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In this 2018 file photo, a Narcan nasal device that delivers naloxone lies on a counter as a health educator gives instructions on how to administer it in the Brooklyn borough of New York. A joint release by Grande Ronde Hospital, Center for Human Development, La Grande Fire Department and La Grande Police Department on Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2021, said that there has been a recent uptick in heroin and fentanyl overdoses in Union County.

## Local authorities see increase in overdoses, issue joint warning

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — After an alarming increase in drug overdoses, local authorities have issued a joint warning.

Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics, Center for Human Development, La Grande Fire Department and La Grande Police Department released a statement on Tuesday, Nov. 23, to bring awareness to the recent uptick in heroin and fentanyl overdoses in Union County.

The Grande Ronde Hospital Emergency Department reported eight heroin overdoses in the six days prior to the statement, which is a 400% increase. The department typically sees two to three overdoses per month in Union County.

Also in the statement, the La Grande Police Department reported a significant increase in calls for response to overdoses in the last several weeks.

Based on information from revived patients, Grande Ronde Hospital Emergency Department staff suspect the current

heroin in the area of being tainted by additional drugs.

According to Grande Ronde Hospital, the uptick is the largest in recent history in Union County. The county has not experienced an increase like this since April, when tainted fentanyl spread around the area.

The statement noted that the Center for Human Development is suspecting a rise in drugs that may be more potent than in the past. Public health officials are seeing an uptick in individuals who are seeking out fentanyl, which the statement says may have become a primary drug in the county.

According to Carrie Brogotti, public health administrator at CHD, accidental overdoses can result from a number of factors.

“People may be taking substances thinking they are one thing but are actually mixed with other things that are more potent or have a different effect than they are expecting,” Brogotti said. “They may also be mixing substances in ways

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## LABOR SHORTAGE



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Police departments in Pendleton, La Grande and Baker City say they have had little luck finding applicants for their open positions in the fall of 2021. “I’ve been with the city of La Grande for 28 years, and 20 to 25 years ago we would see 150 applications for one opening for a police officer position — and that has been trending in what I feel is a negative direction for a long time,” said La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell.

## CALL TO DUTY

Law enforcement faces hiring woes as applications dwindle

By ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

**B**AKER CITY — Add law enforcement officers to the growing list of professions feeling the brunt of a labor shortage and facing hiring woes.

Police departments in Pendleton, La Grande and Baker City are having little luck finding applicants for their open positions, and the police chiefs are flummoxed about the reasons why.

“We’ve had zero applicants,” said Ty Doby, chief of the Baker City Police Department.

Doby, who worked for 25 years for the Oregon State Police before joining the Baker City Police Department in 2019, recalls a time when a single opening brought in hundreds of applications, giving law enforcement agencies a wide variety of potential applicants



Bell



Byram



Doby

to choose from. Those numbers have dwindled over the past year — and Doby said he has had to actively pursue applicants and ask them to apply for the job.

The Baker City Police Department is not alone in the struggle to find qualified applicants.

“I’ve been with the city of La Grande for 28 years, and 20 to 25 years ago we would see 150 applications for one opening for a police officer position — and that has been trending in what I feel is a negative direction for a long time,” said La Grande Police

Chief Gary Bell.

Bell’s department is having only slightly better luck hiring, with nearly 15 qualified applicants vying for two open positions, he said, but the situation is being made more difficult with an increasing number of law enforcement officers retiring or resigning.

“The last 18 to 24 months, we have seen a lot of our long-time employees — police officers — retire, and so we have been doing more hiring than what maybe we would, or have over the course of the last 15 to 20 years,” Bell said.

To attract lateral transfers — poaching police officers from other regions — Bell created a \$6,000 hiring bonus for certified experienced police officers, hoping to draw in officers from across the state. So far, that effort

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## Trees for sale help fund Philly trip

Local schools selling Christmas trees in downtown La Grande

By ALEX WITTWER  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Downtown La Grande became a lot more green over the weekend — albeit temporarily.

Dozens of Christmas trees were set up for sale on Friday, Nov. 26, at a downtown La Grande cafe, The Local. The trees are part of a fundraising effort for the Union County Youth Heritage Group, the program behind the annual “Philly Trip” taken by Imbler and Elgin eighth grade students who travel to Philadelphia and

other Eastern United States cities to visit historic landmarks.

“It’s kind of a whole cultural American history experience,” said Ken Patterson, a volunteer with the program. “Unless you’ve gone on the trip, you can’t really appreciate it. Until you’ve actually gone, then you’re like, ‘Wow, this is amazing.’”

Parents, students and volunteers were all smiles while they unloaded the Christmas cargo last week. Close to 100 trees were set up for sale in the courtyard of The Local at 1508 Adams Avenue, as patrons watched from inside the ice cream and coffee shop.

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Keira Counsell, right, and Karlee Patterson set up Christmas trees for sale at The Local in downtown La Grande on Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. The trees are being sold as a part of a fundraising campaign for the Imbler and Elgin schools’ annual trip to Philadelphia.

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Full forecast on the back of B section  
Tonight 43 LOW Cloudy  
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