

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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WEEKEND EDITION

\$1.50

PGG HQ building sold at auction

Braseth Properties buys building for \$1.8 million

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The former headquarters of Pendleton Grain Growers is officially off the market.

More than five years after members of the grain cooperative voted to dissolve the organization, PGG agreed to sell its 42,000-square-foot building to the La Grande-based Braseth Properties for \$1.8 million, according to Umatilla County property records. The new owners posted a sign at the building advertising for open commercial driver and sales positions, but they did not return a request for comment as of press time.

Braseth Properties does business as Eastern Oregon Rentals & Storage, a personal storage company with facilities in La Grande and Island City. But the Braseth family has its fingers in several pots in the La Grande area.

The Braseth family also owns the similarly named Eastern Oregon Rentals & Sales, a heavy equipment rental company with locations in La Grande, Pendleton and Baker City. The Braseths bought Eastern Oregon Rentals & Sales in 1989, four years after they acquired Mountain West Moving & Storage, another La Grande business.

Once a steadfast presence through Eastern Oregon, PGG methodically sold its assets after the dissolution vote in 2015. In the years that followed, PGG sold its energy division, upcountry elevators and terminals to other companies. The co-op's Umatilla County retailers all were sold into private hands and repurposed.

But PGG's Pendleton properties took a little longer to move. The former PGG Energy building was sold in 2020 to Hines Meat Co., a La Grande butchery that now uses the facility as

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COVID-19 SURGES IN UNION COUNTY



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Nancy Davila, immunization coordinator for the Center for Human Development, sets up privacy screens on Friday, Aug. 6, 2021, for the weekly vaccination clinic at the center in La Grande. Union County vaccination rates have dropped considerably in recent weeks, with the adult inoculation rate stalling at 48%, while COVID-19 cases continue to rise.

Trending up

Union County sees 800% increase in COVID-19 over the last three weeks

By CARLOS FUENTES
The Observer

LA GRANDE — For the last several months, the 25 beds at Grande Ronde Hospital have been plenty for the county's low COVID-19 rates. But with rates rising in recent weeks, the hospital has been stretching its resources thin.

As the county's only hospital, Grande Ronde has taken on the responsibility of bringing COVID-19 patients from other smaller hospitals in Eastern Oregon, such as Wallowa Memorial Hospital.

And with Union County — along with the rest of the state — facing an increase in cases, the hospital is seeing a spike in COVID-19 patients.

"We know the delta variant is highly contagious and more efficient in transmissions. We are experiencing that reality

first hand and it has led to an increase in hospitalized patients, which will in turn affect hospital bed availability," Mardi Ford, director of communications and marketing at Grande Ronde Hospital, said in an email.

In the last three weeks, Union County saw an 800% increase in positive cases, from 11 cases on the week of July 12 to 101 cases the week of July 26, according to Ford.

The Oregon Health Authority's COVID-19 weekly workplace outbreak report on Aug. 4 showed Grande Ronde Hospital had 12 total COVID-19 cases between July 15 and July 27.

"While we are understandably disappointed in the news, it is important to be reminded how quickly these cases have escalated over the past month," Ford said.

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Demonstrators hold "Make masks optional" signs outside Central Elementary School ahead of the school board meeting Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021.

Demonstrators decry mask rules

By DICK MASON and DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Central Elementary School's gymnasium was filled with tension Wednesday night, Aug. 4.

The gym was the site of a La Grande School Board meeting packed by a group of concerned residents voicing their objections against Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's July 29 directive mandating that all students wear masks in Oregon

schools this fall because of increasing COVID-19 rates.

Robin Maille, chair of the La Grande School Board, like everyone on the board, listened intently to the input.

"It was important that they be able to express their points of view," she said.

The heart of the tense meeting was a 45-minute public forum, where all but one of about 15 speakers spoke out in opposition to the mask

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Gravel cycling takes people on the roads less traveled

Dirty Freehub provides routes online

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — An online nonprofit group that promotes gravel bicycle routes is taking advantage of the many miles of gravel roads in

Wallowa County, as well as the history and beauty of the county by establishing routes for gravel cycling.

The Bend-based Dirty Freehub maps out routes it shares with cyclists. The group has a guide to more than 8,000 miles of gravel bike routes across Oregon, Washington, California, Arizona and Tasmania.

So far, the group has mapped four five-star routes in the county, according to

Executive Director Linda English.

"One will go through Zumwalt (Prairie) Preserve," English said in a press release. "We will have one that starts in Enterprise and uses Hurricane Ridge, another that starts in Imnaha and another that uses logging/forest roads up toward Hells Canyon Lookout."

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Linda English/Dirty Freehub

Gravel cyclists traverse a route between Enterprise and Joseph recently. From left, are Kevin English, Chris Kutach and Kelly Kutach.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Sunday
	58 Low		71/48
	Partly cloudy		Partly sunny

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TUESDAY

EXPERIMENTING WITH PEPPERS

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