

Malheur Enterprise “Gearing Up: Area Leaders set 2017 targets”

John L. Braese and Pat Caldwell / The Enterprise

John Breidenbach, Ontario Chamber of Commerce president, is one of a number of area officials who talked about goals for 2017 recently.

Breidenbach said his organization is working on an economic vitality plan for the Ontario area along with planning other events for the coming year. They're not quite New Year's resolutions, but community leaders do have their goals for 2017.

Here's a sampling of what they shared with the Malheur Enterprise as the projects they most want to see done in the coming year:

Lynn Findley, Vale City Manager:

"We want to get the new city water system in-stalled and running in Vale." For the last three years, the city has worked to acquire financing for a new city water system. A federal grant will cover nearly half the \$8.1 million cost, with city loans covering the balance of the project. The first shovel of dirt is scheduled to be thrown in the spring.

Dan Joyce, Malheur County Judge:

"The County Court's goal for the upcoming year is to continue to work against the (Owyhee) monument." Up to Jan. 20, President Obama can still set aside of 2.5 million acres in Malheur County using the stroke of a pen under the Antiquities Act. Supported by numerous conservation groups and private industries, the plan is opposed by ranchers and the group Owyhee Basin Steward-ship Coalition. ' The County Court has voiced its opposition in letters to the president and other federal officials.

Phil Abbott, Lead Minister Vale Christian Church

"As a church, we want to find more events to reach out to the community this upcoming year." Abbott will concentrate on offering classes in marriage and raising children and will sponsor a “Marriage 101” class within the next few months. Special events will occur as the weather warms including family events with fun houses.

John Breidenbach, Ontario Chamber of Commerce president:

"Along with eclipse weekend, we are working on a economic vitality roadmap for Ontario." Breidenbach said plans are to bring people to the table, wipe the slate clean of past ideas and start anew with where the city and the chamber of commerce is going. This will involve city leaders, business owners and persons interested in Ontario.

Brian Wolfe, Malheur County Sheriff:

"There are several (goals). We have a lot of new folks in three of our four divisions: dispatch, jail and the criminal side. These folks are very bright and hard working so a priority is their training. Training and experience take a while." Wolfe said he also wants to improve the connection between his office and the public. "We are going to do a better job of informing the public about what we are doing. And we will try to do a better job with customer service."

Ray Rau, Nyssa Police Chief:

"I would like to see us continue with the inter-agency training we've done in the past with area (police) agencies." Rau said he would retire in March from the Nyssa Police Department. However, his time away will be short. Right after he retires from the Nyssa Police Department, he will be back as a contracted employee and still fill the city's top law enforcement position.

Cliff Bentz, State Representative:

One of his top goals is to see a viable transportation bill for the state move through the Legislature, though he admitted it is hard to gauge, at this point, the prospects for it. "At the beginning of any session it is hard to predict. There are so many variables. There are many other bills that could affect the price of gasoline and diesel and could have a negative impact to get people interested in raising their fuel taxes." Bentz said he is committed to supporting a transportation package of some kind. "The good news is there is great support for it," he said.

Ron Verini, Ontario Mayor:

For Verini, a big goal for 2017 will be to find more revenue for his city.

"The city of Ontario is in unique situation. We have a tremendous amount of services - such as police and fire - and the revenues coming in right now are not sufficient to have a police force that can really protect our citizens," he said. Verini said Ontario boasts a population of about 11,000 but its size balloons each day as residents from other areas - such as Idaho - arrive.

"We'll have well over 30,000 people coming into our community using our streets where" he said. "Some where along the line we'll have to increase the revenue of our community or decrease services. That would be a shame".

Deborah Delong, Malheur County Clerk II

One of the big events for 2017 in her office will be preparing for the May election, which will fill seats of a variety of local boards. That includes candidates for school boards, the Malheur County Education Service District, the Treasure Valley Community College board along with health, cemetery and rural fire district boards. Another important ongoing project, Delong said, is an effort to digitize archives.

Kit Kamo, Snake River Economic Development Alliance Exec Director:

Not surprisingly, Kamo's main goal in the next 12 months to bring Businesses to Malheur County. I would love to have the mushroom plant operational in Vale. I would love to have a great big new business in Nyssa. I'd love to have landed a company on the 200 acres of industrial zoned land in Ontario Kamo said. Those goals may not be that far off while Kamo could not go into details, she said she is cautiously optimistic about 2017 in terms of economic development. "I think we are in a really good situation now. And we have some companies that are looking at the greater "Ontario area," Kamo said.