

STATE BRIEFS

179 COVID cases linked to Round-Up

PENDLETON — Umatilla County health officials have traced nearly 180 COVID-19 cases to events that occurred during the week of the Pendleton Round-Up.

But the spike in cases that followed the week-long rodeo seems to be on a slight decline, said Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara.

“I’m hoping we’ve gotten past the initial bump,” Fiumara said after reporting the 179 cases. “Time will tell. It will be important for people who are sick to stay home.”

Last week’s total amounted to 487 COVID-19 cases, making it the county’s third most infectious week since the pandemic started.

It’s a positive sign after an alarming initial bump in cases, Fiumara said, but infection rates remain far higher than they were before the delta variant surge began in mid-July.

“It’s hard to be happy with cases dropping to 50 or 60 each day,” Fiumara said.

Officials OK long-lasting fire retardant

BOISE, Idaho — U.S. officials on Tuesday, Oct. 5, approved a long-lasting fire retardant that could significantly aid in fighting destructive wildfires.

The U.S. Forest Service approved Perimeter Solutions’ fire retardant that’s intended to be used as a preventive measure and can last for months. It’s similar to the red-dyed retardant dropped from aircraft, but is clear and lasts much longer.

“The real game-changer here is once you treat it, you can forget it,” said Edward Goldberg, chief executive officer of Perimeter Solutions. “It’s there for the whole year.”

The company said its primary use will be by industrial customers such as utility companies and railroads, but can also be used at residential and commercial properties.

Goldberg said the product will likely be most effective in the drier climate of the U.S. West, and could be applied in the spring to offer fire protection throughout the wildfire season. He said traditional retardant is effective until there’s rain, but the new product will remain effective even after a couple inches of rain.

Proud Boy guilty of assault in protests

PORTLAND — An Oregon jury on Tuesday, Oct. 5, found a member of the far-right group the Proud Boys guilty of assault, menacing and unlawful use of a weapon for pulling out a loaded revolver, firing paintballs and spraying bear mace at people during Portland protests last year.

Prosecutors called Alan Swinney a “vigilante cowboy,” while Swinney and his lawyer argued he was acting in self-defense against “agitators” who were harassing him.

The charges stem from demonstrations Aug. 15 and Aug. 22, 2020, as clashes erupted between right-wing and left-wing groups armed with paintballs, bear mace, pepper spray, umbrellas and shields, The Oregonian reported. The protests were among rallies that were held nationwide after a white police officer murdered George Floyd, a Black man, in Minneapolis.

Swinney, 51, of Texas, came to Portland “dressed for battle” in August because of his “hatred for the left, for antifa,” Deputy District Attorney Reid C. Schweitzer told jurors in his closing arguments.

—EO Media Group and The Associated Press

‘Exhilarating’: Autism advocate reaches social media stardom

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When the social media star announced in a video that her 5-year-old son has autism, William Wehrli knew he wanted to reach out.

Wehrli has autism and is a local autism advocate living in Pendleton. He wanted to tell her that doctors predicted he would never be independent or graduate; that he proved them wrong when he obtained his master’s degree; that he has his own home, pays his rent, owns a car, cares for a dog, cooks, cleans and works many jobs.

He made a video on Sept. 5 on TikTok saying just that.

“This was me assuring that her son would also be able to succeed and be independent,” Wehrli said.

He was shocked when Laura Clery responded.

Clery is an actress and comedian who consistently receives millions of views across multiple social media platforms. She took a video with her husband reacting to Wehrli’s video. They smiled, held their hands over their heart and



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
William Wehrli and his dog Rossy stand on the porch of Wehrli’s home Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021 in Pendleton. Wehrli, who has autism and is a local autism advocate, made a video supported a boy who has autism, and the video went viral.

blew kisses. As with all of her videos, thousands of people commented back.

Who’s cutting onions? Clery wrote in the comments.

“I’m not crying my eyes are just sweating,” a commenter said. “My grandson has autism. This video makes me so happy. Thanks for sharing.”

Messages flooded Wehrli’s accounts as the video spread rapidly and his following skyrocketed. Many of the messages were from people who have loved ones with autism. They said doctors had told them the same thing — that their child would never succeed — and seeing Wehrli’s video gave them hope.

“I was definitely surprised,” Wehrli said. “In fact, I responded by going for a run with my dog because it was so exhilarating for me.”

Wehrli was thrilled. He said it felt great to see his video having an impact. He responded to many of the messages, providing

people with advice. But then the comments became endless, and he became overwhelmed.

“What they don’t realize is that I’m only one person and I can’t respond to everybody,” he said. “All those messages I was getting was just so draining. A lot of people think it would be fun to be famous, but it can be very overwhelming. It was draining my mental health and taking a toll on me.”

He turned off direct messaging to all his accounts. Instead, he pointed commenters toward his website, where they could sign up for paid

coaching. Some people were pushy, insisting that he dole out advice for free. Others signed up for sessions.

Wehrli helps parents navigate the challenges that come with having children with autism. Whether it be in school or at home, his goal is to draw on his personal experiences to help parents better understand their children.

“I would give them my take on what the situation is like in their shoes to help them understand how to connect with their child and what I think they should do to help their child,” he said.

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