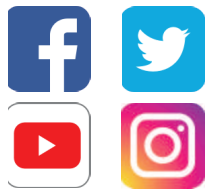




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Good day to our valued subscriber Retta Hoxie of La Grande

Mental health resources lacking in Union County school districts

■ Problem stems from difficulty of filling positions and retaining hires, CHD says

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

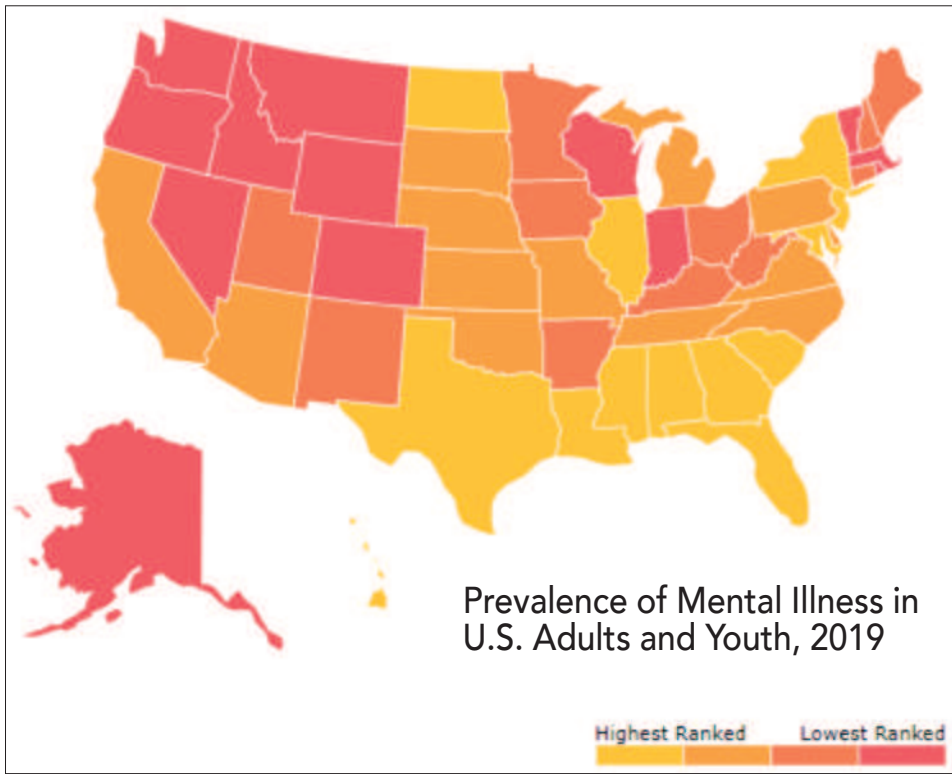
Oregon is the lowest ranked state for access to mental health services in the country, according to Mental Health America, a 110-year-old nonprofit dedicated to addressing and promoting mental health needs across the country.

In its 2019 State of Mental Health in America report, MHA ranks the state 51st out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It is also ranked 44th in the nation for youth mental health specifically. In these data sets, low rankings indicate a higher prevalence of mental illness and lower rates of access to care.

MHA reported 44 million American adults live with a mental health condition,

which is about 18 percent of the adult U.S. population. Fifty percent of adults with a mental health condition experience their onset by the age of 14, but this number spikes to 75 percent by the age of 25, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a grassroots organization dedicated to raising awareness and providing support and education on mental health issues.

According to NAMI's website, "One in five youth live with a mental health condition (in the U.S.), but less than half of these individuals receive needed services," and schools "play an important role" in "providing a unique opportunity to identify and treat mental health conditions by serving students where they already are."



Mental Health America/2019 State of Mental Health in America report

According to this data set compiled by Mental Health America, Oregon (51) is the lowest ranked state in the nation and District of Columbia, meaning it has the highest prevalence of mental illness and the lowest access to mental health services. Ranked just above Oregon are Alaska (50) and Idaho (49).

Aaron Grigg, mental health director at the Center for Human Development in La Grande, agrees that schools are in a special position to provide on-hand mental health care to youth.

"We know we need to do more to help kids develop resiliency, and one of the best places to do that is in the school setting because

they're easily accessible," he said. "Rather than asking them to leave school to come to an appointment at our office, (us) being in the schools is really important (so we can) meet students where they're at."

The schools of Union County are no exception.

CHD is responsible for contracting most of the

school counselors in Union County, but Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. is responsible for providing funds for these counselors and wellness centers, according to Erin Rust, a school-based program coordinator at GOBHI.

GOBHI is also the coordinated care organization for

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Ladd Canyon project rolling

By Dick Mason
The Observer

A \$30 million Oregon Department of Transportation project in the Ladd Canyon area that will add a 1.5-mile third lane to Interstate 84 and other safety features is beginning.

The launch of the 18-month Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project means the speed limit through ODOT's work zone on the west side of Ladd Canyon is now 50 miles per hour. The reduced speed will remain in effect until all ODOT work scheduled for this year is completed, around Oct. 31. The speed limit, according to ODOT, will then return to 70 miles per hour.

The first phase of the Ladd Canyon project will involve removing an eastbound lane bridge near the entrance into Ladd Canyon and replacing it with a concrete box culvert. The box will be large enough to accommodate log trucks and semi trucks, said Mike Remily of ODOT, manager of the Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project.

Taking out the bridge will be beneficial because it tends to get icy, the ODOT official said.

"Removing the bridge

See Ladd / Page 5A

Building confidence through horse riding

■ La Grande instructor explains how training with horses can positively influence many different types of people

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

Jaci Weishaar owns Victory Acres in La Grande, where people can board their own horses or take horsemanship classes. As the head instructor, Weishaar works with people who ride horses frequently for sport and competitions, but also teaches children and adult novices.

Weishaar also works with people who have PTSD, including veterans, and with children who have problems to work through, whether their challenges stem from disabilities like autism and ADHD or from a lack of self-confidence due to bullying or shyness.

She said working with horses can help anyone build up self-confidence,

whether they have a tangible problem to work through or not.

"I really enjoy working with people and watching them achieve their goals and get confidence in themselves," Weishaar said. "I love watching people grow."

She said part of the reason working with horses is so helpful to personal growth is the simple aspect of achieving goals. People who come to her classes set horsemanship goals for themselves, and she helps them achieve them. She said her personal teaching style includes pushing people a little bit out of their comfort zone.

Weishaar said she tells them, "Now we're going to do this. Yes it's hard, yes it's scary, but you're going to do it and you're going to be fine. I'm not going to ask you to do something you're not capable of." She said when her students accomplish something they were originally nervous to do, they realize they are more capable than they thought.

Just being around horses is therapeutic, according to Weishaar.

"Grooming a horse is calming for them," she said. Many scientific sources including the Mayo Clinic recognize time with animals as well



Courtesy photo

Owner of Victory Acres Jaci Weishaar with her main showhorse, Wiley. Weishaar has been showing horses since the age of 14.

as animal-assisted therapy to be effective ways to manage pain and anxiety.

Humans can learn a lot from how horses deal with stress and trauma, added Weishaar, who often rescues horses that might have trauma in their pasts. She said that the 18-year-old horse she currently uses for training children younger than 5 was rescued from a slaughter pen.

Weishaar said the horse was extremely timid at first and it took a lot of careful training to get her used to her new life.

"Now I put 3-year-old

children on her," she said. "She's super quiet — just sassy enough to teach them something, but very safe."

The instructor said her experience has taught her that horses don't dwell on the past. "They live for the comfort and security they feel in this moment," she said.

According to Weishaar, seeing a horse overcome a problem can teach people how to tackle their own problems and move past them.

"If the horse can do it, then they can do it," she said.

"Horses were my outlet growing up. They were my sport. They were my therapy. They were my healing."
— Jaci Weishaar, owner of Victory Acres

Weishaar said horses helped her during her youth quite a bit because she experienced bullying that she described as "severe."

"Horses were my outlet growing up. They were my sport. They were my therapy. They were my healing," she said.

She stressed that working with horses is good for everyone, whatever their challenges are or their past experiences have been. She makes an effort to treat her students the same, even if they are coming specifically to help deal with a problem related to something like PTSD or ADHD.

"I still treat it like they're coming to ride a horse. I don't treat them any different," she said.

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U.S. Cellular holds fundraiser

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

U.S. Cellular, the fifth largest telecommunication network in the nation, is offering youth groups an opportunity to fundraise that is much more high-tech than selling candy bars or collecting cans and bottles. Instead, groups can earn money by using social media.

The U.S. Cellular program, called Community Connections, began in 2015 and can sponsor youth organizations with up to \$1,000 toward expenses.

According to U.S. Cellular's website, many different types of groups, like sports teams and academic clubs, can apply to participate in the program,

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Issue 41
3 sections, 40 pages
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