



SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

THE OBSERVER

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • October 3, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Gary Wright of Union



Dick Mason/The Observer

Valerie O'Dai of Emergency Equipment Solutions checks items Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2020, that will be sold at an upcoming yard sale to raise money for fire victims in Western Oregon.

Monthly COVID-19 cases drop in Oregon

September sees fewer than 7,000 new cases

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The number of COVID-19 cases in Oregon dropped month-over-month for the second month in a row. The Oregon Health Authority reported fewer than 7,000 new cases in September and less than 100 deaths attributed to the virus.

The final day of the month, Wednesday, Sept. 30 — which OHA reported Thursday — saw the state add 363 cases and round out with an overall total of 6,916 in September, down from a peak of nearly 10,000 cases in July and from more than 8,000 additional cases in August, a decrease in total cases of about 15%. The average daily total in September was 230.5 cases per day.

See, Cases/Page 5A

Reaching out to help

Regional yard sale will raise funds for people hurt by wildfires in Western Oregon

By Dick Mason
The Observer

ELGIN — The most heartfelt of actions sometimes can miss the mark. For a classic example look no further than local efforts to help the thousands of fire victims in Western Oregon. Many of those reaching out to the victims have given items that can't be used — but their good intentions will not go to waste. These items will be sold at a huge yard sale Oct. 9-10 in Walla Walla, Washington.

The sale, which will raise money for fire victims, is necessary because many of the donations from residents in Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington during the past month will not benefit the people who need help, said Valerie O'Dai with the nonprofit Emergency Equipment Solutions.

Emergency Equipment Solutions and the American Legion Auxiliary in Milton-Freewater are putting on the yard sale. La Grande Strong, which O'Dai and Spring Roberts co-chair, also are pitching in.

The sale will feature at least 10 trailer loads of items that include skis, chairs and mattresses.

"Nobody who has just lost their home and is living in a tent will need items like these," said O'Dai, who lives in Elgin and is the senior disaster relief coordinator for Emergency Equipment Solutions.

The revenue from the sale will go toward the purchase of what the fire victims need: toiletries, pots and pans, hay for livestock, pet supplies and more, particularly wood boards and galvanized screens for making sifters. Fire victims



Dick Mason/The Observer

This is one of three trailers transporting local donations from Union County to a large yard sale happening Oct. 9-10, 2020, in Walla Walla to raise money to help the victims of fires in Western Oregon.

need sifters to sort through ashes looking for heirlooms such as rings and jewelry.

"These are items they didn't have time to grab before fires hit," O'Dai said. "We need thousands of them."

O'Dai is frustrated when people donate items fire victims can't use, but she also is buoyed.

"People are well intentioned. They want to help. They are incredibly generous," she said.

Observing this firsthand makes reaching out to victims of tragedy an

uplifting experience, O'Dai said.

"What I get to see are communities pulling together," she said.

While reflecting on this recently, a jolt of realization struck O'Dai.

"Neighbors are not first responders but they are the first to respond," she said. "That hit me hard."

Three of the trailer loads bound for Walla Walla are coming from Union County, two are from Umatilla County,

See, Sale/Page 5A

State balks at inmate release

By Alex Castle
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Gov. Kate Brown announced a second round of early releases for individuals incarcerated in Oregon prisons who are medically vulnerable to COVID-19 or within two months of release on Tuesday, Sept. 29, this time commuting the sentences of 66 people.

Brown has granted the release of 123 people from the state's prisons since the start of the pandemic — less than 1% of the state's prison population — after officials with the Oregon Department of Corrections said in April that up to 5,800 people would need to be released to allow for adequate social distancing.

For families with those incarcerated and the attorneys fighting for prisoner's rights to not be exposed to a deadly virus, the announcement was a disheartening show of political will

See, Inmates/Page 5A

Get out the rod and reel — coho make an appearance

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

ENTERPRISE — For the first time in four decades, anglers have the opportunity to harvest coho salmon on the northern end of the Grande Ronde River.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in a press release this week said fishermen were able to throw lines out for the reintroduced fish beginning Thursday, Oct. 1.

The release said coho have made a "strong appearance" in

"We're excited to offer the first opportunity to harvest these fish in the Grande Ronde in over 40 years."

— Kyle Bratcher, assistant district fish biologist for ODFW

the Columbia River system, and counts of the fish at the Bonneville Dam are above the 10-year average.

The fish in that group include the Lostine River coho, which in 2017 were reintroduced by

ODFW and the Nez Perce Tribe. The release said the Lostine coho are set for their highest numbers since reintroduction after fewer than 200 returned to the Lostine River in adult runs in 2018 and 2019.

"We're excited to offer the first opportunity to harvest these fish in the Grande Ronde in over 40 years," Kyle Bratcher, assistant district fish biologist for ODFW, said in the release.

As many as 3,000 coho originating from the Lostine River are estimated to make it past the Lower Granite Dam and reach the Grande Ronde River. That estimate is based on Lostine River coho that are tagged, and

See, Coho/Page 5A

INDEX

Classified.....2B Horoscope.....3B Outdoors.....1B
Comics.....5B Lottery.....2A Sudoku.....5B
Crossword.....3B Obituaries.....3A State.....6A
Dear Abby.....6B Opinion.....4A Weather.....6B

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 42 LOW Clear
Sunday 79/44 Sunny and warm

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 118
2 sections, 12 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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



8 51153 00100 6

ONLINE

MORE PHOTOS FROM 'SIDELINED'

Online at lagrandeobserver.com