



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Burke selected as MCHD Interim CEO



Dennis Burke

The Morrow County Health District Board unanimously selected Dennis Burke as the district's new interim CEO at a special meeting held Monday evening via Zoom. Burke is taking on the role in order to bridge the gap between CEO Emily Roberts's resignation and the hiring of a new, permanent CEO.

The Zoom meeting was well-attended, with a total of 45 people online to see the introduction of the new interim CEO.

Burke said his associa-

tion with healthcare started early. In 1966, his father was a hospital administrator and set Burke to work cleaning the operating room.

"I've been working in hospitals ever since," said Burke.

Most recently, Burke served as president and CEO of Good Shepherd Health Care System (GSHCS) in Hermiston for 31 years, from 1989 until his retirement in September 2020.

Joining GSHCS as assistant administrator, he became CEO later that year and led the organization's transformation from a 250-employee hospital to a robust health system with over 700 employees and 40 service lines.

Under his leadership, GSHCS expanded facilities, including a new surgical center, women's center, and urology suite, while introducing advanced technologies like the da Vinci

robotic surgical system.

Burke's tenure was marked by significant accolades, including GSHCS being named one of the "Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals in America" by the National Rural Health Association in 2011 and earning recognition for excellence in outcomes and financial strength by iVantage Health Analytics in 2015.

The system was also designated a "Top Workplace in Oregon" by The Oregonian/Oregon Live four times. Burke himself was honored as one of Becker's Hospital Review's "50 Rural Hospital CEOs to Know" in 2016 and 2018 for his dedication to accessible, high-quality care.

A fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives, Burke was deeply engaged in healthcare advocacy, serving 19 years on the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems board,

including as chair in 1998, and contributing to the National Rural Health Association's Critical Access Hospital Leadership Committee. His leadership strengthened rural healthcare in Eastern Oregon, and he still serves as a consultant for Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization (EOCCO).

"He has the highest integrity," said MCHD Board Chair Diane Kilkeny. "We're really fortunate that he is willing to come and take on some big projects for us."

Burke himself said he keeps going in healthcare because he loves it and because "I just feel I need to be giving something back."

"It's going to be interesting," said Burke. "I am optimistic that we are going to be very successful recruiting that right person for Morrow County. I look forward to working with each one of you."

## Martha's House Provides Helping Hand for Needy Families



Martha's House in Hermiston. -Contributed Photo

Taranna Patton recently spoke to the Ione Community Church Mission and Outreach Committee about a little-known resource, Martha's House in Hermiston, OR. The Ione Community Church included Martha's House in their outreach program this year. Taranna explained that Martha's house, built in 2013, is a product of Eastern Oregon Mission, founded in 1986.

Martha's House is

unique in that it is not an overnight shelter, but rather a shelter program to help families get back on their feet. The goal is to transition into permanent, sustainable housing.

Martha's House is community-based and privately funded by churches, businesses and individuals who may provide "Home Starter Kits." Those kits include equipment for bedrooms, which include sheets, pillows and comforters. Dona-

tions for bathrooms include towels, garbage cans and shower curtains. Kitchen items include dishes, silverware, pots and pans, crock pot, etc. These items are used by families while living at Martha's House and are taken with them to permanent housing.

Martha's House partners with local agencies to provide counseling and education in parenting, budgeting, job skills, GED classes and more. They average eight to 10 families at a time in the house.

Families from Morrow County are also using this resource, since Morrow County does not have a similar housing program.

Each adult resident of Martha's House is given an

adult mentor to help with challenges that come up. A mentorship for children over eight is offered through FORGE Youth Mentoring in Richland, WA. Help for non-English applicants and residents is offered through local agencies. All mentors are volunteers; the only paid staff are on-site house managers.

At the end of 2023, after 10 years of being open, 28 residents successfully completed the program and moved into their own homes. Martha's House is now needing donations for increasing maintenance as well as home starter kits. For more information contact Agape House in Hermiston.

## Morrow County School District to host town halls on \$204.4M bond measure

Morrow County, Ore. – The Morrow County School District (MCSD) is inviting students, parents, teachers, staff, and community members to three town hall meetings next week to discuss General Obligation Bond Measure 25-104, set to appear on the May 20, 2025, ballot. The \$204.4 million bond aims to fund critical upgrades and replacements for aging school facilities across the district.

The community town halls are scheduled as follows:

**Tuesday, April 22, 2025**, at Riverside Jr/Sr High School in Boardman  
**Wednesday, April 23, 2025**, at Irrigon Jr/Sr High School in Irrigon  
**Thursday, April 24, 2025**, at Heppner Jr/Sr High School in Heppner

Each event will run from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. with guided building tours, followed by a bond presentation and Q&A session starting at 6:00 p.m. The

tours will highlight the conditions of the facilities targeted for improvement, giving attendees a first-hand look at the need for the proposed projects.

"We are dedicated to providing accurate, timely information about the district bond using multiple methods to reach our community," said MCSD Superintendent Matt Combe. "We hope people will join us for the town halls so we can share more information and answer any questions they have about the bond and its projects."

In February 2025, the MCSD Board of Directors voted to place the bond measure on the ballot. If approved, it would fund:

Replacement of Irrigon Jr/Sr High School (built in 1978), which faces severe structural issues, to provide a modern learning environment.

Remodeling and expansion of Riverside Jr/Sr High School (built in 1968) to add classroom

space and a gym for growing enrollment.

Conversion of Heppner Jr/Sr High School (built in 1962) into a K-12 campus by remodeling and integrating Heppner Elementary (built in 1954), ensuring grade-level separation for safety and operational savings.

Safety upgrades at Sam Boardman Elementary, including a dedicated bus loop and improved parking and traffic flow.

District-wide security enhancements, such as secure main entries, cameras, and door access controls at all schools.

The bond would raise \$204.4 million and unlock a \$6 million matching grant from the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program. It would mature in 20 years or less, with an estimated tax rate of \$2.99 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, though the actual rate may vary.

Residents seeking

more details can visit [mcsdbond.org](http://mcsdbond.org), email [bondinfo@morowsd.org](mailto:bondinfo@morowsd.org), or call the Morrow County School District Office at 541-676-5705. The district encourages community members to attend the town halls to learn how the bond could shape the future of local education.

## Messages of Easter hope from local pastors page 6

## Ione Easter Egg Hunt Saturday



Ione's Easter egg hunt will be held this Saturday, April 19, at 10 a.m. in the Ione City Park. Children up to the fourth grade are invited.

The Easter Bunny will be there for photo ops and

will be handing out treats.

This event is made possible by the Bank of Eastern Oregon and community members' generous donations. Anyone wishing to donate may do so at Bank of Eastern Oregon in Ione.

## Heppner kicks off Little League baseball season opening day ceremonies



Heppner Little League families and fans gather at George Waterland field for opening ceremonies. -Photo by Cameron Sweeney using his drone.

By Rachel Sykes

Last Saturday marked the official start of Little League baseball season in Heppner with the annual opening day ceremonies, and the community showed up in full force to support the local youth. It was a fantastic turnout, with families, friends and fans gathering to cheer on players of all ages.

Despite the chilly air, the sun came and went throughout the day, adding warmth and energy to the

festive atmosphere. The kids were excited and eager to hit the field, signaling a promising start to the season ahead.

The event kicked off with team introductions, as each player was called by name and welcomed onto the field alongside their teammates. Coaches followed, receiving applause for their dedication and support.

A highlight of the morning included a heart-

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### ~ G-T Trophy Corner ~

The Heppner Gazette Times would like to see pictures of your trophy animals from this hunting season. Please send a photo along with your name, age, town you live in, location of the hunt and a description of the animal to editor@rapidsolve.net, upload to Heppner.net or text to 541-215-2274.

Lita Townsend of Heppner took her grandson Charlie Nelson (pictured) to the Heppner dam to go fishing on April 10, and he caught a pretty good-sized fish. "Just shows that the dam has some good trout in it, and I encourage folks to enjoy the nice weather and go fishing!" says Charlie's dad, Justin Nelson. -Contributed photo





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