



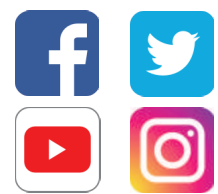
SPORTS

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Good day to our valued subscriber Gerda Brownton of La Grande

It's a Match!

Are dating apps linked to increasing STD rates across the US?

Hookup culture, lack of federal funding and education possible causes for STD increase

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

Swipe right to regular STD screening: The Center for Human Development expects cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis in Union County, Oregon state and the U.S. to rise for the sixth consecutive year in 2019.

In its February 2018 Communicable Disease Summary newsletter, the Oregon Health Authority attributed this rise in cases of sexually transmitted diseases to four specific drivers: increased sexual activity without condoms due to reduced risk of HIV; reduced local public health infrastructure leading to lack of STD education; use of methamphetamines and other drugs that increase sexual drive and decrease inhibition; and the abundance of mobile apps facilitating "hookups" with anonymous sexual partners.

The newsletter also noted while part of this increase is due to the rising number of people getting screened regularly because of some destigmatization, "most of the ob-

“ We are in the midst of an absolute STD public health crisis in this country.”

— David C. Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors

served increase represents a true increase in incidence.”

Elizabeth Sieders, communicable disease nurse at the CHD, agrees.

“It could be thought the increase (in reported STDs) is caused by the increase in testing, but the way the numbers have risen, it doesn't look to be true,” she said. “It looks like it's caused by the increase of social media apps where you can find partners anonymously. It's more of a behavior we're seeing change culturally.”

A popular argument against the dating apps theory, however, is the people who are

on Tinder, Grindr and other apps would be looking for anonymous partners anyway, even without using social media as a tool to find them. Although dating apps may lead to more sexual encounters, increasing the likelihood of contracting an STD, the other factors listed by the OHA also seem to contribute, so it's difficult to pin the increase down to one particular cause.

At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's annual STD Prevention Conference in August 2018, David C. Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors, cited the reasons he believes the STD epidemic is occurring.

“The first is an extreme lack of awareness and education about STDs and sexual health. The second reason is doctors are not screening and testing for STDs and patients don't know that they need to ask for that screening and treatment,” he said. “The third reason is that we've had a tremendous cutback in federal and state funding over 20 years.”

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Outdoor recreation habits save Union County \$9 million, study says

■ Statewide study finds Oregonians save \$1.4 billion in health care costs annually

By Max Denning
The Observer

A study recently released by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department found that Oregonians' participation in outdoor recreation saves the state \$1.4 billion each year in health care costs. In Union County, more than \$9 million was saved in health care by individuals taking part in sports and exercise.

According to a press release from OPRD, the report “calculates how much energy people expend when engaging in outdoor recreation, and the corresponding reduction in costs related to chronic illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, depression, dementia, diabetes and several cancers.”

McKayla Nitz, the recreation supervisor for La Grande Parks and Recreation, said Union County has great recreation opportunities that many other communities don't have.

“I think that the La Grande area in particular is so rich for outdoor sports, and it's easy to access,” Nitz said. “We're close to hiking trails that are maintained and well kept. We are close to places to ski.”

The study found that the three most popular activities in Oregon also saved the state the most money. The most popular was walking along local streets and sidewalks, which saved the state \$630 million. Next was jogging and running along streets and sidewalks, saving \$146 million. Third was walking on local trails and paths, which saved \$126 million.

In Union County, those three

activities were also the most popular and cost saving, saving a combined \$4.25 million.

According to the study, a recreation activity more popular in Union County than in many other parts of the state is biking. Nitz said the county has a lot of good areas to bike.

“I think we have a really good resource in our Grand Tour bikeway that could be utilized more often,” she added.

While maybe to the surprise of some rural residents who take part in daily outdoor recreational activities, the OPRD found that urban residents take part in more weekly outdoor recreation than rural residents. Urban residents reported an average of 428 weekly minutes taking part in outdoor recreation, rural residents reported 413 minutes and suburban residents reported 392 minutes.

However, the outdoor recreational activity of urban residents that creates this separation is walking on local streets and sidewalks. Urban residents average 60 more minutes of walking on streets and sidewalks than rural residents.

Rural residents take part in a number of activities more often than urban residents, most notably horseback riding. Rural residents ride horses on average 46 minutes a week, while urban residents average 9 minutes a week.

While urban and rural residents hike on local trails at similar levels, Stu Spence, director of the La Grande Parks and Recreation Department, said he thought hiking in urban areas

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Mark Wahlberg makes appearance in La Grande

Observer staff

Mark Wahlberg, an American actor, producer and songwriter, who starred in several movies including *The Departed*, stayed in La Grande on Sunday night to do research for a film he's working on about the late Jadin and Joe Bell, who were both from La Grande.

Jadin Bell died at 15 years old when he committed suicide in 2013 for being the subject of homophobic bullying. His father, Joe Bell, wanted to raise awareness about his son's struggles and went on a 5,000 mile walk across America. Joe Bell was struck by a truck and killed in Colorado during his trek six months into his campaign.

Jadin Bell's family members and friends said bullying drove him to suicide, and they later launched an

anti-bullying campaign called Faces for Change.

Joe Bell gave numerous talks in churches, schools and other places on behalf of his foundation during his walk. He talked of the evils of bullying and what can be done to prevent it.

Since his death, Bell's name and face have been associated with a global effort to prevent suicide. Stop Homophobia, a worldwide network based in the United Kingdom, often shares an image of Bell on its Facebook page, typically to garner support for the suicide prevention cards it prints and distributes. Text on the image notes Bell attempted suicide “after being bullied.” The text goes on to say, “Tragedies like this should never have to happen.”

Wahlberg started the Mark Wahl-



Courtesy photo

Mark Wahlberg met with family and friends of Joe and Jadin Bell.

berg Youth Foundation, with the goal to “remove and eliminate barriers that prevent youth from succeeding,” according to its website.

The film about Jadin and Joe Bell is in its very early stages. Wahlberg's agent declined an interview with the actor due to his limited time in La Grande.

Boosting Communication

■ Cove School District installs a new wireless bell and PA system

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The Cove School District's traditional bell system is going the way of the slide rule, typewriter and vinyl record.

The school district's old electrically operated bell system has been silenced by a new \$16,500 Visiplex wireless bell and public address system, which was installed, for the most part, five months ago.

“It is awesome,” said Cove High School Principal Mat Miles.

The system's many features include one allowing elementary school classes to be conducted each day without interruptions from bells for high school classes. The old metal

bells previously rang in the elementary school for high school classes because several high school classes are taught in the elementary building. This meant elementary school students heard more than 10 bells a day.

“The bells were disruptive for grade school students,” said Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit.

Miles agrees. “They were very annoying and very loud,” the principal said.

Miles said portions of the old bell system may have been installed when the grade school was built in the 1930s.

“It is antiquated,” he said. Today bells for the high



Photo by Dick Mason

Cove third-grader Ethan Phares is one of the students to read announcements on the new public address system.

school are still heard in the elementary school but only in classrooms where high school classes are taught. The new system sends the sound of bells to speakers in classrooms with the students and teachers the bells are meant for.

Another feature of the new system is an inter-

com that can be easily tailored to connect with specific classrooms. This allows separate school announcements to be read over the intercom system each morning for high school and grade school students. The grade school announcements are read

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
22 LOW
Some clouds



Tuesday
39/34
Cloudy

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