

## TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Thursday, April 1, the 91st day of 2021. There are 274 days left in the year. This is April Fool's Day.

### TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On April 1, 1954, the United States Air Force Academy was established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

### ON THIS DATE:

In 1789, the U.S. House of Representatives held its first full meeting in New York; Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania was elected the first House speaker.

In 1933, Nazi Germany staged a daylong national boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.

In 1945, American forces launched the amphibious invasion of Okinawa during World War II. (U.S. forces succeeded in capturing the Japanese island on June 22.)

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed a measure banning cigarette advertising on radio and television, to take effect after Jan. 1, 1971.

In 1972, the first Major League Baseball players' strike began; it lasted 12 days.

In 1975, with Khmer Rouge guerrillas closing in, Cambodian President Lon Nol resigned and fled into exile.

In 1976, Apple Computer was founded by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne.

In 1977, the U.S. Senate followed the example of the House of Representatives by adopting, 86-9, a stringent code of ethics requiring full financial disclosure and limits on outside income.

In 1984, Marvin Gaye was shot to death by his father, Marvin Gay (correct) Sr. in Los Angeles, the day before the recording star's 45th birthday.

In 1987, in his first speech on the AIDS epidemic, President Ronald Reagan told doctors in Philadelphia, "We've declared AIDS public health enemy No. 1."

In 1992, the National Hockey League Players' Association went on its first-ever strike, which lasted 10 days.

In 2003, American troops entered a hospital in Nasiriyah, Iraq, and rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who had been held prisoner since her unit was ambushed March 23.

Ten years ago: Afghans angry over the burning of a Quran at a small Florida church stormed a U.N. compound in northern Afghanistan, killing seven foreigners, including four Nepalese guards.

Five years ago: World leaders ended a nuclear security summit in Washington by declaring progress in safeguarding nuclear materials sought by terrorists and wayward nations, even as President Barack Obama acknowledged the task was far from finished.

One year ago: President Donald Trump acknowledged that the federal stockpile of personal protective equipment used by doctors and nurses was nearly depleted, and he warned of some "horrific" days ahead for the country. Resisting calls to issue a national stay-at-home order, Trump said he wanted to give governors "flexibility" to respond to the coronavirus.

# Nobody hurt in ODOT building fire

By DICK MASON

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Nobody was hurt in a fire Monday, March 29, at the Oregon Department of Transportation sign shop building in La Grande, although the blaze caused the structure's roof, ceiling and garage doors to collapse.

Firefighters had to deal with high winds during the fire, which was reported at 10:58 a.m.

"The wind was quite a factor," said Emmitt Cornford, chief of the La Grande Fire Department.

The wind accelerated the fire but did not spread any embers from the building between Island Avenue and Mulholland Drive to nearby buildings or property, Cornford said.

He said firefighters were positioned upwind of the blaze to prevent flames or embers from blowing at them.

Twenty-two firefighters from the La Grande and



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Firefighters with the La Grande Fire Department respond to a structure fire at the Oregon Department of Transportation sign shop the morning of Monday, March 29, 2021. There were no reported casualties.

the La Grande Rural fire departments responded to the emergency. The La Grande Fire Department sent a ladder truck and an engine and La Grande Rural sent two engines.

Nobody was in the building when the fire started. A malfunction of a ceiling heater exhaust system in the building's attic caused the fire. Cornford and Deputy State

Fire Marshal Casey Kump made the determination after conducting an investigation.

The fire did not harm any of the signs in the shop, but some may have sus-

tained damage from the collapses of the roof and ceiling and the water used to fight the blaze.

Craig Kretschmer, chief of the La Grande Rural Fire Department, said the fire was particularly difficult to tackle because the fire started in the ODOT building's attic. This meant it was inevitable the structure's roof, ceiling and garage doors would collapse. For safety reasons, firefighters could not aggressively attack the blaze until all three occurred.

"Any time you cannot get to the seed of a fire you are delayed," Kretschmer said.

Firefighters first focused on containing the blaze.

"We were in a defensive posture at the start," Kretschmer said.

Once the roof, ceiling and garage doors collapsed, crews were able to attack the blaze and extinguished the flames by about 12:15 p.m.

# Baker City's backhoe goes on the auction block

By JAYSON JACOBY

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Baker City's most famous backhoe is finally on the auction block.

And it's there with the approval of city voters, an endorsement not typically afforded to pieces of heavy equipment.

Future sales of such machinery, however, will not be subject to the whims of the electorate.

The story dates to 1952, when Baker City voters approved a city charter.

The document, among much else, requires city officials, before selling land or buildings with an estimated value of at least \$5,000, or vehicles and other equipment worth at least \$10,000, put the matter on the ballot.

The idea seems to have been that voters might want to have a say in whether the city disposes of relatively valuable, but publicly owned, items.

Over the past 30 years or so the city has sought voter approval for more than half a dozen sales, all involving buildings or land. Voters approved each of those sales, and usually by relatively wide margins.



Tom Fisk/Contributed Photo

Baker City is selling this 1995 backhoe through an online auction. Voters had to approve the sale on the May 2020 ballot. Voters that same election also changed the city charter to allow the city to sell equipment without voter approval, no matter its value.

But as the value of vehicles and equipment has increased, the potential existed for property other than real estate to meet the monetary threshold in the charter.

During the spring of 2020, city officials deemed as surplus a 1995 Case backhoe. They also pegged its market value at \$16,000.

And so it was that the May 19, 2020, ballot included, among the usual political races, a measure asking voters to decide whether to authorize the city to sell that digger.

Voters approved that measure — which is to

say, the future sale of the backhoe — by 92% to 8%.

But that wasn't the only unusual matter on the ballot.

City officials also identified at least two other surplus items that could conceivably fetch more than \$10,000 — a 1990 Case excavator and a 1988 International dump truck.

To avoid larding future ballots with measures involving equipment sales, the city also placed on the May 2020 slate a measure that amended the city charter, allowing the city, without voter approval, to sell surplus vehicles of

any value, so long as the money goes to the city's equipment replacement fund.

Voters also backed that measure, although not quite as enthusiastically as with the backhoe sale. The charter change measure passed by 75.5% to 24.5%.

(The measure did not affect the requirement that voters approve the sale of real estate; that \$5,000 threshold remains.)

City officials initially planned to sell the backhoe, along with the excavator, dump truck and several dozen other surplus items, via the online auction site govdeals.com, in 2020, said Tom Fisk, operations supervisor for the city's public works department. But officials decided to postpone the auction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the auction is conducted online, prospective bidders sometimes want to examine items in advance. Also, buyers are required to pick up their lots. Fisk said it made sense to wait until the pandemic had eased.

The backhoe, and more than 100 other surplus items, are available for bidding now at govdeals.com.

Search for "Baker City" to summon the local items.

The online auction continues through April 2, with a couple of items extended through April 9.

As of Friday morning, March 26, the Case backhoe had drawn 12 bids, the highest being \$18,000.

Neither the excavator, with a minimum bid of \$12,000, nor the dump truck, minimum bid \$10,000, had yet attracted a bid.

Among other interesting items on the block:

- The tall slide that stood in Geiser-Pollman Park for decades before being removed last year to make way for the all-abilities playground. As of Friday morning the top bid was \$102.

- A four-sided steel climbing structure and slide, which also was removed from Geiser-Pollman Park last year. Top bid was \$102.

- Fiberglass steps from Sam-O Swim Center. Top bid, \$10.

- Two fire hydrants. Top bid for each, \$10.

- Three historic metal street signs, two for Campbell Street, one for Fifth Street. Top bid for each, \$5.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### COVID-19 takes another Union County life

LA GRANDE — Another person died from COVID-19 in Union County.

The Oregon Health Authority on Tuesday, March 30, reported six news deaths statewide, including an 80-year-old man in Union County who tested positive on March 22 and died March 29 at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande.

He had underlying conditions, according to OHA, is Oregon's 2,380th COVID-19 death and the 21st in the county. Union County's total number of COVID-19 cases now is 1,369.

Wallowa County had two news cases to increase the total there to 149. Baker County had 10 more cases, pushing its total to 743. Neither of those counties had new fatalities from COVID-19 in Tuesday's report.

Oregon's statewide death toll of COVID-19 related deaths is 2,381, and the total number of cases is 164,570.

### Organizers nix Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally

BAKER CITY — The Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally in Baker City won't happen for the second straight summer due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A post on Monday, March 29, on the Rally's Facebook page reads: "Thank you all for your patience while we discussed the logistics of this year's Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally. We have come to the difficult decision that we will not be holding the rally this year. Due to of the state of Oregon's restrictions, we could not find a way to safely host this event while still being in compliance with

the state's guidelines. We are devastated to share this news with you."

The message added that while the notion "The show must go on" is in our DNA, we are now working through the ramifications of this unfortunate situation" and working hard "to bring an even bigger and better rally in 2022."

### Enterprise's new police chief approved

ENTERPRISE — Enterprise soon will have a new chief of police, now that Kevin McQuead has completed and passed all required evaluations and testing, according to a statement Monday, March 29, released by a city official.



McQuead

Word, Enterprise City Council president and Police Committee chair, said in an email.

Word said McQuead will be sworn in at the council's next meeting, Monday, April 12.

McQuead replaces Joel Fish, who was elected Wallowa County sheriff last year and was sworn in to the position in January.

McQuead has served as a deputy with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office since February 2008, when he resigned as an Enterprise police officer to take the position, according to Chieftain files.

He is the husband of the city's administrator, Lacey McQuead, but the council "does not feel any nepotism or conflict of interest has occurred with this hiring process or will occur as the city of Enterprise

policies are followed," a February press release stated.

The chief reports directly to the city council.

### DMV to reopen in Eastern Oregon counties in May

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Transportation plans to reopen Driver and Motor Vehicle Services offices in Eastern Oregon counties in May.

Amy Joyce, the DMV administrator, said recently during a conference call with the Association of Oregon Counties the division is reducing the number of appointment slots in most of its Eastern Oregon offices to expand to a "stand-by" model.

Joyce said the appointment system with the DMV never would completely go away. She said people who come in for appointments appreciate the consistency that comes with having a scheduled time.

She said the DMV's future is a hybrid system, where it will keep appointments for some and have a "walk-up" capacity for people who do not want to make an appointment or do not have access to the internet.

Joyce said renewal of driver licenses, permits and identification cards would be allowed online beginning in early May. The DMV expects the new feature to be available on DMV2U.Oregon.gov in early May.

While some DMV services have previously been available online, most have been moved to appointment-only sessions at local DMV offices during the pandemic. Timely appointments can be challenging to come by due to the reduced capacity at DMV offices.

— EO Media Group

# Ontario prison must enforce mask mandate

By LILIANA FRANKEL

Malheur Enterprise via AP StoryShare

ONTARIO — A state judge last week ordered officials at Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario to devise a plan to enforce mask use at the prison and to deploy mass testing after finding the state's treatment of two inmates reflected indifference during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Multnomah Circuit Court Judge Amy Baggio issued her findings and orders after two inmates sued prison officials in Malheur County Circuit Court. Local state judges recused themselves from the case.

"Certain SRCI staff view mask wearing as an issue of politics rather than one related to health and welfare during a pandemic," Baggio concluded. "Mask failures by staff are particularly troubling considering the very nature of their jobs: to oversee a large, congregate environment."

Her findings came in civil cases filed by inmates Mark Lawson and Don Skelton, who claimed they received poor medical care that put their lives at risk. They claimed the care was so bad that it violated their constitutional rights.

Baggio ordered the

Oregon Department of Corrections to provide her "documentation as to how SRCI is enforcing the masking policy, including proof of specific enforcement" and "consideration of a plan to engage in mass COVID-19 testing at SRCI, particularly rapid testing of staff prior to entry."

While she set no deadline, Baggio said she would conduct a status check in 30 days.

Court filings and the judge's orders paint a picture of a prison where, despite heightened precautions such as locking down inmates and eliminating most programming, the danger of COVID-19 is taken lightly by some staff and inmates.

Dr. Garth Gulick, chief medical officer for SRCI, "testified that he is at war with COVID-19 misinformation in SRCI," the court order said. "He described how staff are on the whole very conservative and have doubts about the virus and the vaccine."

Referring to inmates as adults in custody, the order said that Gulick testified that "misinformation is totally engrained in staff and some of the AICs. He testified that many staff believe that masking is stupid and that the virus is harmless."