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COVID-19 concerns continue to linger

Officials urge caution amid omicron unknowns as holidays loom

By **BRYCE DOLE** and **DAVIS CARBAUGH**

EO Media Group

PENDLETON — In many parts of Eastern Oregon, coronavirus infection rates have fallen to the lowest levels in months, according to state data and regional public health officials.

But with the omicron variant now having reached the United States, prompting travel restrictions while scientists worldwide have sounded an alarm, regional health officials are urging caution as families gather for the holidays.

“My advice for the typical Umatilla County resident would be, yes, this is something we may have to deal with down the road,” Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said of the omicron variant, which scientists say has the potential to be more transmissible and less susceptible to existing vaccines due to a high number of mutations. “It’s not something that will have to be dealt with today or tomorrow, but it might be next week.”

Plummeting numbers

Average daily coronavirus cases in Umatilla County have fallen to the lowest levels since April, the Oregon Health Authority reported. In Morrow County, case rates in recent weeks have fallen to among the lowest in Oregon.

“Casewise, we’re in about as good of a position as we could have ever hoped to be,” Fiumara said. “Over the last several weeks, our numbers have plummeted. And it’s a good thing.”

Since the peak of the delta variant surge that followed the Pendleton Round-Up, weekly cases in Umatilla County have declined for more than two months. Last week, the county reported just 41 cases total, according to Fiumara. Compare that to September, when

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WAITING FOR STORMS

A couple inches of snow covered the slopes at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort on Sunday, Dec. 5, 2021. The ski area, in the Elkhorn Mountains west of North Powder, needs about 2 feet of snow for a partial opening.

Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Promising start evaporates as Anthony Lakes waits for snow

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

NORTH POWDER — When you run a ski area, the term “record high temperature” might as well be one four-letter word.

A couple of early fall storms whitened the slopes at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort but that promising start devolved into a period of unseasonably mild temperatures, according to Chelsea Judy, marketing director for the resort in the Elkhorn Mountains west of North Powder.

Although a bit of snow still lingers in sheltered areas, there’s not enough to thrust a measuring stick into it to get a

reading, Judy said.

“I wouldn’t call it a (snow) base yet,” she said.

That was just a day after the temperature rose to 54 degrees at the Baker City Airport, breaking the previous record high, for the first day of December, of 53 set in 2013.

But Judy points out that at Anthony Lakes, with the highest base elevation (7,100 feet) among the Northwest’s ski areas, the transition to full-fledged winter can be, and often is, rapid.

“A couple of good storms” can sometimes be enough to kick off the ski season, she said.

Typically, Anthony Lakes needs about 2 feet of snow to start running the lift,

although a deeper base is required to fully open all the downhill runs.

The weather forecast looked promising late last week, but the National Weather Service, after consulting its sophisticated computer models, tempered its initial predictions for significant snowfall in the mountains this week.

Weak storms brought light snow to the area late Dec. 4, and again Dec. 6, and cooler temperatures, and a chance for more snow, is forecast for later in the week as well.

With snow scarce across Oregon and the Northwest, Judy said she expects skiers and snowboarders will be eager to make

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Senior center to reopen for in-person dining

The center has been closed to dining for 20 months due to COVID-19

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A popular senior La Grande lunch stop is set to reopen after a 21-month closure.

The Union County Senior Center, 1504 N. Albany St., La Grande, will be serving meals again in its dining area beginning Monday, Dec. 15. The senior center has been closed to in-person dining since March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The senior center, which is operated by Community Connection of Northeast Oregon,

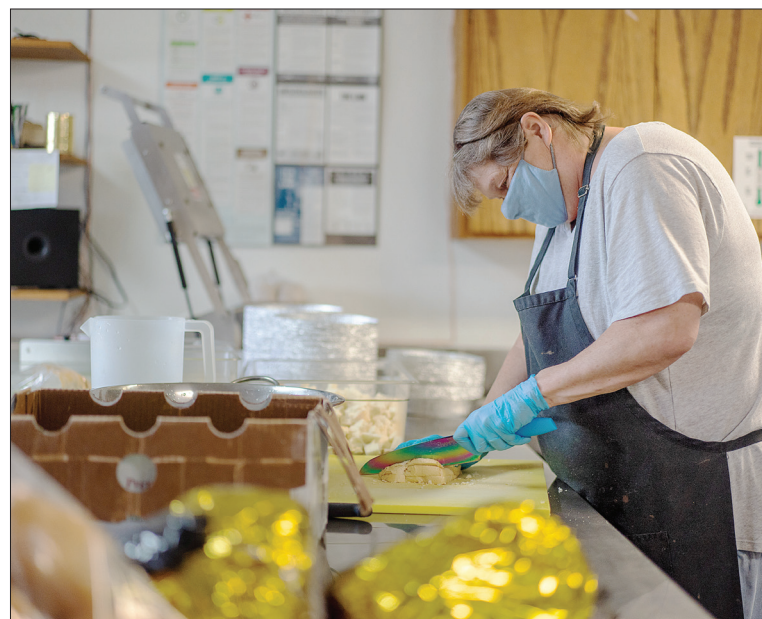
MORE INFORMATION

The Union County Senior Center’s in-person lunch on opening day, Monday, Dec. 15, will be free for all. After that, people coming to eat at the dining site are encouraged to make a \$3 donation per meal if they are older than 60 and \$5 if they are under 60. The meals are open to the public. Volunteers are needed at the Union County Senior Center to help with the reopening of its noon dining program. For information on volunteering call 541-963-7532.

is again to open its dining hall due to falling COVID-19 rates in Union County.

“We are so thrilled that we will be opening again. We feel blessed. It has been a long time coming,” said Sydney Gleeson, the Union County food services manager for Community

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Paula Webb, a member of the kitchen staff at the Union County Senior Center, cuts slices of bread for stuffing on Friday, Nov. 19, 2021. The senior center, run by Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, will again be serving lunch on weekdays in its dining area beginning Monday, Dec. 15.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 40 LOW Brief showers		Wednesday 45/27 Colder
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CONTACT US

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



THURSDAY

IMBLER GRADUATE RECEIVES SAFETY AWARD

Online at lagrandeobserver.com