

Hunting for the holiday

In Outdoors & Rec

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THE OBSERVER

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Weekend Edition

SATURDAY - MONDAY • December 5, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Travis Lanman of La Grande

Physicians urge compliance

Seven local doctors join nearly 800 more across the state in signing letter asking Oregonians to abide by state public health measures

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

OREGON — Just before the Thanksgiving holiday, nearly 800 Oregon physicians, including seven practicing in La Grande, signed onto a letter urging Oregonians to abide by the restrictions on social activity aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 and prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.

“If the spread of COVID-19 does not slow and reverse, we will not be able to provide the best care for anyone whether they need a ventilator for COVID-19, chemotherapy for cancer, or a safe place to deliver a baby,” the letter states. “Any promotion of in-person social gatherings outside of our households or ‘bubbles’ is dangerous and irresponsible.... We have countless examples of how such gatherings endanger those who attend and also everyone they live with, work with, or who are part of their broader community. Oregon physicians urge small, safe celebrations for one more holiday season to prevent regret and grieving as 2021 approaches.”

The chief architect of that letter, OHSU pediatric physician and professor of public health Paul Lewis, said the message of the letter remains vitally important.

“Our job is to take care of people, and we want to be able to do that,” Lewis said. “But if we get squeezed and squeezed and squeezed, it gets hard, and people get tired.”

Lewis said he understands the difficulties of continuing to stay isolated during the pandemic, from increased stress at work to separation from loved ones.

“It’s a bad situation for everybody,” he said. “That said, we want people with other health problems — stomachaches and babies being delivered and everything else, car crash victims — we want them to be able to get the care that they need.”

At least seven physicians in La Grande agreed with Lewis. Doctors Melindres Lim, Susan Rice, Eve Koltuv, Kevin Grayson, Mary Porter, Arie Trouw and Zachary Spoehr-Labutta all signed their names to the letter. None of the doctors returned calls seeking comment.

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Kaleb Lay/The Observer

This shows the exterior of Cock & Bull Villa Roma in downtown La Grande on Friday, Dec. 4, 2020. The restaurant has been forced to cut employee hours because public safety measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 prevents them from offering sit-down dining.

SKATING BY

Local restaurants grapple with latest changes to COVID-19 restrictions

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

LA GRANDE — When Oregon Gov. Kate Brown last week announced the state’s new “data-driven framework” for determining the extent to which businesses would need to curtail their activity, there was little doubt Union and Baker counties would be in the “extreme risk” category, bringing with it the most severe restrictions.

With the two-week freeze over, the new framework took hold Tuesday, Dec. 1, and the two counties now bear the extreme risk label, which prohibits in-person dining. Some local restaurants find themselves struggling.

Cock & Bull Villa Roma in La Grande is one such business. Manager Marcus Arnsen said before the pandemic, most of their profits came from sit-down dining.

“We don’t have any outdoor dining or any other options, but we’re in full swing of to-go and delivery,” Arnsen said. “We’ve always done a lot of to-go and delivery, but in-house sales were always more than 50% of total, so we’re down a lot.”

Arnsen said the Cock & Bull has had to send employees home early and might have to cut hours in the near future. And he voiced his displeasure with Brown’s public health measures.

“It has negatively impacted us, sig-

nificantly. We strongly hope that the governor will take back the order,” he said.

Other businesses have fared slightly better. Just down Adams Avenue, Kody Guentert at Brother Bear Cafe said he’s trying to adapt and take the new measures in stride.

“Definitely seeing the impact of no dine-in. It hurts. But, you know, doing the best we can to keep people wanting to come in or keep people wanting us to deliver food to them,” he said.

Guentert said he expects his business to just “skate by” until things return to normal. He said he feels for other businesses in town, though.

“All these other businesses are trying to survive too, these little retail businesses,” he said. “I look next door to Bugs and Butterflies or down the street to Tap That and Blue Mountain Outfitters and all those places, you know, and those are places that you want to go in and look around. When (customers are) not supposed to be able to do that, that’s tough.”

Baker City businesses are in much the same boat as those in La Grande. Paizanos Pizza is feeling the effects of the pandemic, according to manager Breydon Colvin, and he said not much changed for the eatery when the county moved from the two-week freeze to the slightly relaxed restrictions now in place.

“It seems not to be damaging our busi-

ness too much, we’re still doing all right, but we’ve slowed down a whole bunch since this whole thing started,” Colvin said.

Paizanos had to cut hours for its employees, leading Colvin to believe the staff may be forced to turn to support systems.

“I know a lot of people are going to have to try to get unemployment because they don’t really have any hours,” he said.

In downtown Baker City, however, at least one business is faring better. Sweet Wife Bakery’s relative success, according to manager Kylie Severson, may be due to its walk-in format.

“For the most part, it hasn’t affected us too much because we’ve always been an in-and-out kind of place anyway,” Severson said. “We did have a couple of seats inside and a couple outside as well, but for the most part we’ve had a pretty high turnover rate compared to the restaurants and sit-in places.”

Severson said she’s supportive of Brown’s public health measures but feels for businesses that rely on sit-down dining.

“I personally think that it is helpful,” she said. “I mean, I totally understand where other businesses are coming from who aren’t like us, who (get) the

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Classes, cases and contact tracings

School superintendents urge governor to allow in-person education

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — December began on a grim note for Union County as the month opened with the reported deaths of two county residents due to COVID-19.

Local restrictions are expected to remain in place at least through next week, as the virus continued its community spread throughout the county and regional intensive care unit bed capacity once again dropped into single digits.

COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

Union County: 834 cases, 8 deaths
Wallowa County: 72 cases, 3 deaths
Baker County: 316c cases, 4 deaths
Oregon: 81,437 cases, 1003 deaths
U.S.: 14.04 million, 275,386 deaths
Sources: Center for Human Development Inc., Oregon Health Authority and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

On Friday, Oregon smashed its previous record for daily reported cases with 2,176 and saw a record-high death toll as COVID-19 claimed 30 Oregonian lives.

The Oregon Health Authority warned in the announcement of the totals that “current level of transmission could generate ‘exponential’ growth, resulting in approximately 2,000 new daily

cases and 75 additional daily hospitalizations by Dec. 24.”

The United States surpassed a death toll of more than 275,000 American lives, and COVID-19 is on track to be the third leading cause of death in the country for 2020, trailing only cancer and heart disease.

Local spread

COVID-19 infections in Union

County this week surpassed 800. As of Friday, Dec. 4, 834 people in Union County have been infected by the virus and eight people have died.

According to Union County’s public health arm, the Center for Human Development Inc., the county recorded 55 positive cases this week — 19 of which were reported on Friday alone — and saw two deaths.

With 93 cases the week before, the county remains classified as “extreme risk,” meaning restrictions on social activity will be unchanged.

The county must record fewer than 60 cases in a two-week

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
27 LOW
Mostly cloudy



Sunday
43/26
Inc. clouds

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



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TUESDAY

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