



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Lou Gerber, left, judges a piece of artwork at the Union County Fairgrounds on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021.

FAIR

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the position off and on since 2017. While it may be her first year as fair manager, Gover-Shaw has lived her whole life in La Grande and attended the Union County Fair frequently.

“She’s wonderful to work with,” said Union County Fair Board President Jamie Jo Haddock. “We ran with Margaret for a while and then she handed the torch to Kathy. It’s a fairly new board, so we’re all learning.”

Adjusting to COVID-19

As the board looks to bring the fair back to La Grande for the first time since 2019, certain challenges related to the pandemic have been unavoidable.

“Fairs are important to connect our agricultural community

to everybody else who doesn’t get to experience these things,” Haddock said. “So, it’s very important that we bring the fair back.”

The Union County Fair will be without the fan-favorite carnival rides this year, but Bubble Fun will provide inflatable bounce houses, obstacle courses, bungee jumping and bumper balls.

Davis Amusement Cascadia Inc. typically supplied the carnival rides, but the company went out of business in January 2020 after 80 years. While COVID-19 has had similar effects on amusement companies across the country, Union County Fair board members hope to bring back the rides next year.

“We want to bring the carnival back,” Haddock said. “Bubble Fun was just very willing to help this year.”

According to Haddock, the board hopes to have both carnival

rides and Bubble Fun at next year’s fair. Frank Davis, owner of Bubble Fun, brought the inflatables to the Union County Fair all the way from Paso Robles, California. Scheduling entertainment has been one of the many challenges for Gover-Shaw in coordinating her first county fair, but she said she is rolling with the punches.

“Unfortunately, I got on really late, but thank goodness I have an amazing board,” Gover-Shaw said.

According to the new fair manager, four regional carnival businesses went out of business during the pandemic. In addition to entertainment shortages, the lack of restaurant employees has impacted vendors as well.

“We have a lot of the same vendors back, ones that have been here year after year after year,” she said. “We do have some that were not able to be here this year

because they did not have enough employees to cover it.”

Even so, the Union County Fair will have upward of 60 vendors in attendance throughout the week, with most opening from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Likewise, the Union County Fair has a full schedule of entertainment during the week including live music acts and a hypnotist.

After last year’s cancelation, the board of directors is looking to bring the fair back in full force.

“We have more animals than we’ve ever had and we have more art and photography than we’ve ever had,” Haddock said. “I feel like it’s coming back really strong this year.”

Building a reputation

Gover-Shaw hopes that her first year as fair manager precedes more successful fairs and

continued growth of the event in years to come. According to Haddock, the board aims to improve plumbing at the fairgrounds as well as implementing a sewer system.

As a lifelong La Grande resident, Gover-Shaw has a personal mission to continue enhancing the Union County Fair.

“I’m planning on being the fair manager for a while,” she said. “With this amazing board we have a lot of improvements we want to do out here.”

The Union County Fair officially started on Aug. 4 and extends through Aug. 7. After canceling the event last year, the board members have high hopes for this summer’s event.

“As a community we’re trying to make it bigger and better,” Gover-Shaw said. “Everybody’s just got to get out and support it, so we can make it better every year.”



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Linda Schreiner inspects a quilt for judging at the Union County Fairgrounds on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021.

HEALTH

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she said. “That’s true in rural areas where there is only one hospital.”

And without that market power, hospitals have no incentive or need to lower their costs. But if price transparency doesn’t have the ability to lower prices, then what entity or law could?

“The way that health insurance has been lowered has been through negotiation with powerful entities, such as Medicare or Medicaid,” Sharma said.

For the average consumer, Sharma admitted, the ability to influence prices of health care is low, and the patients mostly rely on their physician to make choices for them regarding their health care.

“(Health care prices are) very inelastic because your life and your health is at stake,” Sharma said, “and because consumers rely on professionals rather than their own judgement to make choices.”

Succinctly, a patient who needs an appendectomy isn’t likely to spend their precious time deliberating over prices when their life is in danger — they’ll go to the nearest hospital and face the consequences of payment later.

But for other procedures, such as diagnostic testing, the outcome isn’t as clear; even less clear is the notion that consumers would use price transparency to their advantage.

“There is a lot of chatter about, ‘Oh, if I knew about the price I would actually price-shop,’” said Atul Gupta, an assistant professor of health care management at University of Pennsylvania during a university podcast on health care transparency. “The evidence suggests that a very small fraction of people who have that tool available to them actually use it.”

“Price transparency is a great concept in principle,”

Sharma said, “but is incredibly hard to implement in practice.”

Following the laws

Most hospitals in Eastern Oregon follow the laws regarding price transparency — all hospitals in the region have price comparison tools readily available to patients on their web portals allowing them to compare prices between typical procedures. Compliance with the full extent of the law, however, is less than ideal.

Out of the seven hospitals that serve most of Eastern Oregon, only four follow the second requirement of the transparency laws, and completely forgo a machine-readable file.

And the consequences for ignoring the law are minor; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which oversees the price transparency laws, is allowed to fine hospitals up to \$300 per day for non-compliance. For a full year, this works out to just more than \$100,000. CHI St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton, in comparison, on its 2020 tax form reported revenue exceeding \$18.7 million.

CMS officials are proposing to stiffen those fines to a minimum civil monetary penalty of \$300 per day that would apply to smaller hospitals with a bed count of 30 or fewer, according to the center, and apply a penalty of \$10 per bed per day for hospitals with a bed count greater than 30, not to exceed \$5,500 per day.

That would raise the maximum penalty for non-compliance to just above \$2 million. But even with a heavy fine, some hospitals are unsure about what that machine-readable file would entail, and whether or not that information would be of particular usefulness to analysts and app developers.

“The challenge with the machine-readable files is that the definitions of those

are different depending on the hospital,” Bittner of Trinity Health said. “Without common definitions, then the comparability of that information is significantly lacking.”

Information overload

Further, Sharma contended that for the average

health care consumer, price transparency is rendered nearly ineffective due to the volume of information required to make informed choices regarding care.

“The informational requirements on patients is enormous,” Sharma said. “Even if you had perfect price transparency, and even if that transparent

price was incredibly well customized, there is still so much uncertainty regarding exactly what would be required, that it would be difficult to sort through these possibly hundreds of price combinations for the five or six hospitals that are reasonably available.”

Bittner said hospitals in the Trinity Health system,

such as St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City, are working toward increasing price transparency across the board to help its members become better informed about the prices they pay for services.

Whether or not price transparency will help lower costs, however, remains the question.

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NORTHWOOD MANUFACTURING

Thursday, August 5th

8:00 am-10:00 am Fair Opens
10:00 am-2:00 pm Exhibit Booths Open
2:00 pm-5:00 pm Denny Langford Small Stage
5:00 pm-6:00 pm Tammy the Hypnotist Large Stage
6:00 pm-6:30 pm Beck's Studio of Dance
6:30 pm-8:00 pm Mutton Busting & Stick Horse Race at Mavericks Arena
8:00 pm-10:00 pm Tammy the Hypnotist Large Stage
Fair Closes

Friday, August 6th

8:00 am-9:00 am Fair Opens
9:00 am-10:00 am Open Class Dairy Goats
10:00 am-2:00 pm Exhibit Booths Open
2:00 pm-3:00 pm Glitter Funk Large Stage
3:00 pm-4:00 pm Pee-Wee Show
4:00 pm-6:00 pm Fair Parade Line Up
6:00 pm-8:00 pm Fair Parade Downtown
8:00 pm-10:00 pm Too Slim & The Taildraggers Large Stage
Fair Closes

Saturday, August 7th

8:00 am-10:00 am Fair Opens
10:00 am-4:00 pm Exhibit Booths Open
4:00 pm-8:00 pm Wasteland Kings Large Stage
8:00 pm-10:00 pm Wasteland Kings Large Stage
Fair Closes

Thank you Dr. Stephen Bump for giving us 30 years

of your dedication and kindness while providing excellent medical care to our community.

We will miss you.

From your GRH family— we wish you all the best that a happy retirement brings!

It is richly deserved.

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