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# THE OBSERVER

## Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • August 1, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Allen Evans of La Grande

COVID-19

### Oregon's case count doubled in July

Children under age 10 added 466 cases, 10-19 year olds added 1,172

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County on Thursday, July 30, was removed from the governor's watch list, one of two counties along with Lincoln taken off after seeing a drastic reduction in cases following outbreaks in June.

The move came on a day when Union County saw an eight-day run without new COVID-19 cases end. The Center for Human Development reported one case Thursday and two Friday, giving the county a total of 388.

Union County's slowdown in cases is welcome news at the end of a month where the total number of cases in the state doubled — again.

Oregon on Thursday passed 18,000 cases, and as of Friday afternoon has 18,492, according to the Oregon Health Authority. That's more than 9,500 cases in the month of July.

At the end of June, there were 8,931 cases. It's the second month in a row the number of total cases has at least doubled. For the month, Oregon has averaged 318.7 new cases a day.

During the month of June, younger Oregonians were more likely — at a disproportionate rate — to contract the disease, and did so again in the month of July.

Individuals from 20-29, who account for 21.7% of all cases in the state, saw their number rise by 2,247 cases to 4,009 and in July made up close to one-fourth (23.5%) of all cases. That demographic makes up the most cases with 764 more than 30-39 year olds (3,245 cases), which have had 1,680 cases during the month.

People in the 30-39 range accounted for 17.57% of all cases in July, a mark just ahead of the number of cases (17.55%) they have made up for since the start of the pandemic.

The 40-49 demographic increased by 1,617 cases to 3,096, making up 16.9% of the month's total, just above the amount of overall cases it has

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# Schools go virtual

La Grande schools to open Aug. 31 with distance education only

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande School District students will start the 2020-21 school year at home.

The district will launch the school year Monday, Aug. 31, with all students attending via its Comprehensive Distance Learning program. This means students will be taking classes online rather than at school because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Students will take classes online via the district's Hybrid Model or its La Grande Learning Academy, which provides online education throughout the school year. Students enrolled in the Hybrid Model will receive online education via the district's Comprehensive Distance Education Learning Program until schools can reopen for in-person instruction.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said the district has spent the summer focused on developing an in-person instructional model that would allow a full return to school based on state social distancing and other rules. However, he said, the new metrics for schools that Gov. Kate Brown announced earlier this week takes in-person classes off the table.

"This guidance puts our plans for in-person learning on hold due to not meeting current indicator requirements from the Oregon School Health and Safety Metrics," Mendoza said in a letter to parents, guardians and community members Thursday, July 30.

The superintendent said the hybrid model's distance education will be more comprehensive than what the La Grande schools provided to students last spring. Mendoza said students will be able to interact more with their teachers in the new distance education model.

"Students will have a daily connection to ensure that they learn," Mendoza said.

The superintendent said he wants to get students in the Hybrid Model back into school buildings soon.

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Staff photo by Dick Mason  
La Grande School District technology specialist Jeff Roberts examines one of the district's network closets Thursday, July 30, at Willow School, part of the district's computer technology infrastructure. It will receive heavy use from its students when school starts Aug. 31 because all of the district's students will take their classes via distance education.

*"I didn't get into education 30 years ago to teach students over a computer, but that is the reality and what we have to do."*

—Lance Dixon, North Powder School District superintendent

## Videos offer virtual visits to tourist sites

By Jayson Jacoby  
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — The gadget in Joe Hathaway's hands looked like it could be a prop from a "Star Wars" movie except this device, a sort of oversized pair of goggles, actually worked.

When you snug its elastic strap over your head, it can put you in a speedboat zinging across Phillips Reservoir, an experience lacking only the cool spray spattering your cheeks.

Or you can take a run through fresh powder at Anthony Lakes Ski Area. While wearing shorts and a T-shirt instead of a heavy, insulated parka.

The term for the technology is "virtual reality," said Hathaway, communications coordinator for Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative. But the scenes are real. The virtual part is that you're not sitting in the boat or grasping the ski poles.

The device allows you to see what the cameras saw when they captured the images. You can also tilt your head to experience the same 360-degree view as if you were actually there. You can turn around and see the boat's wake. Or glance back and see the cloud of snow still lingering



Photo by Jayson Jacoby/EO Media Group  
Kate Reid, right, owner of the Royal Artisan gallery in Baker City, watches a virtual reality video using a headset that allows users to view the 3-D video in 360 degrees by moving their head. Lea Gettle, left, OTEC's manager of administration and strategic services, helped introduced Reid to the technology.

in the air — something not recommended when you're actually skiing toward actual trees.

This virtual reality experience is part of OTEC's effort to help boost the economies of the four counties where it supplies electricity — Baker, Union, Grant and Harney.

OTEC, with financial assistance from motel room taxes

from those counties and from Travel Oregon, has produced a series of videos that showcase what each county offers to tourists and to prospective residents and business owners.

Another video touts the region's agriculture industry. Although each video can be viewed in 3-D with a compatible headset, allowing for the real-

istic full-range view, 2-D versions of the videos are available on OTEC's website, [www.economicdevelopment.otec.coop](http://www.economicdevelopment.otec.coop)

Hathaway said many visitors centers and other tourism facilities around the nation have 3-D headsets, and OTEC will make the videos available as widely as possible.

"This is a really innovative way for us to differentiate ourselves from other rural communities," said Lea Gettle, OTEC's manager of administration and strategic services. "We want to put our communities on a pedestal."

OTEC's venture into virtual reality started in early 2019 when the cooperative, based in Baker City, contracted to produce three safety-related videos, including one that shows how the cooperative's crews and emergency responders would deal with a situation in which a vehicle crashes into a power pole.

Around the same time, OTEC hired the Golden Shovel Agency, a Minnesota company that contracts with electric cooperatives and other customers, to make the videos for each county in

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### WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight  
56 LOW  
Clear and moonlit



Sunday  
91/58  
Mostly sunny

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Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
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