLD is putting together a facilities master plan. They plan on spending the next two to four months gathering ideas from the communities the district serves.

“This is all very conceptual. We have no money for this yet,” Kuhn added.

They already know, though, that a much-needed expansion of the Heppner library is high on the list.

The library district has existed for 28 years. The Heppner library is the oldest of the district’s three library buildings.

“It’s been quite a while. It’s older than a lot of coun-

cil members and the mayor, probably,” said Kuhn. “And it’s got some problems.”

The building was donated to the county by Amanda Duvall. The library shares the building with the Morrow County Heritage Museum. The county owns the building, but the City of Heppner owns the lot.

The library’s current footprint is about 1,150 square feet. Street told the city council that they need at least 3,500 square feet, but ideally between 4,500 and 5,000.

“If we get for story time six or seven children and there are adults that come with them, that is really crowded,” said Street of the existing building.

Along with more space, Street said they are looking to create a space that is “inclusive and comfortable for everybody that comes to the library.”

“We want it to be inviting,” she added.

OTLD has consulted with Hacker Architects, a Portland-based firm specializing in library design, regarding the possible expansion of the existing library building. The firm is currently working on the Hermiston Public Library.

The architects have -Continued to PAGE SIX

Citizens honored at Town & Country awards

It was a star-studded evening last Thursday in Heppner, when several community members were honored at the annual Town and Country Awards.

Woman of the Year was Trish Maben, Man of the Year was Jerry Conklin, Business of the Year was Gar Aviation, Citizen-Educator of the Year was Ken Grieb, the Youth award was presented to Katie Spivey and the Lifetime Achievement Award went to Sheridan Tarnasky.

Also part of the festivities was the coronation of 2025 Morrow County Fair and Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo Queen KC Anderson. The crown was presented by Sue Gibbs, Judy Healy and past queen Macy Gibbs Goodwin. KC is Morrow County’s first fair and rodeo queen in 10 years.

“It was a fantastic night and a full house of community support to honor these fine citizens,” Heppner Chamber of Commerce Director Madison Rosenbalm said in a Facebook post. “Emcee Ken Grieb kept the night rolling, event after his own award!”

Around 200 community members attended the banquet to honor this year’s award recipients. Alvin Liu and his crew prepared a trip dinner, while the Broken Spoke serviced the no-host bar. Dinner service and cleanup was provided by the Heppner High School senior class.

Sandy Matthews prepared a slideshow for the event, while Dale Bates



(L-R) Citizen-Educator of the Year Ken Grieb, Youth Award recipient Katie Spivey, Man of the Year Jerry Conklin, Woman of the Year Trish Maben, Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Sheridan Tarnasky, Business of the Year Award Gar Aviation owners John and Kelly Boyer. -Photo by Brooke Christy Photography

provided sound and live-streamed the event to Facebook. And, of course, Joe Lindsay’s song about the award winners was a big hit as always.

Woman of the Year was presented to Trish Maben by Amanda Roy and Anne Hamann. Maben, a nurse at Pioneer Memorial Clinic, was honored for more than 40 years as a nurse in the Heppner community.

“Trish has spent 46 years as a nurse caring for the residents of Morrow County and wears her ‘heart on her ears,’ as she would say,” Roy wrote in her nomination letter. “She brings health and health-care education to another level and is an asset to this community.”

“Our community is healthier because of her knowledge and willingness

to teach and help others.”

Former PMC provider Jeanne Berretta wrote that she had worked with Maben since 1988 and that the nurse is “literally a godsend to providers.”

“I have found her to be compassionate, competent, steadfast and dependable,” wrote Berretta. “She is often the first one at work and the very last one to leave, making sure that all the phone calls have been made, the paperwork completed and patient questions answered.”

“The residents of South Morrow County have greatly benefited from Trish’s clear instructions and reliable follow-through for decades,” said former Morrow County Health District nurse and home health and hospice director Molly Rhea. “It is time to show

her how much we appreciate her.”

Man of the Year Jerry Conklin received his award from Molly Rhea. Conklin, home health and hospice chaplain for Mor-

-Continued to PAGE SIX



START THE YEAR OFF ROAD SALES EVENT

\$2,000 OFF UP TO SELECT POLARIS XPEDITION MODELS

OR FINANCING AS LOW AS 0.99% APR FOR 36 MOS

POLARIS

Morrow County Grain Growers...

CALL
541-989-8221
ext 204
for more information

WARNING: Polaris® off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and cabin belts or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-542-3761 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2022 Polaris Inc.

POLARIS | OFF ROAD