

# Big trees under the ax

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COVID-19

## It's not 'the flu' and masks do work

Addressing four areas of too-common COVID-19 misinformation

By KALEB LAY  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Misinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has proven persistent, even a year after the first case of the disease was documented in the United States. Despite widespread and consistent messaging from public health experts, falsehoods about the danger and severity of COVID-19 and measures aimed at protecting against it have become commonplace.

Some of that misinformation has been spread in letters to the editor or in the comments section of The Observer's Facebook page. This article will address some of those claims and provide the factual information from reliable sources.

### 'It's just like the flu'

A common misconception is comparing COVID-19 to the seasonal flu. Other similar sympathies include beliefs that nearly everyone who catches COVID-19 recovers or that COVID-19 death rates are negligible, near zero percent.

Some people experience only mild symptoms from COVID-19, which often mirror those from the flu, including fever, chills, muscle ache and fatigue. Others may experience no symptoms at all and risk spreading COVID-19 unknowingly.

However, COVID-19 is far deadlier than the flu.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 22,000 people in the United States died from influenza during the 2019-20 flu season, 34,000 died during the 2018-19 season and 61,000 died during the 2017-18 season.

During the worst of the past three flu seasons, in 2017-18, the CDC estimated around 45 million contracted influenza. In the three flu seasons since 2017 combined, an estimated 118.5 million cases of the flu resulted in 117,000 U.S. deaths, for a death rate of roughly .099%.

By comparison, roughly 24 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 have resulted in more than 400,000 deaths in the U.S. in a single year of the pandemic. That comes to a death rate of

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# Fiddle Club Zooms

Music teacher's mastery of virtual teaching platform leads to success

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Music teacher Carla Arnold is Central Elementary School's go-to person for many technology questions related to distance education.

The educator, who helps put on workshops on distance education technology, delights in fielding queries about the subject, just as she does teaching students online.

Make no mistake, Arnold would prefer to instruct students in person, but when she has to do it virtually, she embraces the task with a zeal befitting her glass-is-always-half-full perspective.

"There are so many options for doing things (with distance education)," she said.

Arnold puts these options to the test each school day afternoon during meetings of the La Grande School District's La Grande Fiddle Club, which is run in conjunction with the Grande Ronde Symphony. The club's members meet online to play the violin, cello, bass and other related instruments under the guidance of Arnold, Grande Ronde Symphony members Denise Hattan and Kathy Thimmes, and additional educators. They deliver the instruction via the online meeting platform Zoom.

Central Elementary Principal Suzy Mayes credited Arnold with developing an excellent understanding of Zoom, which Central used earlier this school year when teachers could provide only online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayes said Arnold is so respected for her expertise that some teachers refer to her as Central's "Zoom Queen."

The pandemic restrictions still dictate that Arnold must lead her string club sessions virtually — but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Going online has helped the club not only survive but thrive. Prior to the pandemic, the club had a little more than 30 members and met once a week during the school year. Today, the club boasts 47 members and meets every school day afternoon.

Arnold attributed the club's growing popularity to the fact students now have fewer activities, such as athletics, competing for their attention and time due to the pandemic.

"Kids have always been curious about playing stringed instruments. Because there are now no sports, our musicians don't have to make choices between sports and music," said Arnold, who credited Mayes and LG School District Director of Education Scott Carpenter



Dick Mason/The Observer

Carla Arnold, music teacher at Central Elementary School, La Grande, teaches students in the La Grande Fiddle Club virtually on Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2021.

*"In these times especially we crave being with other people, especially the kids. On Zoom, we can laugh and giggle and tease and get teased and yet still hunker down and learn the fine art of playing such cool instruments."*

— Carla Arnold, Central Elementary School music teacher

with providing valuable support for the online Fiddle Club.

Arnold is thankful for distance technology because it gives the strings club a chance to continue meeting and helps fill a void when many feel isolated because necessary state COVID-19 rules restrict public gatherings.

"In these times especially we crave being with other people, especially the kids. On Zoom, we can laugh and giggle and tease and get teased and yet still hunker down and learn the fine art of playing such cool instruments," said Arnold, who also now is providing in-person instruction to Central classes each school day.

Teaching music online can provide an

advantage over in-person instruction because students can more easily focus on their teacher.

"Teachers can spotlight themselves so students can see up close demonstrations of playing or finger patterns," Arnold said. "Having the focus on the teacher without the sounds of kids doodling on their instruments helps many students focus on the concept being demonstrated."

Zoom also allows small groups of students to play together or receive individualized instruction in virtual breakout rooms, while Arnold teaches a large group. She said

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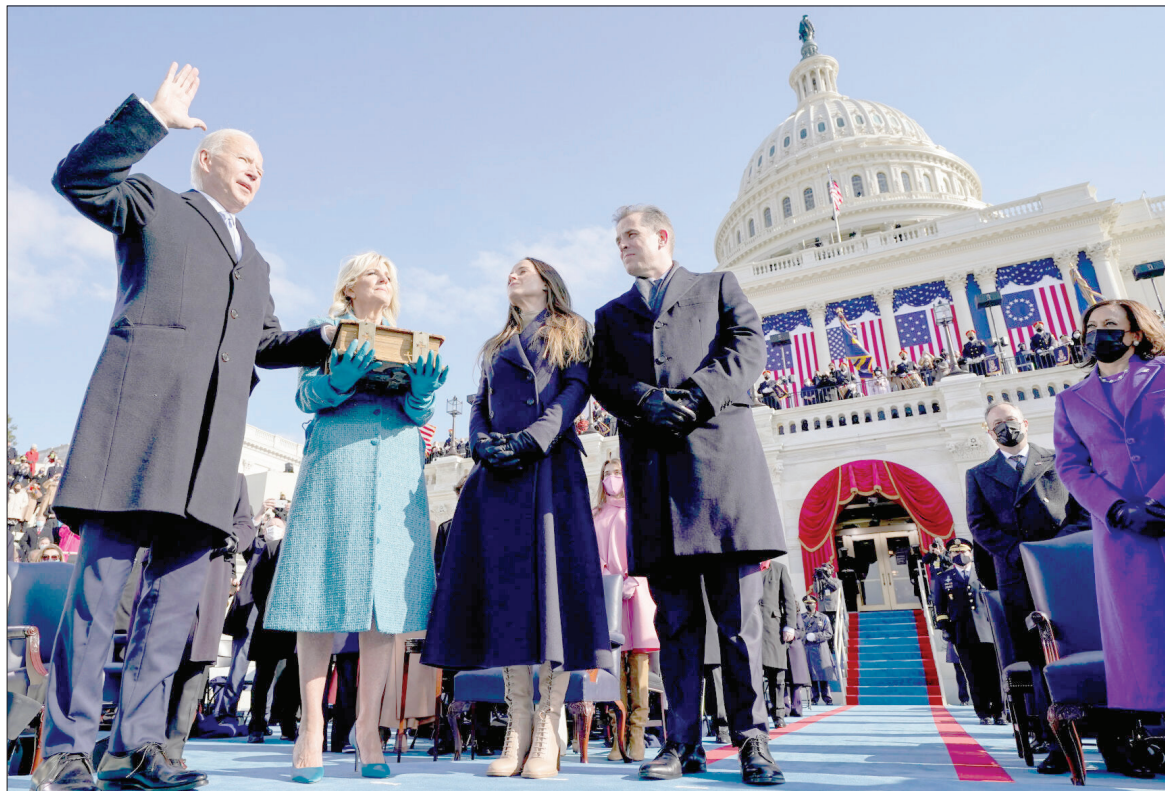
# Biden takes the helm as U.S. president

By JONATHAN LEMIRE,  
ZEKE MILLER and  
ALEXANDRA JAFFE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden became the 46th president of the United States on Wednesday, Jan. 20, declaring that "democracy has prevailed" as he took the helm of a deeply divided nation and inherited a confluence of crises arguably greater than any faced by his predecessors.

Biden's inauguration came at a time of national tumult and uncertainty, a ceremony of resilience as the hallowed American democratic rite unfurled at a U.S. Capitol battered by an insurrectionist siege just two weeks ago. The chilly Washington morning was dotted with snow flurries, but the sun emerged just before Biden took the oath of office, the quadrennial ceremony persevering even though it was encircled by security forces evocative of a war zone and devoid of crowds because of the coronavirus

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Andrew Harnik/Associated Press/East Oregonian

Joe Biden is sworn in as the 46th president of the United States by Chief Justice John Roberts as Jill Biden holds the Bible during the 59th Presidential Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, as their children Ashley and Hunter watch.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight  
29 Low  
A snow squall



Friday  
37/25  
Partly sunny

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



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