

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

May 15, 2021

WEEKEND EDITION

\$1.50

COVID-19

Got your shots? OK to drop the mask

Oregon following the new guidance effective May 13

By **ZEKE MILLER** and **MICHAEL BALSAMO**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a major step toward returning to pre-pandemic life, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people on Thursday, May 13, allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings.

“Today is a great day for America,” President Joe Biden said during a Rose Garden address heralding the new guidance, an event where he and his staff went without masks. Hours earlier in the Oval Office, where Biden was meeting with vaccinated Republican lawmakers, he led the group in removing their masks when the guidance was announced.

“If you are fully vaccinated, you no longer need to wear a mask,” he said, summarizing the new guidance and encouraging more Americans to roll up their sleeves. “Get vaccinated — or wear a mask until you do.”

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced Oregon as of May 13 will follow the new guidance, which applies only to fully vaccinated individuals.

“That means Oregonians who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear masks or social distance in most public spaces,” Brown said in a prepared statement.

The guidance still calls for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings, such as buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, but it will help clear the way for reopening workplaces, schools and other venues — even removing the need for social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated.

Brown also said the Oregon Health Authority will provide updated guidance for businesses, employers and others to allow the option of lifting mask and physical distancing requirements after verifying vaccination status. And businesses may prefer to continue operating under the current

See, **Mask/Page 5A**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Union County sheriff's deputy Lani Jones speaks to a pet owner about a noise complaint she received from a neighbor about a dog barking on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Dog barking calls, which are one of the most common calls the animal enforcement officers receive, are an opportunity for deputies to educate the public about possible solutions and keep communities civil.

The four-legged beat

Union County's animal enforcement duo stays busy

By **ALEX WITTWER**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Union County Sheriff's Office deputy Lani Jones was on the lookout Wednesday morning, May 12, for loose cattle on the outskirts of Summerville.

Her police vehicle kicked up dust as she arrived where someone had reported the livestock — only to find the cattle lazily grazing a field in the sun.

As an animal enforcement officer, Jones said her responsibilities are much more than serving as the county's official “dogcatcher,” a term she said carries a pejorative not unlike “ambulance driver” for emergency medical technicians. Jones, along with deputy Patricia Kelly, her fellow animal enforcement officer, are responsible for handling all animal-related calls in the county — from wayward dogs to vagabond bovines. With thousands of animals in the county, the two find themselves frequently inundated with service calls.

Jones recalled an incident several years prior where the sheriff's office had to confiscate underfed and abused livestock, and keep the animals nearly four



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A horse grazes outside a La Grande home on Friday, May 7, 2021. Rural areas like Union County come with a host of challenges to animal enforcement officers in comparison to metropolitan areas including instances of loose livestock and working animals.

months. During that time, Jones had to learn to become a rancher — though with help and assistance from the community. That meant feeding, providing shelter and giving medical attention to the animals.

By the time the sheriff's office was able to auction off the livestock to cover accrued costs, the evidence had multiplied.

Education first

Jones left the cattle and headed toward Union, taking backroads.

“I have all the shortcuts,” Jones said. Jones has lived in Union County for most of her life, and has spent nearly 20 years working for the sheriff's office. Her official role is a civil deputy responsible

See, **Animals/Page 5A**

Downtown pocket park on the upswing

Small site to become a pollinator garden full of native plants

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Three years ago Reynolds Park on Washington Avenue in La Grande had bright sunflowers but was waiting for its chance to shine again.

La Grande Boy Scout Matt Valentine created the pocket park in 1986 for his Eagle project. The site has lost some of

its luster since. Then Katie Boula stepped forward.

Boula asked the La Grande Parks and Recreation Department if she could begin working at the park as a volunteer. Now the sunflowers are gone but the park again has much more than pocket-sized appeal. There is not a weed in sight, and the park is a botanical oasis, filled with well-cared for plants, many of which are native to Northeastern Oregon.

Stu Spence, director La Grande's parks department, said the revitalization is a major credit to Boula.

“She transformed it with hours and hours of volunteer time. She is just a great volunteer,” Spence said.

And she is not done yet. Boula said she plans to keep adding to the native plants in place, which now include two types of milkweed plus golden rod, chokecherry and mountain ash, which are small ornamental trees. In the process of adding native plants, Boula said she hopes to transform the park into a pollinator garden. This will be a place that attracts birds and

See, **Park/Page 5A**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A trio of tulips grows in Reynolds Park, La Grande, which has received a recent facelift and much-needed attention.

INDEX

Classified.....2B	Outdoors.....1B	Northwest.....6A
Comics.....5B	Horoscope.....2B	Obituaries.....3A
Crossword.....2B	Letters.....4A	Opinion.....4A
Dear Abby.....6B	Lottery.....3A	Sports.....7A

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Sunday
	45 LOW		84/47
	Clear		Sunny and warm

CONTACT US

541-963-3161
Issue 56
2 sections, 14 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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



TUESDAY

NEW DOCTOR DURING A PANDEMIC

Online at lagrandeobserver.com