

Community meeting over hospital and MCHD

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the community.”

Patti Alstott, a former hospital employee, urged the public to “vote carefully” in the May election, with four of five board positions open.

“Seek out those who are filing and ask what their plan is to address it,” she said, stressing the board’s sole responsibility for the CEO, who oversees all staff. “We need people who are open not only to discussion but to action.”

Alstott shared her interaction with her new doctors and said they ask her what the hell is going on in Heppner and she said “it’s pretty embarrassing.”

Tarnasky clarified her earlier remarks, saying “administration” referred to the board, not back-office staff.

Heppner resident Greg Greenup recounted a hospital visit where an ER emergency allegedly left other patients unattended due to insufficient staff. “That should never happen in a hospital,” he claimed, urging collective action to “stop what’s going on there.”

Cyde Estes lamented the loss of personal connection with temporary employees.

“Knowing the people in the community is good care,” she said, recalling her late husband Rusty’s EMS work. “When someone you know shows up in an ambulance, there’s comfort in that.”

She criticized the reliance on non-local contract workers, who don’t coach baseball or sit on city council, explaining the hospital was once a core part of the community—a role now lost. Estes called for efforts to refocus the board on hiring local talent.

Travel nurse Brandy Bommersbach said she worked at the hospital for four years as a per diem nurse and read a statement expressing willingness to collaborate with the MCHD board. However, she claimed her hours were cut, and she alleged a full-time position offer was rescinded.

“There are nurses willing to come here and work,” she said, noting only one full-time RN position was listed on the MCHD website.

Estes asked if contract hiring circumvented union rules, but Bommersbach couldn’t confirm MCHD’s motives.

Nurse Kathleen Greenup added, “Nurses don’t want to work here because there’s no security. I’m a single mom who moved here for a full-time position, and now I drive an hour away for job security.”

The discussion turned to the hospital’s CT scanner, vital for stroke diagnosis. Employee Jimmy Wimer explained the injector (an injector is used to identify strokes) had been down for a month and was unrepairable, with a new one arriving March 14. An unidentified audience member alleged that it was down due to deferred maintenance.

Heppner resident, Brian Thompson, whose wife Susie—a Registered Nurse with 35 years’ experience, certified in Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS)—was allegedly denied work beyond answering phones, also criticized the board. He claimed that at recent MCHD meetings, 50 percent of the meeting focused on censoring public comments instead of focusing on important issues.

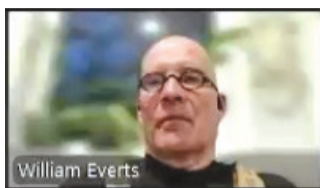
Thompson cited billing delays, including one of his ranch employees waiting nearly a year for a bill after needing stitches, despite insurance paying in May 2024.



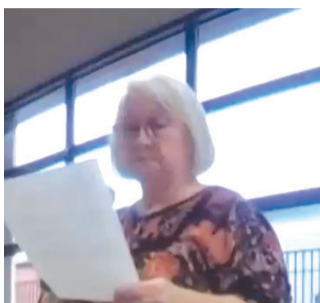
(R) Jason Hanna observes the Zoom monitor. He announced his candidacy for the Morrow County Health District board that evening. -Contributed Photo



Dr. Russ Nichols



Dr. Everts



Janet Greenup

“This needs to stop, and we need a new board,” he said.

Former employee Diana Sharp said she was terminated after 14 years over voicemail, taking two years to recover mentally.

Dr. Emily Jack, now in Pendleton, said she signed on with MCHD to serve Heppner but rescinded due to instability. She now sees many Heppner patients in Pendleton.

Patti Alstott claimed a lack of providers reduced revenue, impacting the community economically.

Dr. Nichols recalled many providers across clinics, including a thriving Irrigon location now “collecting cobwebs.” He aims to prioritize its revival.

Kathleen Greenup challenged the board’s “culture change” narrative, noting staff willingness to adapt elsewhere.

More residents shared stories and expressed fears of losing the hospital entirely, amplifying the urgency of the situation.

Jason Hanna and Dr. Nichols announced their candidacies for the board election in May. Hanna emphasized sustainability and community, while Nichols vowed to improve conditions to attract local providers.

Janet Greenup, also running for a board position highlighted her family’s deep ties to the hospital.

The most shocking testimony of the night was by Dr. Everts. Dr. William Everts was on Zoom, but called in for a better connection. Dr. Everts warned of retaliation risks for staff, delivering a full statement: “I wanted to let everyone know that anyone working at the hospital is taking a huge risk right now of retaliation, which this administration is known for. There is a great community in Heppner. I mean, it is really Mayberry RFD. It’s an amazing place. And I can’t speak for the other doctors, but we love coming and working here. We like making sure the com-

munity is taken care of. We want to be here. We respect you, and you respect us. ‘At night when we are in bed and smell smoke we want to know if the house is on fire and I am telling you the house is on fire.’ You have an emergency crisis there, that needs immediate attention. Usually we ask the administration to identify problems and they make decisions and things get better, but I can’t say that is a pattern I am seeing. I can also say that the difficulties I’ve had are recently with labs, I don’t trust them and I have had to have them rerouted. In the radiology department, I have to send people away that are having a stroke, A STROKE, when time is an issue. This has been a known issue for a long time and has been referred and referred and referred. I am here to tell you that you need people that can make proper decisions, people who have experience in medicine.”

It was announced that Dr. Everts was fired the night before the meeting, Monday, March 10.

Heppner resident Mike Duncan pledged financial support with Thompson for any retaliated employees.

The meeting underscored a community united in frustration, seeking accountability and a return to local staffing to preserve Pioneer Memorial Hospital’s role in Heppner amid fears of its potential closure.

The Heppner Gazette reached out to the Morrow County Health District for a response to the meeting.

It should be noted that the Health District stated they were not invited to the meeting and were unaware of everything discussed, though the Gazette provided them with some topics and quotes from the event.

Addressing CT Scanner/Injector Concerns

On Saturday, February 15, 2025, staff notified the Outpatient Services Director of an issue with the CT injector (used for CTs with contrast). Staff were able to continue care, and the hospital was placed on stroke divert. Within two hours, technical support had helped staff to regain functionality of the CT injector, however, the decision was made to remain on stroke divert out of an abundance of caution. The CEO, COO, EMS Director, DNS, Outpatient Services Director, and three radiology techs participated in that decision. Initially, the service team believed that the injector could be repaired. Unfortunately, after attempting to install new

parts, it was determined that the injector could not be repaired, and a new injector was ordered with an installation date of March 17, 2025. Pioneer Memorial Hospital remained on stroke divert during this time. Ultimately, there were no ambulances that had to be diverted during this time. When PMH is on any type of divert status, the ambulance service and surrounding hospitals are notified. Statements are not made to the public because PMH is not diverting patients that self-present to the emergency department. When emergency care is needed, the safest course of action is always to be presented to the nearest emergency department. If a patient that self-presented needed to be transferred, they would have the benefit of being transferred with medical support and a consultation from the OHSU tele-stroke provider. PMH would only issue a community divert notice if PMH was asking patients not to present to the emergency department. Equipment maintenance is the joint responsibility of department leads, maintenance, and administration. Depending on the type of equipment, it may require periodic preventative maintenance. In the case of the CT injector, PMH was working with the service vendor to determine whether it was more cost effective to complete another service or to order a new CT injector. For the past three years, MCHD has been applying for grant funding to completely replace the CT machine, which costs around \$550,000. Congressionally Directed Spending funds were awarded to MCHD for this purpose for FY25, however, we received notice over the weekend that these funds will not be issued due to Federal budgetary decisions. MCHD has been invited to re-apply for FY26 and will do so.

Broader Operational and Administrative Issues

MCHD has always utilized traveling staff at PMH to fill gaps. Our use of traveling staff did increase during and post COVID, which is true of most hospitals. MCHD generally employs staff in four categories: full-time, part-time, occasional part-time, and temporary. OPT staff receive a higher rate of pay because they do not receive benefits. For this reason, certain departments see staff move between full-time, part-time, and OPT positions frequently. This is

But lately, I wonder if maybe we’ve learned our lesson. It appears the fashion world has relaxed just a tad. I recently watched a bunch of teenagers walking to the store during lunch hour. I could have sworn they had just crawled out of bed. Apparently, PJs are a style suitable for all occasions...and they don’t even have to match.

My dad had it right. You never found him staring in his closet wondering what to wear. Aside from a stint with a required Navy uniform, he has worn the same thing his whole life... long underwear, a denim shirt, Wrangler jeans and boots. That was his summer attire. Wintertime included

~ Letters to the Editor ~

The Heppner Gazette Times will print all letters to the Editor with the following criteria met: letters submitted to the newspaper will need to have the name of the sender along with a legible signature. We are also requesting that you provide your address and a phone number where you can be reached. The address and phone number will only be used for verification and will not be printed in the newspaper. Letters may not be libelous. The GT reserves the right to edit. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under “Card of Thanks” at a cost of \$15. Email to editor@rapidsolve.net or upload to Heppner.net.

Farm Fashion

I like to be comfortable. I don’t like things that poke, prod, push, squeeze, scratch, ride up, fall down or inflict pain (excluding farm animals). As a result, you won’t find one pair of 6” spikey, pointy-toed shoes in my closet. There is, however, one pair of dusty black 1” pumps and I only have those because my daughters wouldn’t let me wear boots. I was also informed that you don’t wear flannel to a wedding. Who makes these rules?

Trying to be fashionable is a pain. By the time you find something that “goes,” you spend the rest of the time trying to keep it from “going” where it doesn’t belong. You can tuck and tug all you want... some clothes are just determined to win. I tried on a pair of leggings once. Took a good half hour getting them on and I’m pretty sure I pulled a couple good muscles getting them off.

The whole thing is exhausting. No wonder women are so cranky. Especially since all that work really doesn’t get you any closer to the perfect silhouette you’re going for. I mean, whose idea was the Muffin Top Jean anyway? And... unless you’re 13, Skinny Jeans make you look something akin to Gru on Despicable Me. Also, admit it ladies, certain things just should not be accentuated, and there comes a time when no amount of butting is going to be an improvement.

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his heavier long undies and Pendleton wool shirts. For formal occasions, Wrangler slacks and a string tie sufficed. That was it. And that got him through ranching, raising kids, and the first 90 years or so of his life. To be fair, he did own several pair of pointy-toed heels, but Tony Lamas don’t count.

So, I’ve decided to take a little fashion advice from my dad and simplify. As I find myself staring into the Sunset Years of my life, I plan on spending less time staring into my closet. From now on, my choices will be flannel or denim, period... and maybe a good pair of overalls. The only muffin tops you’ll see coming from me will be the ones I’m taking out of the oven. If I am ever so fortunate as to be invited to dinner or an occasion that affords more formal attire, I will, however, pull out my best Wranglers and choose the boots with the least amount of poo. It’s the least I can do for my dear daughters.

Susie Crosby,
Prineville, OR

Meeting about health district a positive step

Last Tuesday, there was a public community meeting concerning MCHD (Morrow County Health District), specifically PMH (Pioneer Memorial Hospital) and the clinic. It was very short notice, and many more concerned citizens would have been in attendance and participated on Zoom.

The goal was to allow facts about staff, including doctors, nurses, lab and maintenance, etc. “leaving” the employ of the district. There were no personal attacks, no slander and no names mentioned.

Positive comments and commitments came out of the meeting. It’s been a long time since there’s been anything positive on the topic of PMH and the clinic. Let’s keep it that way.

Greg and Janet Greenup
Heppner, OR

Seniors Matter March Menu

March 11, - Burrito Bar, Dessert

March 18, Pork Roast, Potatoes with, buttered corn and Dessert

March 25 - Italian Tomato Soup, Salad, Dessert



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Heppner

