



THE OBSERVER

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TUESDAY • June 30, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Sherri Ritchie of La Grande

Union County COVID-19 count ticks up to 327

Masks or other face coverings now required statewide

By Ronald Bond

LA GRANDE — Union County added 13 more confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the weekend — 11 on Saturday and two on Sunday — and five more cases Monday, raising the

total to 327, according to the Center for Human Development. That count is the sixth-highest in the state, according to data from Oregon Health Authority, which also announced Monday the state total now sits at 8,485. The latest count comes the same day Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced a requirement for all Oregonians to wear face cover-

ings in indoor public spaces effective Wednesday, extending a mandate already in place in eight other counties. “Over the last month, we have seen the disease spread at an alarming rate in both urban and rural counties. The upcoming July 4th holiday weekend is a critical point for Oregon in this pandemic, and we can all make a difference,” Brown said in a

press release. “Modeling from the Oregon Health Authority shows that if we don’t take further action to reduce the spread of the disease, our hospitals could be overwhelmed by new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations within weeks.” The release stated Oregon OSHA and state and local agencies will lead the enforcement of face covering requirements. Some local business,

such as Safeway and Walmart, have been encouraging customers to use masks. Joe Beans Coffee, the popular gathering spot in downtown La Grande, stated on its Facebook page the governor’s order is forcing the establishment to close. “Last day till its over is Tuesday June 30,” according to the posting. To date, there has been one death in the county

related to the virus, a 90-year-old woman who died Thursday at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande. Data from the center continues to show 13 people are considered as having recovered from COVID-19, meaning there are 313 active cases. More than 600 tests were conducted June 18-19 at a drive-thru testing clinic in

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Airport receives \$5.6 million grant

By Ronald Bond

LA GRANDE — The main runway at the La Grande/Union County Airport soon will undergo a major improvement — and get a new number. Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced Friday that rehabilitating the runway, No. 16-34, is the main project at the airport that will be funded by a portion of more than \$9 million in federal grants to four small airports in the state.



A LifeFlight and an Ameriflight plane sit on the apron in front of Runway 16-34 Monday afternoon at the La Grande/Union County Airport. The facility will undergo more than \$5 million in upgrades with a federal grant. The project will shift Runway 16-34, the main runway at the airport, 500 feet to the south.

director. “We’re very fortunate to have this project. Wright said the Federal Aviation Administration had flagged the north end of the roughly 3,400-foot main runway as a safety concern, so a large portion of the grant will cover the cost of adding 500 feet of runway to the south end. “The center section of

the runway is still in good shape,” Wright said. The adjustment to the runway also will result in a number change to 17-35 because of its positioning. Improvements and changes also will be made to the taxiways in the airport — in particular, taxiway D — and lighting also will be added to the

main runway to help guide in LifeFlight or cargo carriers, such as FedEx and UPS, that come in at night. Taxiway A also will be extended to allow for a new run-up to the new portion of the runway. “The improvement to the taxiway is a major improvement as well,” Wright said. Union County Com-

missioner Paul Anderes said the work is important because it will help modernize the airport. “The airport in my view is one of those things that is kind of a sleeper within our county. There is much more activity out there than at first glance,”

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Expanded edition coming Thursday

In recognition of Independence Day and the resulting federal holiday, The Observer will not publish an edition on Saturday, July 4. “July Fourth is one of several postal holidays throughout the year,” said Andrew Cutler, regional editor for the EO Media Group, which owns The Observer, the East Oregonian and other newspapers. “As a result, we will not produce a newspaper that day but we will beef up our July 2nd edition.” The Observer will publish an expanded edition, including additional comics and puzzle features on Thursday, July 2. The Observer’s office will be closed Friday, July 3, in observance of the national holiday.

Fuse relit for Fourth of July fireworks at Wallowa Lake

By Bill Bradshaw

JOSEPH — The on-again-off-again fireworks show over Wallowa Lake is officially on again, said Gary Bethscheider of Joseph, who is spearheading the effort. “I don’t think we should be shutting down our whole lives,” Bethscheider said, referring to the COVID-19-related shutdowns. “We should be able to celebrate the Fourth of July like it should be celebrated, and do it safely.” The fireworks show is

scheduled to take place over the north end of lake at 10 p.m. on Independence Day. “This is about our patriotic rights and celebrating Fourth of July,” Bethscheider said. The annual “Shake the Lake” fireworks show, usually put on by the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce with assistance from the Wallowa County Commission, was canceled in early June. Then, Mike Lockhart and the Wallowa Lake Tourism Association took up the mantle

until a massive mid-June surge in coronavirus cases in Union County and a corresponding rise in Wallowa County cases to eight. Lockhart told the commissioners June 17 his efforts were on hold. On June 22, he said the association was abandoning the effort. But Bethscheider and others — including the Joseph Chamber of Commerce — are not giving up. The next day, he said the show would go on. “The fireworks are on. It’s happening,” he said. Bethscheider said

they need another \$2,500 in donations to foot the bill for the show. Previous years’ shows have cost the Wallowa County Chamber about \$14,000 for a 25-minute show. This year, Bethscheider said he’s trying to raise about \$12,500. “If we do raise that, the show will be better than we’ve ever had,” he said. Nicole Brookshire, an employee of Bethscheider’s, posted on Facebook on Tuesday, June 23, that

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Fireworks burst over Wallowa Lake for Independence Day in 2018. After a series of on-again, off-again efforts, it appears the show will go on this Fourth of July.

Wyden urges Oregonians to set a good example

Senator discusses mail-in voting and meat processing during virtual town hall

By Jade McDowell

EO MEDIA GROUP — UNION COUNTY — Eastern Oregon residents expressed to Oregon’s U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden during a Thursday virtual town hall that many in their community are not taking COVID-19 precautions seriously despite rising case levels.

One Elgin woman referenced a quote by Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert, that some Americans “don’t believe in science and don’t believe in authority.” “What steps can be taken to deliver COVID-19 info to people of this mindset?” she asked.

Wyden said while there is no simple answer, many people are more willing to trust their friends and neighbors than an expert in Washington, D.C. He said in a small community, people seeing their neighbors wearing a mask at the grocery store can have more of an effect than “handing out 10 papers by Tony Fauci.” “At a fundamental level, you cannot in effect force people — control — how

everybody handles a pandemic,” he said. “You just can’t. But when you wear a mask where people see how important it is to you, and your family and friends, I personally think that makes a really big difference.” He said he wears a mask while around other people, based on the scientific evidence that doing so helps lower the risk of transmitting COVID-19. He encouraged everyone else to take it upon themselves to lead

by example in their own circle. “Talk to friends, talk to family, tell them why you believe in precautions, and why those precautions are important to you,” he said. In response to another question about COVID-19, Wyden said “practical, common sense measures” such as washing your hands shouldn’t have anything to do with political parties.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
47 LOW
Clear



Wednesday
65/43
Partly sunny

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



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THURSDAY FIREWORKS FOR THE FOURTH

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