



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Bringing the Heppner MS Walk back to life

### One-mile walk creates fun morning, forum for MS facts

By Barb Orwick

Previously published in MS Focus Magazine.

My friend, Merilee McDowell, began the Heppner MS Walk in 1997. She was diagnosed with MS when she was 22. She began her journey before there were medications or much understanding of this disease. When the National Society for Multiple Sclerosis started sponsoring walks, Merilee initiated this activity in Heppner, OR. This was a big party involving lots of helpers, walkers, food and prizes. Businesses were involved in donating door prizes and financial contributions. Volunteers made sandwiches, registered walkers, took in contributions and made walkers know they were celebrated. People came not from just our county but nearby counties as well. The NSMS was enthused. They brought in their people from Portland, OR, as well as bread, fruit and snack bars.

At the height of the Heppner MS Walk, it brought in about \$14,000 annually. Merilee led the Heppner MS Walk for 20 years. Participation decreased, some of the workers left, and we all got older. The walk lost enough that the Society moved the walk to Pendleton, a larger city. Then COVID-19 hit the world.

I decided to recreate the Heppner MS Walk because I wake up with MS every day. After getting the okay from our sheriff, we were told if we kept to six-foot distancing, we could have the walk. A few of us decorated scooters and ourselves for newspaper pictures. We had a small walk that first year, collecting a few hundred dollars. We have grown ever since.

Let me explain where Heppner is. To get to the nearest McDonald's, Walmart, or a Chinese restaurant, you must be ready for an hour drive. To get to our MS support meeting is almost an hour-and-a-half drive. The nearest neurologist is in another state and an hour-and-a-half drive. One of my friends said, "This isn't rural Oregon, this is the frontier!" The population of Heppner is about 1,200, when including the next two towns in our valley, the population grows to about 1,800. To put into perspective, approximately one in 3000 people have MS worldwide. By this rationale, what should be 5.4 cases in our valley's population is 13 cases!

Several years ago in the 1990s, the Tri-County Oregon MS Support Group began. They met in the small town of Fossil. There were no agencies to support the



Barb Orwick

group at that time. Group members reached out to MS Focus: The Multiple Sclerosis Foundation because they were the only MS agency at that time. The Foundation sent a couple of people to Oregon. After landing in Portland, these people drove and drove, saying goodbye to trees. Then they turned off the freeway, driving and driving even further into the abyss. Finally reaching Fossil, the contingent looked around and said, "Give these people whatever they want." MS Focus helped buy lunches for the Tri-County MS Support Group. This encouraged the group to continue meeting for 20 years. This is the first year of our group giving back to the Foundation.

#### How did it work?

After several years without a walk, I wanted to make people aware of the need to help our MS population. We are all independent and stubborn but sometimes we need help.

The current walk format is easy for participants and sponsors. Participants meet and, after a short orientation, embark on the one-mile walk. They can join anytime that is convenient for them. Most people in the area know about the previous walks and are very supportive.

Many people know someone who battles with MS. We try to bring people together, not only for a fun morning, but also to raise awareness about MS by providing them some facts about the disease. The Multiple Sclerosis Foundation is quite helpful putting together information about how MS is a debilitating disease.

People can see only the physical side of this illness. It is the nonevident effects that people don't know about such as missing words, swallowing problems, depression, vertigo, and exhaustion to name a few.

#### Most challenging

The most challenging part of hosting the walk was inviting people to participate and sending out "Thank You" notes afterward. A friend put all the names and addresses on an Excel spreadsheet so this process should be less time-consuming next year.

The other part of "get-  
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## May 20, 2025 Election: Full Candidate List by District and Position

Morrow County and its surrounding districts have announced the full list of filed candidates for various local government and board positions. The following individuals have formally declared their candidacy as of March 20, 2025.

- |                                      |                                            |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ione School District No. 2R</b>   | Position #6 Ashley Lindsay                 |
| Position #1 Lea Mathieu              | Position #7 Rosa Delgado                   |
| Position #3 Adam Collin              | <b>Heppner Water Control District</b>      |
| Position #4 Janette Eldridge         | At Large Joe Perry                         |
| Position #4 Edmund Rietmann          | At Large Judy Barber                       |
| Position #5 Jesse Shoemake           | <b>Ione Rural Fire Protection District</b> |
| Position #5 Sami Peterson            | At Large Tim Holtz                         |
| <b>Morrow County School District</b> | At Large Joel R. Peterson                  |
| Position #2 Erin Anderson            | At Large Jason Proudfoot                   |

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## Emergency Management Partners with Local Agencies for Rescue Training



Boardman ladder truck. - Contributed Photo

BOARDMAN—Morrow County Emergency Management joined forces with Lamb Weston, Boardman Fire, Boardman Ambulance, Morrow County Sheriff's Office and Boardman Police Department for a joint safety training exercise this week, focusing on high building rescue operations. The collaborative effort provided a unique opportunity for these agencies to refine their emergency response skills and enhance teamwork.

The training scenario centered on high-rise rescue techniques, designed to sim-

ulate a real-life emergency in a multi-story building. First responders and safety personnel worked side by side to ensure quick, coordinated action in case of an elevated rescue situation.

The emphasis was on evaluating what went well during the exercise and identifying areas for improvement in response strategies and communication. The exercise demonstrated the importance of hands-on experience and feedback in improving rescue operations and overall emergency response procedures.

## BOC Approves Contract with Construction Firm for Courthouse

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners approved a contract with Bouten Construction for work on the new Morrow County Circuit Court building at its March 19 meeting in Irrigon.

The contract is for the Richland firm to be the project's construction manager/general contractor, or CMGC, for both the final design and construction of the Heppner courthouse.

The CMGC process involves hiring a construction

manager/general contractor at the beginning of the final design phase rather than after the design is finished. That, Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen said, allows the county to value engineer during the process.

"Rather than having the architect go through, do a full design, we bid it out, and we argue with contractors on getting it down to the price that we thought," said Jensen. "The CMGC

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## Lexington council passes RV ordinance

### Development group gets underway with selection of board members



Lexington Town Council Members (L-R) Katie Imes, Bill Beard and Will Lemmon. -Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Town of Lexington passed a somewhat controversial ordinance establishing rules and regulations for the use and occupancy of recreational vehicles (RVs) within city limits at its March 11 meeting.

This move aims to regulate RV occupancy and ensure safe, controlled use while addressing housing needs in the town.

Lexington Town Councilor Katie Imes, who brought the ordinance forward, said it responds in part to a housing shortage exacerbated by an influx of temporary workers.

"There are several large energy producing developments coming into play," said Imes, "so there's a need for temporary worker housing in our area."

She added that she thought the ordinance would be beneficial to both temporary workers and landowners.

The ordinance also addressed the unregulated use of RVs, which the Lexington Town Council recognizes as a public safety and health risk.

The City of Arlington apparently passed a sim-

ilar ordinance recently. A lot of the Lexington ordinance wording was taken from that ordinance, Imes said. She said wording was "tweaked" to fit Lexington and run through the town's legal counsel.

The Town will issue temporary RV occupancy permits for residential or commercial lots, with restrictions such as no more than one RV per lot, no placement in setbacks, and adherence to health and safety standards.

Applicants must submit detailed information about the RV, occupants, and utilities, along with a plot plan showing the proposed location. Permits can be revoked if requirements are not followed, and violations of the ordinance or permit conditions can result in fines of up to \$500 per day, in addition to other legal remedies.

The town council had held a town hall meeting on the topic, and town councilor Will Lemmon said he heard people's concerns but that he thought the ordinance was a good thing.

"It's not actually something that restricts anyone's rights or liberties,"

said Lemmon. "I've really thought about it, and I'm for the idea."

"It actually allows something that isn't allowed right now," added town councilor Bill Beard.

"And it kind of puts some ground rules down," added Lemmon. "And the council has the discretion on issuing the permits and revoking the permits."

Any penalties are at the town's discretion, but Beard said enforcing violations and issuing penalties was the part that worried him.

"We've already had instances where people have brought RVs onto their property and lived in them and emptied right on the property," he said.

"On the ground?" asked Lemmon. "That's unacceptable. That's a health hazard."

Lexington Town Recorder Autumn Crumpton asked what the town should do about people who were already out of compliance. For instance, she asked, what if a property already had two RVs?

Properties with one RV are grandfathered in, but that policy didn't touch on multiple existing RVs on a

property.

"The biggest thing is to educate the public," said Imes. "You don't just go out and enforce and be like, black and white. I think it's important to go out and have a conversation and talk about why we're doing it, what's going on, and not just slapping people with fines."

"I don't think it's something that we're going to solve in this discussion, but it is something that's going to be an ongoing discussion," said Imes. "I think we can work together and...move forward past those issues."

Imes said there will "always be conflicts," but that if the community is willing to work through them, it will be good for the whole community.

"I think it's important to not be scared to move forward with something that is to benefit the whole

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