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# THE OBSERVER



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THURSDAY • April 9, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Jean Dillon of La Grande

## CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK Updates for Thursday

Observer staff

These are the latest significant local and regional developments of the coronavirus outbreak. Look for more comprehensive coverage of these and other COVID-19 stories on our website, [www.lagrandeobserver.com](http://www.lagrandeobserver.com), and in subsequent issues of The Observer. Union County's number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 remains at three as of Wednesday afternoon.

### LA GRANDE

•The NE Oregon Joint Information Center announced local authorities identified a secondary site at the Grande Ronde Hospital Pavilion, La Grande, for an alternate care facility in preparation for a potential surge of hospitalized patients due to COVID-19. At the request of the county, the Oregon National Guard on Wednesday delivered cots, bedding and personal care items for this site. The county also will receive a mobile kitchen and refrigerated trailer for food storage for the secondary site.

•Oregon Rural Action announced Tuesday the La Grande Community Garden will not open this year. The nonprofit in a news release stated that keeping the garden closed was due to the importance of Gov. Kate Brown's "Stay Home, Save Lives" executive order.

"Staying home is the primary way we can contribute to slowing the spread of the virus," according to the statement from Kristin Anderson Ostrom, executive director of Oregon Rural Action.

•The La Grande Optimist Club announced it is postponing its annual fishing derby until further notice.

## Wallowa County has first COVID-19 case

By Ellen Morris Bishop  
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa Memorial Hospital announced Wallowa County has its first in-county case of COVID-19.

The hospital in a news release Wednesday morning reported the patient is iso-

lating and recovering at home and does not require hospitalization.

"The person was exposed OUTSIDE of our county, but was tested here," according to the news release. "Confidentiality remains paramount, and no additional informa-

tion about this patient will be released to the public."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown recently called on the Oregon Health Authority to provide more information to the public about COVID-19 cases, including more specific age ranges of people who have the virus.

Wallowa Memorial Hospital also said the Oregon Health Authority is notifying and investigating any recent contacts of the patient.

"We are testing known contacts for the COVID-19 infection as indicated," according to the news release.

Dr. Gary Zeigler, attending physician, said in the news release the hospital's "extensive planning for this moment paid off. Our systems and processes worked. We properly protected our staff, they are healthy and continue to work."

## Spreading kindness



### New neighborhood watch group helps La Grande residents cope with crisis

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The homebound of La Grande may be shut in, but they are not being shut out during the COVID-19 crisis.

A new La Grande neighborhood watch group is doing its best to make sure these community members are not neglected. The volunteers are striving to keep the lives of the homebound rolling in a positive direction during the COVID-19 crisis by delivering not only food but also smiles.

"Our mission is to love our neighbors," said Spring Roberts of La Grande, the founder of the #LaGrandeStrong Corona Virus Neighborhood Watch.

The neighborhood watch was created about three weeks ago and has

"Our slogan is 'Spread Kindness, Not Virus,'"

Spring Roberts, founder of the #LaGrandeStrong Corona Virus Neighborhood Watch

been growing quickly since then. It has a total of 1,500 members in Union County, about 1,400 of whom are from La Grande. All have been directed to strictly follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

"Our slogan is Spread Kindness, Not Virus," Roberts said.

The watch is part of the broader organization La Grande Strong,

which Roberts also started.

Members of the La Grande neighborhood watch are concerned not only with the virus but also law enforcement. They are asked to be on the lookout for suspicious people in their neighborhoods and report any concerns to the police. Roberts said there have been reports of suspicious people going to the homes of the vulnerable in other parts of the Northwest, and her group wants to prevent that from happening here.

The well-being of those at risk is constantly on the mind of Roberts. She said this is particularly critical now because those most vulnerable to COVID-19-19 — seniors and individuals with pre-existing conditions — may not be getting out to shop. In

See, *Kindness*/Page 2A

Above left, Jordan Hovingh and her daughter, Eilla, are all smiles Wednesday after receiving a supply of food from Spring Roberts. The mother and daughter have a genetic condition that prevents them from leaving their home during the COVID-19 outbreak. At left, Spring Roberts, the founder of a new La Grande neighborhood watch, delivers milk and bread Wednesday to the home of Josh and Jordan Hovingh.

## Candidates for Legislature share differing opinions

### Thoughts range from conspiracy theories to relief packages

By Alex Castle and Antonio Sierra  
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — As the coronavirus has escalated into a global pandemic that has killed more than 12,000 Americans and left millions unemployed, Barbara Wright, a Pendleton woman running as a Democrat for Oregon's House District 58, has been pushing a debunked conspiracy theory online claiming the virus is a man-made "bio weapon" that was intentionally released into the public.

In February, Wright made posts on an online knitting forum, knittingparadise.com, detailing the theory and citing military contacts as

her source. In a recent interview with the EO Media Group, Wright confirmed she made the posts and doubled down on her theory.

Wright claims she's researched and verified the tips provided by her "backchannel sources," such as a story about a Harvard professor recently arrested for lying to authorities about his connection to a Chinese lab in Wuhan, where COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019.

"Before people think that I'm a crackpot and a kook, they need to do some easy research on the internet and see what I'm seeing and make conclusions for themselves," she said.

However, "easy research on the internet" shows Wright's theory already has been debunked.

Charles Lieber, the now former chairman of Harvard's department of chemistry and chemical biology, was

arrested in January for lying about his involvement with the Chinese government program to recruit scientific talent. He also was receiving funding from a university in Wuhan.

Wright and others have claimed Lieber's arrest also is connected to two Chinese students who were arrested in January for allegedly stealing U.S. research and biological samples. But both of those arrests took place at different universities. Nothing links those arrests to the coronavirus nor is there a link between those arrests and Lieber's.

Additionally, 27 scientists published a joint statement in February in The Lancet, one of the most prestigious peer-reviewed medical journals, denouncing such theories.

"We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories sug-

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 38 LOW Mainly clear  
Friday 67/38 Partly sunny

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