

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Crazy Days hits downtown this weekend

Inside

Thompson running two years after accident 2A

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Good day to our valued subscriber Ed Schmittle of Elgin

La Grande educator promoted to assistant principal position

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Chris Wagner, an algebra teacher at La Grande Middle School the past six years, will have a new job when classes start in late August. Make that two jobs.

The La Grande School Board named Wagner to serve as a half-time assistant principal at both the middle school and at Central Elementary School.

"I feel very, very honored to be selected," Wagner said.

Wagner will make history when he takes his new position in August. He will be the first educator in the La Grande School District known to serve simultaneously as an assistant principal at the middle school and at a grade school. The school district has had administrators who were the principals of two grade schools in recent decades, but not anyone who was an assistant principal at a grade school and the middle school.

School board Chair Joe Justice said Wagner's position is needed because enrollment at Central and LMS is increasing. The growth is creating a need for more staff, but Justice is glad there is a need to

See Wagner / Page 5A

Vaccination rates in Oregon among lowest in the country

How Baker, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties' vaccination rates compare with the rest of the state

By Audrey Love

The Observer

Oregon has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the country — seventh lowest, to be exact, according to estimates by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, the state requires that all students attending public, private, charter and alternative elementary, middle and high schools be vaccinated. Shots are also required for attendance at all preschools, certified child care facilities and at Head Start programs. At initial enrollment, children need a signed Certificate of Immunization Status form, which must show at least one dose of each of the following vaccines: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), mumps, rubella, measles, hepatitis A and B, polio, varicella (chickenpox) and Hib (for children under five years of age). In addition, teachers, administrators and school personnel follow the same vaccination guidelines as students.

At all ages and grades, the number of doses required varies by the child's age and how long ago they were vaccinated. Children are not allowed to start school or attend child care without these minimum requirements unless they file for a medical or non-medical exemption. The state allows medical exemptions for those who have a medical condition that contraindicates (makes it inadvisable to prescribe a particular drug, procedure or treatment) vaccination, and

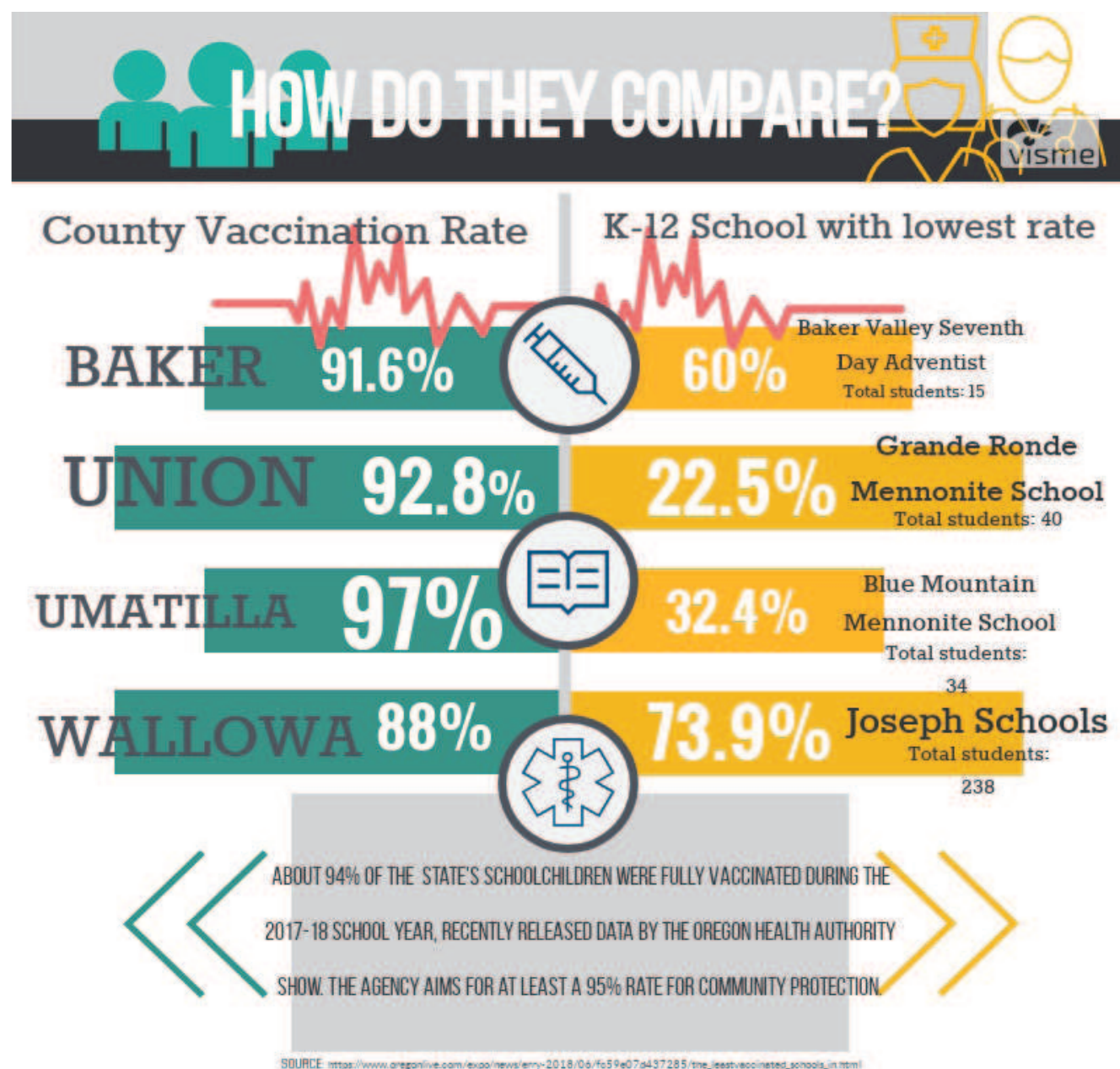


Illustration by Audrey Love / The Observer

must be signed by a physician or authorized representative of the local health department. Those seeking a non-medical exemption must obtain a Vaccine Education Certificate by either viewing an education module online or seeing a health care practitioner, essentially proving the parent has been

educated on the risks of not vaccinating. While non-medical exemptions are often religious in reasoning, they also fall under a matter of personal philosophy.

"We do have several parents who choose not to vaccinate their children," said Jessica McKaig, secretary at Heidi Ho Christian Pre-

school and Kindergarten in La Grande. "Usually it is because they don't want to expose their kids unnecessarily. Sometimes it is because a parent or relative has had a bad reaction to a vaccine at some point and (they) fear the same for their child."

However, children with either exemption are, natu-

rally, considered susceptible because they maintain a higher risk of contracting a vaccine-preventable disease.

"If you go out into the public, you're exposing others to that disease, (including) the ones who are the most vulnerable — youth who haven't been vaccinated yet, who

See Vaccinate / Page 5A

Wallowa County extension agent retires

John Williams embroiled in natural resource policy for 25 years

By Katy Nesbitt
For The Observer

ENTERPRISE — On his last full day in the Wallowa County Extension Office before hitting

the high lonesome retirement trail, John Williams was late for an exit interview with The

Observer.

With precious few hours left as the county's extension agent, Williams was still downloading information to his staff. A glance around his office revealed evidence that he had started collecting his personal effects.

Wrapping up his meeting in the conference

room, Williams went to his office and sat down at his writing desk with a glaringly noticeable bare spot where piles of paperwork used to sit.

He picked up a plastic bottle in the shape of a bear.

"I found this cleaning out my desk. Did you know honey is the perfect food? Its lactose gives you that blast of energy when you first eat it, and the fructose gives you energy released over time," Williams said.

Always teaching, Williams comes from a long line of educators and ranchers. He grew up on a 3,500-acre family cattle ranch south of John Day, studied agriculture at Oregon State University and after graduating returned to help run the

ranch. After 10 years of ranching he returned to academia, earning a master's degree at Oregon State. This time his education didn't point him back to Eastern Oregon beef country, but to Tillamook County to serve as an extension agent.

Six-and-a-half years later, Wallowa County Extension Agent Arleigh Isley announced his retirement and asked Williams if he wanted to apply for the job. Eager to return to Eastern Oregon, Williams — along his wife, Eileen, and their two young children — moved to Enterprise, where he began a 25-year hitch as the county's natural resource extension agent.

"Instead of the 'feed 'em and weigh 'em' type of ag extension agent, Arleigh wanted someone to analyze the state and federal policies that impact agriculture," Williams said.

Natural resource issues are the focus of most industries in the county, whether agriculture, timber or tourism-based. Williams found himself in the middle of a number of contentious issues over the last two-and-a-half decades. In 2008 when elk numbers spiked on the Zumwalt Prairie, pressuring grasslands grazed by cattle, Williams helped form the Zumwalt Elk Landowners Committee and served as its facilitator.

See Retire / Page 5A

Citizen-led marijuana initiative submits signatures

Verification of signature total is forthcoming

By Max Denning
The Observer

After less than two weeks of collecting signatures, the citizen-led ballot initiative to let voters decide if the sale of recreational marijuana should be banned has delivered the signatures to the City of La Grande. While the group collected 1,200 signatures, with little margin of error for the verification process, organizers said they would be surprised if the initiative went through.

David Moyal, chief petitioner, said he would be surprised if the group got all 1,200 signatures verified.

"It will be a complete miracle if we get it. It's already a miracle that we got close to 1,200," Moyal said prior to his count being completed.

The county clerk's office has 15 days to verify the signatures on the petition as registered voters in La Grande. If the signatures are verified and they reach the necessary 1,200, the initiative then goes

to city council, which then has three options, Angelika Brooks, city recorder, said. The La Grande City Council could accept the initiative and make it an ordinance, allowing the sale of recreational marijuana in the city. They could also put the repeal on the ballot in November for La Grande citizens to vote on or they could put an opposing measure on the ballot, Brooks said.

"Most likely it would go on the ballot and citizens would vote on it," she said.

Recreational marijuana was made legal in Oregon in 2014, but in counties where more than 55 percent of voters voted against legalization, cities were able to ban the sale of recreational marijuana. The La Grande City Council banned recreational marijuana shops within city limits. This April, however, the city council revisited the issue and voted 5-2 in support of

See Petition / Page 5A

INDEX

Business.....1B	Horoscope.....5B	Sports.....6A
Classified.....4B	Lottery.....2A	Sudoku.....3B
Comics.....3B	Obituaries.....3A	Wonderword...3B
Crossword.....5B	Opinion.....4A	
Dear Abby...10B	Record.....3A	

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Thursday
	53 Low		91/50
	Mainly clear		Sunny and warm

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