

MISSING

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vehicle. State police have not been able to confirm reports of anyone seeing Hendrichs since that time.

Hendrichs is an employee of the Les Schwab Tire Center in Meridian, Idaho, where she has worked since 1995 as a bookkeeper. Taylor said her sister is popular with customers and is the type of person who the late Les Schwab, who founded the tire company in the 1950s, wanted his employees to be like.

“She fits the image of (an ideal) Les Schwab employee to a T,” Taylor said of her sister, who has worked a total of 37 years for Les Schwab.

Taylor said her sister brightens the spirits of customers.

“She makes them feel valued,” she said.

Despite the lack of new leads in the search for her sister, Taylor said she has reason to be hopeful, noting she is impressed with how many people are continuing to help. These include individuals with the Jon Francis Foundation, a nonprofit that helps find missing persons, Valley County Search and Rescue of the McCall, Idaho, area and the Oregon State Police.

Taylor is working closely with Conner of OSP on the search.

“Lt. Conner has been phenomenal,” Taylor said.

Conner is hoping evidence leading to Hendrichs may be found now that



OSP/Contributed Photo

Oregon State Police and others plan on searching in May for Deborah “Deb” Hendrichs of Star, Idaho, who has been missing since Jan. 11, 2021, after her car ran out of gas near Meacham.

ODOT is starting a road construction project just outside Meacham on Interstate 84. Conner is encouraging ODOT employees to be on the lookout for evidence. This includes cellphones. Conner said Hendrichs had at least two cellphones.

The law enforcement officer also wants people who have cabins in the Meacham area to report anything suspicious they have noticed since the disappearance of Hendrichs.

Conner said in early May a search team will again scour the area. The effort likely will include the Jon Francis Foundation and law enforcement agencies and search and rescue organizations. He said he believes the odds are better that something could be found because much of the area’s snow may be gone by then.

Regardless of how the search turns out, Taylor will remain hopeful in her quest to find her sister.

“I know that God knows where she is,” Taylor said. “God loves her more than I do, and I love her a lot.”

FEES

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\$1,450 for residents.

Other rates are the same whether someone lives inside or outside La Grande. Special care transport, for example, is increasing from \$2,000 to \$2,500, and the per hour rate for special events is increasing from \$150 to \$200. The new rates go into effect July 1.

The city also will not charge amounts in excess of the caps to people on Medicare and Medicaid.

“For those that I think we feel are kind of the most vulnerable to increases, it would not impact them in that regard,” Strobe said. “We wanted to emphasize that.”

Strobe called the increases reasonable and said they would be on par if the city had been increasing the rate to keep up with inflation. He also said this would put La Grande more in line with similar jurisdictions.

In another unanimous vote, the council approved a program to help residents pay their utility bills.

Councilor Gary Lillard recently learned some La Grande residents were having difficulties paying their back utility bills due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and closures, and they faced shut-offs. The local nonprofit Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Inc. has been inundated with requests for assistance.

To help, the city agreed to allocate \$20,000 to Community Connection to provide need-based grants to La Grande residents so they can pay their utility bills. The money is coming out of the COVID-19 loan program the city set up in 2020 using money from the general fund. Strobe said the local program still has more than \$185,000 available.

“I think this would be a great opportunity to provide some much-needed help in a pretty extraordinary set of circumstances for our community,” Strobe said.

Community Connection also has similar deals with other local governments, Strobe said, and the \$20,000 will provide for about two or three months of relief for approved citizens.

He also said the city is set to receive about \$2.7 million from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the latest federal COVID-19 relief package. There are no regulations yet for how local governments can spend their federal allocations, he said, but the city will be able to use the funds to backfill for lost revenue, including for declines in the transient room tax and aquatic fees.

Before the vote, Councilor John Bozarth asked if utility providers Avista and Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative had set up programs to help locals pay their natural gas or power bills.

“I think those two companies have a heck of a lot more disposable funds than we have,” he said.

After the council voted in favor of the need-based grants program, Strobe said he would find out more about what OTEC and Avista have to offer.

In other business, the council approved a hiring incentive of up to \$6,000 for the police department for officers it hires after April 7.

The city would pay the incentive in three \$2,000 installments: The first for applications who complete field training so they can work solo; the second upon completion of probationary status and 12 months of continuous service (whichever occurs last); and the third after working 30 months of continuous, satisfactory service as a police officer for the city.

The incentive is to attract and hire experienced police officer candidates to replace some of the experience the department lost with the high number of retirements over the last several years, according to a memo to the city council. Other police agencies in Oregon offer similar incentives.

SHELTER

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Was Wearing” became available Friday, April 2. The exhibit contains stories of sexual assault survivors in Union County. You can find a link to the exhibit and more at www.unioncountysfs.org/awareness. (Shelter From the Storm warns this contains depictions and scenarios of sexual violence.)

The nonprofit also is hosting its annual Soup Supper drive — although with changes to accommodate social distancing requirements — as well as handing out bags with resources to college students about sexual assault, including how to report an assault and what to do if you or a friend is assaulted.

As an additional way to get the word out, the Shelter From the Storm has placed teal ribbons on lampposts along Adams Avenue in La



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Roszanne Moldovan is a crisis response advocate with the local nonprofit Shelter From the Storm, which helps survivors of interpersonal violence. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and the shelter has put together several events to raise awareness during the annual campaign.

Grande containing information about Sexual Assault Awareness Month, commonly cited statistics about assault and a link to the shelter’s website and phone number.

Shelter From the Storm also is encouraging community members to wear jeans for “Denim Day” on April 28 — a gesture that

came after an Italian court overturned a rape conviction in 1998 of a 45-year-old driving instructor, stating the victim had to have helped him remove her “very tight jeans.”

In protest, women members of the Italian Parliament wore denim jeans the next day. The movement has become a worldwide protest.

168 Oregonians got COVID-19 despite full vaccination, state says

By FEDOR ZARKHIN

The Oregonian/OregonLive

SALEM — So far 168 Oregonians have tested positive for the coronavirus despite being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, leaving 19 hospitalized and three dead — figures so small that officials said they were “good news.”

The case count means that of the 700,000 people who reached full immunity, just 0.024% got infected anyway.

“This shows the vaccines are working really well,” said Dr. Melissa Sutton, the Oregon Health Authority’s medical director for respiratory viral diseases. “All of those numbers are good news.”

While coronavirus vaccines are proven to be effective at preventing hospitalizations and deaths among those who do get infected, no vaccine is foolproof. Sutton was not surprised by the death and hospitalization counts, either.

“They are, of course, unfortunate,” Sutton said. But the numbers were “not more than we would have expected.”

State officials calculated the number of so-called “breakthrough” cases among Oregonians who had reached full immunity, which comes two weeks after a final vaccine dose. Officials track the cases because they could point to dangerous mutations of the virus.

It’s unclear how many, if any, of the breakthrough cases Oregon announced were caused by virus variants, Sutton said, though none of them are known to be.

State officials said many of the people with identified breakthrough cases reported no symptoms and were tested for other reasons, such as care-facility workers who must be screened at least once a month.

None of the three deaths was tied to a variant, the state said. The state’s information is current through April 2.

Oregon has now identified 294 cases driven by variants the federal government is concerned about. But the health authority has detailed case data for only 23.

That’s because the state identified the other 271 variant cases before fed-



Courtne McCauliffe/Contributed Photo

Ruthie Mann, infection control officer at Wallowa Memorial Hospital, prepares a syringe with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday, March 9, 2021. In the background is Stacey Karvoski, WMH quality director and nurse. State health officials report 168 Oregonians have tested positive for the coronavirus despite being fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

eral health officials said those specific versions of the virus had to be monitored closely. As a result, at the time Oregon discovered those variants it didn’t check whether the people infected with them had been vaccinated.

The bill to mandate transparency is still in the works.

Oregon’s disclosure Thursday makes it at least the seventh state publishing breakthrough case numbers. Officials initially denied a records request from The Oregonian/OregonLive for the data.

Lawmakers said the state should reveal how many such cases health investigators identified. They also criticized the state for hiding behind a law allowing officials to conceal any health investigation information they want, with a bill pending in the legislature to improve transparency.

Sutton said the agency will continue to update numbers about breakthrough cases once a month.

CIVICS

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Studies and a teacher at Kings Valley Charter School in Independence, said civics instruction is scattershot now.

“There is inequity in civics education where some students receive dedicated focus on the subject while others receive limited instruction scattered across multiple social science classes,” Lepley said in a statement after the Senate vote. “This inequity has real implications for our students and our society and it must be addressed.”

Democrats joined Girod in speaking for the bill.

“In the leaner budget years of the last couple of decades, civics education has been one of the first things on the chopping block,” Sen. Jeff Golden of Ashland said.

He said civics should teach students how rights and responsibilities should be balanced in a democratic society.

“My judgment is that our sense of that balance, especially among young people who have not had civics education, is wanting and needs addressing,” he said.

Majority Leader Rob Wagner of Lake Oswego sat on a City Club of Portland panel a decade ago that assessed civics education in the metro area. He said one of its conclusions was that the state should set standards and offer professional development for teachers.

“One thing that should not divide our citizenry is our deep love and abiding concern for our state and federal constitutions and our love for our country and state,” he said. “That requires an active citizenry engaged in learning our history and how government functions.”

Sen. Lew Frederick of Portland, a former broadcast journalist, said real-life politics isn’t as it is portrayed in television shows or movies.

“At its core, it is a careful acknowledgment and respect for all Oregonians — the ability and the desire to make Oregon better by working together,” he said. “Demonizing other Oregonians only brings out more demons, more targets — and fewer paths to a better state. Understanding those paths is what the study of civics is ultimately all about.”

Sen. Chuck Riley of Hillsboro said he has offered himself as a guest speaker in schools. “I encourage you to do the same in your districts,” he said.

The bill drew three votes against it: Republicans Dallas Heard of Roseburg and Dennis Linthicum of Klamath Falls, and independent Brian Boquist of Dallas.

Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, is the chief sponsor of a similar bill in the House.

Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics proudly welcomes:

Jennifer Hoffman, FNP-C

To the GRH Urgent Care team as a Family Nurse Practitioner

Nurse Practitioner Jennifer Hoffman joins the GRH team from an urgent care facility in Peoria, Illinois. She is a Midwest native and grew up on a small hobby farm, caring for many kinds of animals throughout her upbringing. She loves the outdoors, including fishing, camping, hiking, hunting, boating, and skiing, and fell in love with the western united states many years ago. After a recent vacation to mountains in the area, she and her family concluded it was time to plant some new roots “out west”.



Jennifer Hoffman, FNP-C

Jennifer enjoys working in urgent care, particularly the variety and challenges that the field presents. She is passionate about her work, meeting patients where they are at in their healthcare journey, and treats everyone as if they were her own family. She looks forward to building new memories in beautiful Eastern Oregon. **Join us in welcoming Jennifer and her family to Union County!**

GRH Urgent Care

10303 S. Walton Road, Island City • 541.962.7845 • grh.org/urgentcare

To learn more about Jennifer and the rest of the Urgent Care team, take a look at our online provider directory at grh.org.

