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Good day to our valued subscriber Jerry Byers of Union

COVID-19

Moving on down

Residents welcome 'lower' risk that becomes effective Friday, April 23

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION — Union County received encouraging news on the COVID-19 front.

Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday, April 20, announced the latest county risk levels. Union County will move from the moderate to lower COVID-19 risk category effective Friday, April 23, because of declining infection rates.

The new risk list that goes into effect April 23 has no counties at extreme risk, 23 at high risk, three at moderate risk and 10 at lower risk. The lower risk category means fewer restrictions for businesses, offices, social gatherings and more.

Suzannah Moore-Hemann, director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, is among those who greeted the news with enthusiasm.

"This is very exciting for our businesses," Moore-Hemann said.

Moore-Hemann also said the news is encouraging because

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Joseph admin resigns, cites 'harassment'

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Citing "constant harassment from members of the current city council," Joseph City Administrator/Recorder Larry Braden resigned by letter to council members read publicly Friday evening, April 16, in an emergency city council meeting.

The type of harassment or specifically who it was from was not specified in the letter. Braden was not present at the meeting and was not available for comment.

Mayor Belinda Buswell, who read Braden's letter aloud, and the council members all said they had no idea from whom the alleged harassment was coming.

The resignation comes just over two weeks after a heated exchange at the April 1 city council meeting, during which Braden cited confusion over the role of the mayor and the city administrator, and his role in the day-to-day function of the city.

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A student with Greenwood Elementary, La Grande, sits in the cab of an Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative line truck Tuesday, April 20, 2021, while La Grande OTEC District Superintendent Jeff Pillow explains how workers use the vehicle to provide power to county residents.

Learning not to touch

La Grande students take part in career and safety day event

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The event would have been inconceivable a year ago.

Greenwood Elementary School on Tuesday, April 20, conducted a career and safety day activity with the major help from Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and the La Grande Fire Department. About 100 students in grades four and five participated in the outdoor event at Greenwood's field. Students attended 12-minute sessions at six stations. Students stayed in small cohorts and wore masks, allowing them to meet COVID-19 protocols.

It was the first event involving a large group of Greenwood students since the pandemic hit in March 2020 and was possible because of falling infection rates. Greenwood teacher Missy Rinker was encouraged by the students' excitement to take part in the activity.

"It is a new normal, back to normal activity," Rinker said.

OTEC's communications manager, Joseph Hathaway, said this was the first such event in which the cooperative has participated in a year. Hathaway said normally OTEC is involved in about 12 a year.

"We're thrilled to take part in such a fun and important event for our local kids and thank Greenwood Elementary for inviting us. As a member-owned cooperative, we want to do whatever we can to give back to the communities we serve. This event also gives us the opportunity to educate kids

about the importance of staying safe around electricity and also show them that there are great jobs like being a lineman right in their own backyards," Hathaway said in an email to The Observer.

The presentations at two of OTEC's stations focused on electricity and safety, and a third provided an inside look at what it is like to work as a lineman for the cooperative. OTEC District Superintendent Jeff Pillow noted linemen are well paid, earning between \$120,000 and \$150,000 a year. There are drawbacks, though. Linemen must

"It is great to be able to do this for the community and the kids."

— Robert Tibbetts, La Grande Fire Department Captain



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Greenwood Elementary School students peer into a tool chest atop an Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative line truck with OTEC lineman Blake Eckstein during a career day outside the La Grande school on Tuesday, April 20, 2021.

be willing to respond to calls for service at any hour of the day or night and they have to work in dangerous situations far above the ground.

"You can't be scared of heights," Pillow said.

Pillow also emphasized the dangers of downed power lines, urging Greenwood students never to touch them, noting that voltage of power lines is many times greater than what is in their homes.

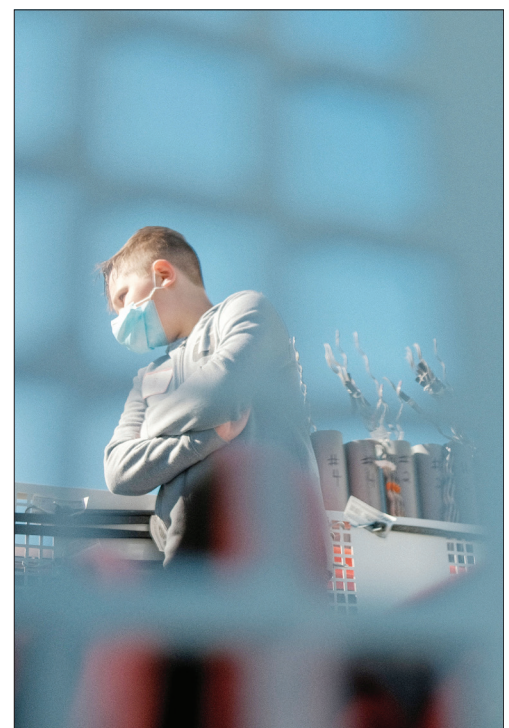
"It is a massive difference," he said.

Pillow urged the students to tell an adult or phone OTEC if they see a downed power line.

"Call us and we will make it safe for you guys," he said.

The La Grande Fire Department had an engine and two ambulances at the career-safety fair. Firefighters told children how the department uses the equipment to extinguish

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A Greenwood Elementary School student stands atop an Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative line truck on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, during a career day outside the La Grande school.

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WEATHER

 Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 38 LOW Mainly clear
Friday 65/43 Partly sunny

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La Grande, Oregon

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



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SATURDAY

EASTERN OREGON FILM FEST UPDATE

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