

COVID-19

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day when we can return to normal life. In the meantime, we must keep up our guard.”

Gains and losses

COVID-19 spread continued in Union County. Between Sunday, Dec. 13, and Friday, Dec. 18, the Center for Human Development, the county’s public health arm, reported 35 positive cases.

“Cases really can fluctuate, so it’s possible that you could have another large number of cases come through over the next few days that could bump the number up again, but right now it seems like we kind of increased for a while and went down,” said Carrie Brogoitti, CHD’s public health administrator. “So far, it looks like we could be going down, which is good news.”

With 56 cases the week before, case counts remain high enough to keep Union County under Oregon’s “extreme risk” public health measures. The county must record fewer than 60 cases in a two-week period to drop into the “high risk” category, which would allow for indoor activities, including dining.

Cases of COVID-19 tapered off across Oregon this week as well. The number of weekly reported infections dropped 11% compared to last week — the first week-over-week decrease in eight weeks. Nonetheless, statewide daily cases continue to number in the thousands every day, and weekly deaths continue to number in the hundreds.



St. Charles Health System/Contributed Photo

Staff at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend place doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in ultra-cold storage on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020.

The Oregon Health Authority reported the deaths of two more Union County residents this week. The first was a 73-year-old man who tested positive on Dec. 3 and died Sunday, Dec. 13, at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande. The second was a 75-year-old woman who tested positive on Nov. 27 and died Dec. 10 at St. Luke’s Medical Center in Boise.

“The hard part is that we, unfortunately, have also seen an increase in the number of deaths over the past few weeks,” Brogoitti said. “I think it’s good that we have had a lower number of cases, but what we find is that when we have one of those spikes, usually a couple of weeks later is when we’ll see deaths happen, if they’re going to happen.”

The statewide COVID-19 death toll climbed to 1,304 as of Friday.

COVID-19 outbreaks continued to grow in La Grande. The Oregon Health Authority’s weekly report

listed one new case at Wildflower Lodge, which is the site of 70 cases and five deaths. Northwood Manufacturing’s outbreak ticked upward, growing from 16 to 18 cases.

Union Elementary School also made OHA’s weekly report, where two cases of infection in staff or volunteers were reported. District Superintendent Carter Wells said between 40 and 50 students were quarantined due to cohort exposure, and Union schools began their winter break on Friday, Dec. 18.

The Center for Human Development is holding another free COVID-19 testing clinic Monday, Dec. 21 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at its office, 2301 Cove Ave., La Grande. To register and schedule a test, go to [doineedacovid19test.com](https://doineedacovid19test.com).

Schools fight to stay open

The county’s smaller schools — Union, Imbler, Elgin, Cove and North Powder — expect to be able continue offering

in-person instruction to their K-12 students thanks to new guidance from the Oregon Department of Education on Wednesday, Dec. 16.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza announced in a livestreamed town hall the same day that when La Grande students return from Winter break on Jan. 11, 2021, kindergarten and elementary students will return for in-person instruction.

“That’s something I hope that we’re all happy about,” a smiling Mendoza said. “I’m definitely very excited about the future for our school district.”

La Grande schools grades K-5 will attend school daily from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., while sixth grade students will be in two cohorts that will attend school in-person from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Middle and high school students could be allowed to return to in-person instruction on Jan. 27.

A slight pinch

The race to vaccinate the United States against COVID-19 began in earnest this week, with health care workers across the nation, including some in Ontario, Bend and Portland receiving the first doses. Union County, however, has to wait on future vaccines before local immunization can begin.

The next COVID-19 vaccine in the pipe for an FDA emergency use authorization is the Moderna vaccine. The Oregon Health Authority told reporters in a media briefing last week that rural counties with fewer health care workers should expect their first doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to be the Moderna vaccine, not the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that was rolled out in Portland and Ontario.

Similar to the Pfizer vaccine, the Moderna version is a messenger RNA vaccine that boasts a 94% efficacy rating.

Brogoitti said Union County is waiting on details from the state and is working on a plan for local distribution.

“Unfortunately, I am still learning about what vaccine distribution is going to look like,” Brogoitti said. “We’re still fairly early in the process, still gathering information from the Oregon Health Authority.”

Grande Ronde Hospital spokesperson Mardi Ford said the hospital is working to put vaccination plans in place and had put together a vaccine planning task force, though the hospital lacked confirmation about what vaccine it would receive first, how many doses it could expect or when those doses might arrive.

The Moderna vaccine

The Food and Drug Administration fast-tracked the Moderna vaccine for a decision on emergency use earlier this week after it conducted an analysis of Moderna’s ongoing clinical trial. FDA briefing documents shed light on how it works.

The vaccine is administered in two injections 28 days apart. Two weeks after the second injection, the Moderna vaccine was effective in preventing symptoms of COVID-19. The vaccine worked regardless of age, ethnicity or the presence of preexisting conditions, such as obesity and diabetes.

The vaccine does have common side effects. Most people reported pain at the injection site, while roughly two-thirds of people reported fatigue or headache. Other common symptoms include muscle and joint pain and chills.

Two key advantages of the Moderna vaccine come in how it is distributed and stored. Unlike its cousin from Pfizer, the Moderna vaccine can be stored between minus 5 and minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit — balmy compared to Pfizer’s minus 76 to minus 112.

The vaccine also is distributed in smaller batches.

That combination of factors, OHA have said, make the Moderna vaccine more practical for use in rural areas.

As of press time Friday, Dec. 19, the FDA had not yet ruled on an authorization for use of the Moderna vaccine in the U.S.

Oregon to receive fewer vaccines than previously expected next week

PORTLAND — Oregon will receive fewer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine than expected next week, state health officials said.

KOIN reported officials expected to receive 40,950 doses of the Pfizer vaccine next week from the federal government, but will now only receive 25,350 doses. Federal officials have told other states to expect fewer doses than expected in next week’s shipments as well.

Officials said they expect

to have 35,100 Pfizer doses this week.

Oregon hospitals administered the first coronavirus vaccines in the state Wednesday, Dec. 16, to nurses, respiratory therapists and other health care employees in high-risk jobs, marking the beginning of a vaccination campaign.

Health officials say they plan to vaccinate 100,000 people statewide by the end of the year.

— Associated Press

EVANS

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number of other writers produce noteworthy books, including the award-winning “Darkroom Soldier” by the late Fred Hill of La Grande, said the challenge posed in assisting Evans was one of a kind. He explained the enormity of the amount of material, including diary entries, essays, speeches and reflections he had to sort through was remarkable.

“It was massive. I had to make so many choices,” Venn said.

The coffee table book is 491 pages, and Venn said there was enough good material for it to be twice that size.

Taking on dams

One of the most fulfilling accomplishments of Evans’ life, which he covered in detail in his autobiography, was the work he did to help prevent the construction of dams in Hells Canyon. Evans in 1975 pushed for Congress to create the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and grant Wild and Scenic River status to a portion of the Snake River that runs through the canyon.

“It is a compelling story,” Venn said. “(Evans) was a pathfinder and trail blazer.”

Evans’ fight to save Hells Canyon from dam construction began in 1967

and appeared initially doomed to failure for two big reasons: There were few environmental laws in place to help stop dam construction, and the prevailing attitude then was rivers should be used to serve humankind.

“Many people believed the only thing to do with a river is to make it go to work,” Evans said Wednesday, Dec. 16. He said this belief gave rise to the slogan, “The Snake River is a river which wants to work.”

Evans and other Hells Canyon supporters had few environmental laws available to them in 1967, but that year the U.S. Supreme Court came to their aid out of the blue while determining which company should get a license, one already approved, to build a dam in Hells Canyon. The Supreme Court during this process came out with an opinion that would be a landmark in environmental history.

Justice William O. Douglas wrote the opinion on behalf of the court, stating: “The Court will not now make a decision on who gets to build this dam. The first question that must be asked is whether there should be any dam at all. Therefore, we remand this case back to the FPC (Federal Power Commission) for a determination on this one point: should there be

a dam or not.”

Evans writes in his autobiography the words represented a “stunning legal precedent.” He explained never before had the Supreme Court, or any court, questioned “the common wisdom” of dam building.

“Those words were like manna from heaven,” Evans said Wednesday.

The campaign to save Hells Canyon had the Supreme Court on its side at that point but limited regional political support. The anti-dam campaign picked up a powerful ally a little more than a year later when Bob Packwood beat incumbent Wayne Morse in 1968 to become a new U.S. Senator for Oregon. Packwood later became a big Hells Canyon supporter and introduced a bill to create the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

Beating the odds

Evans has overcome long odds not only in fighting for the environment, but also in fighting for his life. He details in the book how he battled multiple myeloma, a plasma cell cancer in 2002 and 2003, and a doctor told him he had only three or four months to live. In 2015 a physician at Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City told Evans he was cancer free. He did not believe his doctor at first but was persuaded

moments later.

“My heart danced with gladness,” Evans writes in his book.

Evans, who grew up in Columbus, Ohio, moved to Union County with his wife, Linda Garcia, because of the connection he feels to the Northwest, where he had spent extensive time working on projects in Oregon and Washington.

“I love the people here and the land. This is my beloved Northwest,” Evans said.

Evan said he titled the autobiography, published by Wake-Robin Press, “Endless Pressure Endlessly Applied” because it represents a signature mantra of Evans’ when striving for an objective.

“The key is to keep moving, to never stop, to never quit,” he said.

He stressed that everything he has helped accomplish in his life was done with the assistance of many others, individuals he sees as part of an international brotherhood and sisterhood. Evans said when on trips outside the country finding new friends is as easy as locating a meeting of a conservation group.

“Our accents may be different,” Evans said, “but our love of the land is the same.”

For information on obtaining copies of the autobiography, email [wakerobinpress@redbatcreative.com](mailto:wakerobinpress@redbatcreative.com).

LETTER

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President Donald Trump and conservative groups and media have pointed to the video as evidence of election fraud, alleging that the bins were filled with ballots that were processed after Republican poll watchers were told to go home for the night.

But after an investigation, Georgia election officials determined that the bins were empty and were a part of the normal ballot counting process. Poll watchers were never told to leave, but some observers left for the night when a group of election workers left the facility.

Levy and Barreto were the nominees from Northeast Oregon and Levy was the only legislator-elect to add her name. The other signatories were Sen. Chuck Thomsen of Hood River, Sen. Alan Olsen of Canby, Sen. Dennis Linthicum of Klamath Falls, Sen. Kim Thatcher of Keizer, Rep. Bill Post of Keizer, Rep.

Gary Leif of Roseburg, Rep. Vikki Breese Iverson of Prineville, Rep. Mike Nearman of Independence, Rep. E. Werner Reschke of Klamath Falls and David Brock Smith of Port Orford.

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, said the letter was never circulated to him so he never got the chance to sign it. Hansell said he didn’t know if he would have signed it because he would need to gauge the purpose and tone of the letter.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, did not return a phone message requesting comment as of press time.

The Electoral College voted Tuesday, Dec. 15, further affirming Biden’s win.

Before the Electoral College vote, Levy declined to comment on whether Biden had won the presidential election, citing other pending litigation related to the presidential election.



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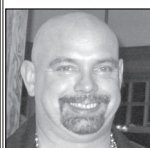
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