Turkey-day tips
In Home & Living

The Observer's Thanksgiving edition will be delivered Wednesday, Nov. 25, due to the postal holiday.

THE OBSERVER

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Good day to our valued subscriber Maarten Tromp van Holst of Cove

COVID-19

State, county see rapid spread

Imbler, North Powder schools report new coronavirus cases

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The local surge in COVID-19 cases continued in Union County over the weekend as the Center for Human Development reported 62 new cases in three days, mirroring the unprecedented spread of the virus across the state.

"While some of these cases can be linked, we continue to see consistent community spread," CHD stated in a press release. "This means that many people who test positive are not sure how or where they became infected. This is a trend seen statewide and nationally."

The center on Saturday, Nov. 21, reported 31 new cases of COVID-19, then five on Sunday and 26 more on Monday, bringing the overall caseload to 717 since the start of the pandemic, with 224 of those cases reported in November alone.

Cases continue to impact local institutions, with the Imbler and North Powder school district reporting new cases Sunday.

Imbler announced it received notification a person at Imbler High School was diagnosed with COVID-19.

"Through contact tracing, we have been able to identify and notify those who have been exposed," the district posted on its Facebook page. "Those exposed are being quarantined. We will continue with classes."

The school district also reported for this case it will employ an "electrostatic disinfectant sprayer that deploys charged disinfectant particles into an area covering every surface in the space will disinfect all classrooms."

North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon canceled classes Monday to accommodate contact tracing after one high school student tested positive for COVID-19.

The district anticipates classes resuming Tuesday, then

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Dick Mason/The Observer

Wally Rudd of Cove shows memorials Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2020, from his service in World War II. Rudd was a Navy frogman, the precursor to the Navy SEALS.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Navy frogman reflects on WWII experiences

By Dick Mason
The Observer

COVE — Almost eight decades ago the hopes of Wally Rudd, a U.S. Navy frogman, were sinking like an anchor.

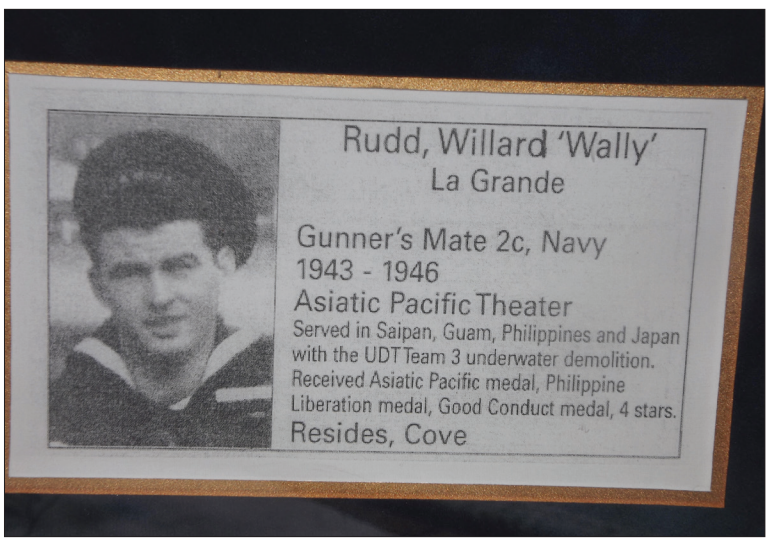
Rudd, who had just survived a dangerous World War II island mission in the South Pacific, was beginning to wonder if he would ever catch a plane in Guam back to his military base at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor.

Rudd, who now lives in Cove, had gone weeks without getting a seat on a plane bound for Pearl Harbor because the U.S. military was giving top priority to officers, letters and packages.

A frustrated Rudd then took matters into his own hands — he airmailed himself, postage-free, to Pearl Harbor.

The Navy frogman and a friend snuck onto a plane bound for Pearl Harbor and hid under bags of mail. Rudd said military bosses thought the pair were in with the mail and yelled for them to come out.

"But we didn't," Rudd said, "and they never came in and checked on us."



Dick Mason/The Observer

This old clipping shows Wally Rudd of Cove as he appeared when he served in World War II.

When the stowaways arrived at Pearl Harbor they were not disciplined as mischievous rule breakers. Instead, their fellow sailors embraced them as though they were long-lost brothers.

"They were afraid that we had died because we had been gone so long," Rudd said.

This was understandable considering they were part of an underwater demolition team, one of a number that helped give rise to today's legendary Navy SEALS. Rudd's team was responsible for checking the harbors of islands occupied by

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Elgin

Turn on your porch light — Operation Santa is a go

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

ELGIN — With the help of a certain famous red-nosed reindeer, Santa Claus has never missed a Christmas Eve delivery. Now, with the help of a mask, that streak is set to continue in Elgin.

Each year on Dec. 24, the local fire department enlists the help of the jolly Saint Nick and his assistants to deliver bags of candy to people young and old in the small Northeast Oregon town of Elgin in the long running tradition known as "Operation Santa."

Elgin Rural Fire Protection District Fire Chief Kevin Silvernail is helping to organize the North Pole resident's safe visit amid the pandemic.

"It is a tradition," Silvernail said. "It's been going on for 50-plus years, and we felt that we had to do it somehow. If we could do it with COVID, we would, and if we couldn't have done it we wouldn't have done it. But with our distancing, Santa and all his helpers will be in their proper PPE with gloves, masks, things like that, six feet distancing, all the COVID stuff that we can do."

Silvernail said Operation Santa will look different this year. Santa and his helpers will be practicing social distancing, which means Elgin residents won't be able to take pictures with the holiday celebrity.

Santa also will be borrowing a fire truck from the fire protection district. Silvernail said he was glad to be able to bring Operation Santa back to Elgin during a difficult year.

"I don't know how to explain it. It's an honor," Silvernail said. "To keep that tradition going that started way back when, it's great to be able to give back to our community even in that little way. These times are pretty tough, so a little joy and a little cheer this time of year always helps ... plus the little kids get a

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Get Thanksgiving on the go this year

Community groups offer holiday dinners

The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Neighbors Together of Union County has adapted its approach to provide a community Thanksgiving dinner despite the pandemic.

The limit on social gatherings and rules about food service remain in effect until Dec. 2 due to Gov. Kate Brown's two-week freeze to curb the spread of COVID-19. The freeze put the hard chill on large community events. So rather than hosting a Thanksgiving dinner in a big hall, Neighbors Together, a 13-member church-based organization in La Grande, is distributing the goods to locals.

Jared Upwall, pastor of Mountain Life Church, La Grande, is handling much of the project.

"It was a really hard decision to cancel it this year," he said, adding that it was the right one because holding the event in the traditional manner would not have met the pandemic restrictions.

The goal is to give out 100 boxes, Upwall said, which contain the ingredients for a full Thanksgiving meal, including either a turkey or chicken, stuffing, potatoes and a dessert. Those who sign up for the meal will then prepare it themselves.

For more information about getting a food box, visit

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Phil Wright/The Observer, File

Volunteers serve the goods during the 2019 community Thanksgiving Day meal at the Presbyterian Friendship Center, La Grande. Due to the pandemic, the nonprofit Neighbors Together of Union County this year is distributing Thanksgiving meals in to-go boxes.

THANKSGIVING DINNER IN A BOX

Neighbors Together of Union County aims to provide 100 to-go Thanksgiving dinners. For more information about getting one, visit Neighbors Together at neighborstogetherofunioncounty.org or call 541-963-9126.

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

THURSDAY BLACK FRIDAY PREVIEW

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