



The lost season, part 3

in Sports

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THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • May 23, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Robert Rea of La Grande

COVID-19 by the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 4,995,996
Worldwide deaths: 327,821
U.S. cases: 1,571,617
U.S. deaths: 94,150
Total U.S. tests: 12,917,827
Oregon cases: 3,864

Oregon active cases: 1,922
Oregon deaths: 147
Total Oregon tests: 107,745
Union County cases: 6
Union County active cases: 3
Union County deaths: 0

Total Union County tests: 325
Wallowa County cases: 1
Wallowa County active cases: 0
Wallowa County deaths: 0
Total Wallowa County tests: 98
*As of 2 p.m. Friday, May 22.

Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Military Department.

Virtual health care flourishes during pandemic

■ Studies show 1 in 4 people in rural areas unable to access health care

By Sierra Dawn McClain
EO Media Group

SALEM — COVID-19 has forced health care into cyberspace, and some rural providers say the shift could be a post-pandemic “silver lining.”

When Gov. Kate Brown ordered health care providers to stop non-emergency services March 30, it created what some medical providers call a “telemedicine revolution,” in which providers have “seen” their patients through calls or videos using computers, tablets or smartphones. Providers say they expect telemedicine will become a permanent feature of rural health care.

“I do believe telemedicine is here to stay,” said Gail Nelson, CEO of Rinehart Clinic, a community health center in Wheeler.

In Enterprise, seat of Wallowa County, family doctor Elisabeth Powers at Winding Waters Clinic has been examining patients the past few months via computer screen.

Powers is a long-time advocate of telemedicine that can result in faster diagnoses and treatments, reduce patient stress and reach rural people who otherwise may not have health care access — for example, those limited by mountain passes and transportation options. Even as a telehealth pioneer, her use of virtual medicine catapulted during COVID-19.

In early March, according to Winding Waters’ CEO Nic Powers — Dr. Powers’ husband — about 2% of the clinic’s patients had telehealth appointments. Now, he said, it’s 45%.

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Staff photo by Dick Mason

Thomas Houck, a food distribution and warehouse assistant with the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank, moves pallets of food Thursday in the dining hall of the Union County Senior Center. The food bank serving Northeast Oregon is receiving an additional 60,000 pounds of food each month and running out of space to store it all.

Food boost pushes bank’s limits

■ Regional Food Bank distributing 60,000 more pounds of food per month

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank in La Grande is not running short of peanut butter, rice and canned vegetables, but it is experiencing a space shortage.

The bank, based at the Union County Senior Center, is now receiving an additional 60,000 pounds of food a month to address a growing need in Northeast Oregon due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extra food is more than the bank’s warehouse can handle, and the staff has been forced to move much of it into the dining hall of the senior center, where activities

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Staff photo by Dick Mason

Steve Konopacky of the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank marks food items Thursday in the dining hall of the Union County Senior Center, La Grande.

COVID-19: Oregon not hit as hard as the rest of the nation

■ 12 states with populations akin to Oregon have higher incidence, test rates

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Oregon has seen a much lower breakout of coronavirus cases when compared to most of the nation.

As of Thursday, the state had recorded 3,817 cases of COVID-19 according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Less than one-tenth of 1% of Oregon’s more than 4 million residents have tested positive. The number itself is lower than some less populous states

— South Dakota, New Mexico and Mississippi are just three examples with a lower population that have more confirmed cases of the coronavirus. Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Hawaii and Alaska are all states with fewer overall cases.

Some of those states, however, have a higher incidence rate than the Beaver State, according to data on the Johns Hopkins University website. In fact, Oregon is in the bottom five of states with the lowest incidence rates

in the nation. Just 90.50 per 100,000 Oregonians have tested positive for the virus.

Only Montana, Alaska, Hawaii and West Virginia have lower percentages of the population to contract the virus.

The state, though, also ranks near the bottom of the nation in terms of testing at 46th. Just four states — Arizona, Colorado, Kansas and Idaho — have a testing rate lower than Oregon’s 2,494.80 per 100,000 residents. Oregon as of Thursday had conducted 105,132 tests for the coronavirus, and more than 96% of them have come

back negative.

So why does Oregon have a lower number of cases than most of the nation?

The low number of tests would seem to be the obvious answer, until you compare the state to others with similar testing rates. Virginia, for example, has a similar testing rate at 2,561.05 per 100,000, but an incidence rate of 399.94 per 100,000.

Virginia does have more than double the population of Oregon at about 8.5 million, which can partly account for the higher number, but the numbers still show the virus

infecting four times as high, and still double if you figure in population.

The 12 states with population most similar to Oregon (six above and six below) all have a higher incidence rate than Oregon, but all of them also (with the exception of Colorado) have a higher test rate.

But each state in the list has a worse testing rate-to-incidence rate ratio than Oregon, many several times worse. This means even if Oregon conducted the same number of tests as every state immediately around it — by population

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight
38 LOW
Mainly clear

Sunday
68/44
Cloudy

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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