## **CASES**

Continued from Page A1

last week for COVID-19 were in quarantine after testing positive and the other four were absent because of close contacts.

The week before, two of the six staff members out because of COVID-19 had tested positive for the virus.

Of the the five staff out because of positive COVID-19 tests last week, four were from La Grande Middle School and one was a staff member not based at a specific school.

Fifteen of the 21 students out after testing positive for COVID-19 were at the secondary school



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza delivers opening remarks at the school board meeting held on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021.

level. Nine were La Grande Middle School students and six were La Grande High School students. Elementary school statistics show six students out because of positive COVID-19 tests three from Central Elementary, two from Island City Elementary and one from Greenwood Elementary.

La Grande Middle School had the highest number of students out due to close contacts with 22. LMS was followed by Central, which had 11 students out due to close contacts. Island City had five students out, and Greenwood had four students out.

The school district has also released its September COVID-19 report, which

indicates that 323 students and staff were out at some point during the month after testing positive or due to close contacts. Mendoza said this is an reflection of what the school district is facing as it continues functioning during a pandemic.

"Even though there is a lot of COVID out there, our school district is still operating. We are still fighting to give students the best education we can," he said. "We want to make it happen."

Mendoza noted that in doing so the school district's staff also is receiving an education.

"We are learning how to operate during a pandemic," the superintendent said.

reation Department. The fields' primary usage will

University baseball and

opportunity for tourna-

ments at both fields will be a positive thing for both

the local sports programs

and the city's infrastruc-

Little League.

be La Grande baseball and softball, Eastern Oregon

Spence noted that the

## **TURF**

Continued from Page A1

Following the renovations in La Grande, that vision will exist for the local baseball and softball teams that frequent Pioneer Park.

"Everything went really smoothly," Starwalt said.

According to Spence, there are several small projects that still need completion following the turf installation. The city will conduct irrigation and layout procedures on the outfield of Trice Community field and perform hydroseeding where there is currently dirt from the renovations. At Optimist Field, some areas will need additional seeding in order to level out the surface of the playing area near first base.

'Our goal is to get seed down ASAP," Spence said.

According to Starwalt, the turf fields typically last approximately 10 years before needing an upgrade or replacement. He noted that one of the biggest advantages of having a turf field is the decrease in rain delays and cancellations. The parks and recreation department will maintain brushing the turf and replenishing the rubber on a regular basis.

Another positive factor of a turf field is expanded availability in the winter months, when most baseball fields in Oregon are

"For the kids who are driven and want to work on their game in the offseason, nothing really holds them back," Starwalt said.

#### **Enhanced** performance

unpiayable.

The turf fields will be a major draw for hosting teams from all across the region, as well as improving the home teams' ability to train and perform.

According to Cody Bowen, co-head coach of the La Grande High School softball team, the turf will allow the team to train much earlier in the offseason than in years past. The softball team previ-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

in between games is prac-

after the conclusion of the

previous game with little

**New opportunities** 

two new fields will be

Upon completion, the

accessible to the public by

reservation with certain

permissions through the

La Grande Parks and Rec-

tically eliminated with

to switch onto the field

wait time.

turf. Teams will be able

Brandon Starwalt, an employee with Northwest Sports Turf Solutions and brother of the company's owner, Ryan Starwalt, works on the renovation of Optimist Field on Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021, in La Grande.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Keaton Weaver, an employee with Northwest Sports Turf Solutions, measures and cuts brown turf Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021, as part of Optimist Field's new makeover at La Grande's Pioneer Park.

ously had to wait to begin on-field training until the rain decreased, while some teams with turf in other areas of the state would be able to get a head start.

Prior to the turf installation, the outfield at Trice Community Field had a severe drainage problem that often cause unplayable conditions. The project

fixed these drainage issues, which were a result of the field being built on what was originally a wetland area.

"The field never drained properly, so it was like playing on a wet sponge year-round," Bowen said. "Now, we have less chance of injuries, and a proper field surface will improve

the kids' abilities to react and respond to the ball."

The high-quality playing surface is expected to draw in visiting teams and tournaments, and the quick turnaround between games is another added bonus of a turf field. According to Starwalt, the time that would be spent preparing the dirt infields

ture. The new pitching mound on Optimist Field is removable, which will allow for two softball games to be played at once during tournaments.

"I think it will be a big draw for folks that want to come here and play on them," he said. "We plan on offering several tournaments throughout the year."

Spence emphasized that the project came together through community involvement and outreach. With the new turf being placed, the city of La Grande secured a major upgrade in its facilities that will benefit the local sports programs and the community as a whole.

"Seeing the project come together with all the community supporters has been very rewarding," Spence said. "We couldn't have done it without them. It's just the way we do things in La Grande. People are very generous and have been willing to give to improve our facilities."

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# **CHARGES**

Continued from Page A1

Law enforcement seized two handguns, a pipe bomb and other items of evidence. Officers also found what appeared to be methamphetamine, marijuana and alcohol in Burns' bag along with the firearms and explosive device.

Both O'Quinn and Burns were lodged into the Union County Jail.

"Law enforcement acted immediately," Lt. Jason



endepotstreet@gmail.com



was hurt and thankfully we had a witness who became a victim that was able to give us a very good description of the suspects

Hays, of the

Police Depart-

fully, nobody

La Grande

ment, said.

"Thank-

involved." According to Hays, pre-

by O'Quinn could point toward a crime spree. The investigation is still ongoing and additional

charges could be filed. State court records show that O'Quinn's criminal history in Union County extends to 2016, with convictions for unlawful entry into a vehicle, methamphetamine possession, misdemeanor theft and trespassing. O'Quinn also

in Union County since 2020, including felony criminal mischief and possession of a burglary tool in one case and felony burglary, altering or removing identification information on an AR-15 short barreled rifle and felon in possession of a firearm in another case.

Burns has a pending case from September in Union County regarding a misdemeanor theft charge.







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