

TRAIL

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visitors. They include a portion of a wagon that crossed the Oregon Trail in the 1800s.

“It is a real emigrant wagon wheel,” Allen said. The wheel, which Willie Myers of La Grande donated, has a thin metal rim and wooden spokes that look too fragile to support a small fleet of Matchbox cars much less the weight of a wagon filled with a family’s possessions.

“They are about ready to turn to dust,” Allen said of the wheel’s spokes.

Another new addition is a wagon made from century-old barn wood. It was a farm wagon before Dale Counsell, a rancher who lives nearby on Pierce Road, renovated it to look identical to an Oregon Trail wagon. The renovated wagon’s features include a front seat like the ones used by



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Ronnie Allen of La Grande checks out a replica of the kind of wagon that came over the Oregon Trail. It was a farm wagon before local rancher Dale Counsell renovated it.

Oregon Trail pioneers in the 1880s. “Wagons (on the Oregon Trail) did not have seats

until then,” Allen said. The wagon also has a wooden barrel like the ones pioneers carried to save

water for their oxen. “Oxen were critical for pioneers,” Allen said. “If they lost their oxen, they

could not continue.” The shell of the wagon, when it was new, probably could float a family. Allen said many pioneers took off the wheels then boarded the wagons to float down or across rivers.

Another feature of the wagon is a wooden toolbox with a leather strap. The toolbox is empty, but Allen said Oregon Trail travelers had theirs filled with axes and knives.

No actual wagons in which pioneers used to travel across the Oregon Trail still exist, Allen said. He explained by the time pioneers made it to Oregon, most wagons were in terrible condition and virtually useless. Those that were functional were used for farm work until they were worn out.

“After 10 years (of farm work) they were totally destroyed,” Allen said.

The Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail site is 2 miles west of Hot Lake.

Allen has determined the site is exactly where revered Oregon Trail pioneer and devotee Ezra Meeker dedicated his Lower Ladd Canyon marker on April 11, 1906. The marker replica is 5 feet west of where Meeker dedicated the original marker, said Allen, who has analyzed photographs of the 1906 dedication.

Today this site is part of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area. ODFW granted Allen permission to set up the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail interpretive site.

The work Allen has done to create the site has not gone unrecognized. The northwest chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association has given Allen its Distinguished Service Award for his work to build the interpretive site. The OCTA plaque salutes Allen for “exceptional efforts to preserve and promote the Oregon Trail.”

CASES

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districts can reopen in-person education if their home counties have 30 or fewer COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents over seven days, the mandate states.

Not only are younger children less likely to catch, show symptoms of or transmit COVID-19 to others, but in-person learning is more crucial at that age, said state health officer Dean Sidelinger.

“These younger students need access to in-person education to develop literacy and numeracy skills they need that are critical to their continued learning,” he said.

However, an area that meets these standards at first but later has an uptick in COVID-19 cases could be forced to transition back to at-home distance learning.

School districts must make distance learning plans if the local county has 20 or more COVID-19 cases in a week and/or 7.5% or more of COVID-19 tests in the county are positive. Districts will immediately return to distance learning if the local county has 30 or more COVID-19 cases in a week and 10% or more of local COVID-19 tests are positive.

“Let me be really clear: I am absolutely unwilling to lose an entire school year for any of our kids,” Brown said in a press conference Tuesday afternoon. “But it is also incumbent on all of us ... to take every measure to slow the spread of this disease so we can get our kids into school as quickly as possible.”

As of Wednesday, Oregon has had 17,712 COVID-19 cases, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

From April through the end of June, less than 5% of COVID-19 tests in Oregon returned positive, Sidelinger said. In July, the percentage of positive tests rose to close to 6%, he said, but it has been trending down again recently, he added.

Only five Oregon counties had fewer than 10 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents in the past week, according to state data. All five of these counties — Sherman, Tillamook, Union, Wallowa and Wheeler — are rural and relatively small in population.

When stretched out to the three-week requirement of fewer than 10 new cases per week, only Wheeler County qualifies to re-open classrooms for all students.

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HOSPITAL

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patients infected with the coronavirus.

“We have been saying for months that positive COVID test numbers do not equate to hospitalization rates. We hope that message can now be heard,” said Mardi Ford, the hospital’s director of communication. “Our efforts as a community to flatten the curve, particularly after the large outbreak in June, helped mitigate a continued rise in case numbers for Union County. This has translated into OHA indicating Union County has seen a lower hospitalization rate compared to other areas throughout the state.”

Each week since the outbreak occurred, OHA has shown in its weekly reports the hospital has had nine or fewer hospitalizations during that previous week. The report, as it does with low counts of COVID-19 cases in a given ZIP code, lists “1-9” when a hospital has fewer than 10. It does list a specific number of cases when a hospital has 10 or more in a week.

During its first press conference on the June outbreak, OHA reported there

Grande Ronde Hospital to open visitation Monday

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande announced Wednesday, July 29, that it is updating its visitor policy, effective Monday, to allow people to visit patients at GRH.

The move, which it said in a press release is in compliance with Oregon Health Authority standards, now allows patients

to have one visitor or support person when they are admitted to the hospital, visit a clinic or undergo an outpatient procedure, such as an ultrasound.

Visitors are required to wear a mask and undergo a screening process before entering.

Visitation is limited to patients who do not have COVID-19 or are under investigation for the virus.

were five hospitalizations.

The county saw a drop in the number of hospitalizations in early July. OHA weekly on its websites updates the status of hospitals that have had more than five patients with COVID-19 in the prior 28 days and shows whether they have met a criteria of having that number decrease over a 14-day period.

Early in the month, Union County was marked as having met that designation, but a week later apparently saw an increase as it was marked as not meeting the criteria.

On the July 16 update, Union County was again marked as having met the criteria, and on July 23 was no longer listed among the higher-burdened hos-

pitals. That data was current through July 22, which would mean that all told from June 24-July 22, GRH had five or fewer patients.

“The outbreak was caught quickly and dealt with by public health partners,” Ford said. “That response, along with those of our local officials, businesses and community members doing their part to stop the spread locally, has helped keep hospitalization rates down.”

The data doesn’t indicate how many new hospitalizations there were weekly or how many were accounted for in original information provided by OHA, which has reported that the average length of a hospitalization due to COVID-19 in Oregon has

Visitation hours each day will be from 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., and patients are limited to one adult visitor a day. Exceptions include:

- Inpatients, who can have two visitors in a day, one at a time
- Patients in end of life situations, who can see two visitors at a time as medical staff deems appropriate and can have one visitor stay after hours

- Maternity patients, who can have a support person stay overnight
- Patients under 18, who can have two per day, including a parent, and one after hours

Exceptions outside of these parameters to allow a child to visit or visitation after hours in rare circumstances must be agreed upon by an attending provider and a manager.

UNION

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Also on Monday the council passed a resolution sending a revised city charter to voters in the Nov. 3 election. The city began laying the groundwork for the revised charter three years ago. The council has conducted 15 work sessions to discuss revisions since last fall.

The council voted to send the charter to voters following a hearing. Dick Middleton of Union was the only person who addressed the council at the hearing. Middleton spoke in opposition to the revised charter. He said most people do not grasp the revisions.

“In my opinion, if they do not understand it they should not vote for it,” Middleton said.

One portion of the proposed revised charter addresses counselor attendance. It states if

“A resident deputy for \$50,000 a year would be a good deal for the city.”

Doug Wiggins, Union city administrator

someone misses 25% of council meetings over a rolling 12-month period, the councilor’s status could be reviewed. The council would have the option to take a number of steps including removing the councilor from office.

Another revision would make it much easier for the city to borrow money. Now if the city wants to borrow a sum of \$35,000 or more, it first must get approval from voters. The revised charter would allow the city to borrow a sum of up to 2.5% of its assessed value.

“This would make it much easier for the city to do business,” Wiggins said.

He said, for example, it would allow the city to purchase fire department

vehicles on a payment plan without first getting approval from voters.

The revised charter also would implement gender neutral language. For example, “councilor” replaces the the word “councilman” in every instance and “they” replaces “he.”

Flint said he believes the revisions in the charter would be a plus for Union. He also praised the council for its hard work and noted Councilor Sue Hawkins and former Councilor Mat Later in particular for their efforts.

The city last revised its charter in the 1980s.

Copies of the revised charter will be available via a number of sites including Union’s city hall and its website, www.cityofunion.com.

been six days.

Statewide, about 9% of COVID-19 patients have been hospitalized, but the known data shows GRH has been nowhere near that mark, which would be about 35 patients. Even if

the county had the maximum total it could report (nine) in each of the first two weeks following the outbreak and five total between June 24 and July 22, that would be a total of only 23 patients.

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