

3 days, 47 new COVID-19 cases in Union County

Outbreak under investigation at long-term care facility

The Observer
LA GRANDE — Union County’s COVID-19 cases continue to spike. The Center for Human Development, La Grande, reported 47 new cases in the span of three days.
The center, which serves as the public health arm of the county, on Friday, Nov. 13, reported the county had a total of 574 cases. Then it reported 19 new cases Sunday and another 23 Monday,

spinning up the total to 621. That’s more than an 8% increase in the total number of cases from Friday and 127 new cases since Nov. 2.
Union County Public Health Administrator Carrie Brogoitti in a press release Monday reported the jump in cases the past few days can be partially attributed to an outbreak at a local long-term care facility.
The Oregon Health Authority identified Wildflower Lodge, one of Union County’s long-term care facilities, as the spot of the outbreak. Six people there tested positive, according to the OHA’s

weekly report on Thursday, Nov. 12.
The facility did not respond to requests for comments in time for publication Monday.
Brogoitti reported the CHD is “working closely with the facility to identify cases and close contacts to help mitigate further spread.”
In addition to the outbreak at Wildflower Lodge, Brogoitti stated Union County is mirroring a statewide trend.
“Social gatherings of various sizes and not adhering to public health recommendations continue to play a significant

role in our increasing cases and contacts to confirmed cases,” according to Brogoitti. “Reports of birthday parties, get-togethers with friends, weddings, etc. continue to occur. Attendees at these events then spread the virus to their homes, workplaces, schools, etc.”
And Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, announced in a press release last week it is reimplementing COVID-19 measures that went into effect Friday.
The hospital will allow only one visitor at a time per patient, according to the press release, and the visitor must comply with all

COVID-19 regulations, including completing a screening and wearing a mask.
There are exceptions to this regulation, however, including if a caregiver of a patient needs assistance due to a language barrier or disability or if a person is a close family member of a patient undergoing end-of-life care. Parents also can accompany their children.
The hospital allows these circumstances even if the visitor does not pass screening, the press release stated, but the visitors must follow mask and safety protocols.

Early snow halts prescribed burns

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer
LA GRANDE — Fire season 2020 was one for the record books, as have been many such seasons in the past decade. Fresh are many Oregonians’ memories of dangerously poor air quality, blood-red skies choked with smoke and, tragically, images of entire towns and neighborhoods reduced to heaps of ash and scrap.
But even as blazes were being fought out west, efforts on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest turned from preventing and suppressing fires to lighting them.
“Fire does a good job of maintaining what’s supposed to be there,” said Mike Johnson, a fire management official with the Forest Service. “It’ll keep the fire-intolerant species out and keep the surface fuels to the appropriate levels, so they’re not conducive to having the large crown fires that you’ve been seeing. ... It’s a maintenance tool.”
Prescribed burns are a biannual mainstay in Northeast Oregon’s forests, with brief windows of ideal conditions in the fall and spring.
Each window closes almost as soon as it opens, appearing in the fall during the weeks between fire season and the onset of mountain snow, while in the spring, fire managers have to walk the line between lingering winter soggy and the overgrown vegetation of later months.
This year, local Forest Service efforts focused on a unit known as “Bald Angel,” a

See, Burns/Page 5A

Recognition of service



Dick Mason/The Observer

Retired National Guardsman Jack Johnson of Cove, left, receives the James M. Roche Spirit of Volunteerism Award on Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020, from Lt. Col. Seth Musgrove, commander of the La Grande-based 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment of the Oregon National Guard.

National Guard volunteer Jack Johnson receives noteworthy honor

By Dick Mason
The Observer
COVE — Jack Johnson of Cove is an avid local historian who has been lauded for his efforts to keep the past from being forgotten.
On Sunday, Nov. 15, Johnson was recognized not for his historical research but for his advocacy for soldiers with civilian careers.
Johnson, a retired National Guardsman, received the James M. Roche Spirit of Volunteerism Award. The honor salutes the more than three decades Johnson has worked as a volunteer for the Employer Support of the National Guard and Reserve.
The Roche award is the highest honor given for superior and sustained service to the ESGR. The ESGR is the lead U.S. Defense Department program promoting cooperation between civilian employers and their National Guard and Reserve employees.
Johnson, who retired from the National Guard 19 years ago, has been a ESGR volunteer for more than three decades. He was presented the Roche award at the Blue Mountain Conference Center during a ceremony that included virtual presentations by retired Maj. Gen. Dennis Klein, who is state chair of the Oregon ESGR, and Maj. Gen. Raymond Rees of Helix, a former commander of the Oregon

“I was stunned. I could not get my head around the possibility that I had won the Roche award.”

— Retired National Guardsman Jack Johnson of Cove, on receiving the James M. Roche Spirit of Volunteerism Award

National Guard’s La Grande-based 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry and a former director of the U.S. Army National Guard.
Klein said Johnson is deserving of the Roche award, and Rees credited him with doing “spectacular” work.
Johnson said he will never forget how he felt when told via phone he had won the award.
“I was stunned. I could not get my head around that possibility that I had won the Roche award,” the Cove resident recalled.
Johnson served in the Oregon National Guard for 45 years, 10 months and 16 days before retiring in 2001. He was its command chief warrant officer at the time of his retirement and the first person to ever hold this position.
Johnson has served as a ESGR volunteer

at least since 1990. The veteran said he was inspired to volunteer for the ESGR because he earlier worked for a railroad company in Wasco. He remembers how difficult it was to get the release time he needed to attend National Guard training sessions because his job was essential for the railroad’s operations.
“It was tough,” Johnson said.
He was later Eastern Oregon University’s financial aid director and said EOU has an excellent working relationship with the National Guard.
The veteran has done much of his ESGR work for members of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry. Johnson has an understanding of its history like few others and nine years ago discovered documents that proved the

See, Honor/Page 5A

INDEX

Classified..... 2B Home 1B Obituaries..... 3A
Comics..... 5B Horoscope.... 3B Opinion..... 4A
Crossword.... 2B Letters..... 4A Sports 6A
Dear Abby 6B Lottery..... 2A Sudoku 5B

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
40 LOW
A shower late



Wednesday
50/34
A little rain

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541-963-3161
Issue 137
2 sections, 12 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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THURSDAY

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