

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

May 13, 2021

THURSDAY EDITION

\$1.50

## Wallowa Memorial makes list of top-20 critical access hospitals

By RONALD BOND  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa Memorial Hospital has again been ranked among the top critical access hospitals in the nation.

And with that, it received the distinction of the highest-ranked one on the West Coast.

The Chartis Center for Rural Health announced its top-20 list of CAH on Monday, May 3, and WMH was in the top 20 for the fourth time in the past five years, according to a press release from the National Rural Health Association.

“Obviously, it’s gratifying to know that your efforts are achieving results,” WMH CEO Larry Davy said in an interview with the Chieftain on Friday. “Our goal is always to aim for perfection, which is impossible. But if you aim for perfection, you achieve excellence. It’s encouraging that all the hard work everyone is doing does have a very positive result for our community. It keeps you trying hard.”

The hospital learned in March it was a top-100 hospital for the eighth time in the past 11 years. Only three other hospitals in Oregon made the top-100 list, Brooke Pace, WMH communications director said at the time, and none of them was in the top 20. In fact, there were no other West Coast states that had a hospital in the top 20. Dillon, Montana, and Beaver, Utah, were the next farthest west. Most of the top 20 hospitals were located in the Midwest, including five in the Dakotas, five in Kansas, three in Iowa and two in Nebraska.

A series of factors are looked at by the Chartis Center when determining the top hospitals.

“The determining factors for the Top 20 CAHs were based on the results of the Hospital Strength Index and its eight indices of performance: inpatient market share, outpatient market share, quality, outcomes, patient perspective, cost, charge and financial efficiency,” the NRHA press release stated. “This elite group of hospitals was selected from the Chartis Center for Rural Health’s 2021 top 100 CAH list, which was released earlier this year.”

Davy said there consistently are meetings within hospital

See, **Hospital**/Page 5A

# Vaccination matters



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Eastern Oregon University is surveying its residents on whether or not the university should require COVID-19 vaccinations for students and staff. Larger state universities like Oregon State University and University of Oregon have outright required vaccinations for the upcoming fall term.

## EOU undecided on shots

Eastern rolls out survey to get feedback from students, employees

By PHIL WRIGHT  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University is taking a cautious approach to deciding if it will require students, teachers and staff to get COVID-19 vaccines.

Oregon State University in Corvallis and University of Oregon in Eugene have announced they will require students coming to their campus in the fall to have been vaccinated. And officials with Western Oregon University on Monday, May 10, announced students and employees will need to have the vaccinations if they study or work in person at the university’s Monmouth or Salem campuses for the fall term.

Tim Seydel, Eastern’s vice president for University Advancement, said the setting of Oregon’s Rural University means it does not have to follow in the steps of the state’s larger universities on the western side of Oregon.

“We’re in a different environment,”

he said. “We were able to have in-person classes starting in the fall.”

With perhaps the exception of Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Eastern is relatively isolated and small.



Seydel

Tens of thousands of students each attend Portland State University, OSU and U of O in population centers where it is easier to encounter and spread a virus. Students at Eastern, for example, don’t take mass transit to get to campus. And Eastern has about 3,100 students and more than 400 employees. That’s far smaller than the state’s flagship university in Eugene, which boasts an enrollment closer to 23,000 and employs more than 1,000 people.

But before deciding on requiring vaccinations for COVID-19, Seydel said EOU wants feedback on the matter from students and staff. And the university is rolling out a survey to all students and employees to give

See, **EOU**/Page 5A

## Oregon opens more when 70% of residents vaccinated

By GARY A. WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown laid out some basic math on Tuesday, May 11, for Oregon’s way out of pandemic restrictions: Get 70% of adult residents at least one shot of vaccine and “normalcy” can start to return as early as next month.

“Let’s get this done, let’s get our economy open, and enjoy the summer,” Brown said during an afternoon press call.

Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen said the state needed to inoculate about 430,000 more people to reach the goal by June.

The announcement marked a major policy shift in which vaccination rate will now be the key measure of a county’s ability to drop COVID-19 restrictions.

Individual counties could move out of restrictions even earlier under the new policy.

Counties could apply for the removal of restrictions early next week if they can show 65% of residents age 16 and older have started the vaccination process. If approved, restrictions could be curtailed starting May 21.

Counties must also submit a “vaccine equity” plan on how to get vaccine opportunities to people in underserved communities.

OHA officials said some counties with high vaccination rates and low infection counts, such as Clatsop County, could move out of the restrictions next week.

But the new emphasis on vaccination levels also means counties such as Deschutes and Washington could move out of most restrictions despite high infection rates.

Deschutes County reported 542.6 cases per 100,000 people this week, the second highest of Oregon’s larger counties behind only Klamath County.

Allen said high vaccination rates are more important than high infection rates in determining progress against COVID-19. Even if infection rates are high, vaccination

See, **Vaccines**/Page 5A

# Nursing students learn about telehealth

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Communicating with health care providers on the internet via telehealth is almost as easy as picking up a prescription at a local pharmacy.

Five students at the Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing at Eastern Oregon University and three community members know this firsthand after taking part in a telehealth simulation program recently in La Grande.

The students played the role of nurses conducting telehealth sessions. The future nurses, using computers, talked with people portraying patients with COVID-19 who had been sent home from hospitals with telehealth kits. The “patients” included Warren Moran of La Grande, who quickly learned how to send the nursing students information about his blood pressure, blood oxygen level, heart rate, temperature and more, before beginning his portrayal. Moran said using his telehealth kit was far from complicated.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Jocelyn Brown (right) and Ausha Beckrich, students of the Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, demonstrate usage of a tablet computer for use in telemedicine on Monday, May 11, 2021.

“It is very user friendly,” the La Grande resident said.

Nursing students talked with Moran and the other two community members during videoconference calls. The simu-

lated telehealth sessions gave students the opportunity to learn how to detect health condition cues when communicating with a patient over the internet, such as by paying

attention to speech patterns.

“We listened to see if patients were finishing their sentences,” said nursing student Ausha Beckrich.

She said people who trail off when talking likely are experiencing breathing problems.

Moran portrayed someone with a blood oxygen level of 93%, which is borderline in terms of whether they need to receive oxygen at a hospital. Moran, during the simulation, made a point of completing his sentences, which indicated to the nursing students he likely did not need to go to the hospital, Beckrich said.

The simulation also provided students with opportunities to see how telehealth can be an educational tool. During one simulation, a woman portrayed a diabetic whose blood sugar spiked, even though she had been consuming little more than tea. The practicing students asked the woman if she was putting anything in her tea. She said honey.

See, **Telehealth**/Page 5A

### INDEX

Business.....1B	Dear Abby.....8B	Obituaries.....3A
Classified.....3B	Horoscope.....4B	Opinion.....4A
Comics.....7B	Letters.....4A	Spiritual.....6A
Crossword.....3B	Lottery.....3A	State.....8A

### WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b> 51 Low Cloudy		<b>Friday</b> 74/47 Mostly cloudy
--	------------------------------------	--	---

### CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 55  
3 sections, 24 pages  
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
More contact info on Page 4A.



SATURDAY

AVENUE OF FLAGS RETURNS

Online at [lagrandeobserver.com](http://lagrandeobserver.com)