

**TODAY**

**On Dec. 28, 2014,** the war in Afghanistan, fought for 13 bloody years and still raging, came to a formal end with a quiet flag-lowering ceremony in Kabul that marked the transition of the fighting from U.S.-led combat troops to the country's own security forces.

**In 1612,** Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei observed the planet Neptune, but mistook it for a star. (Neptune wasn't officially discovered until 1846 by Johann Gottfried Galle.)

**In 1832,** John C. Calhoun became the first vice president of the United States to resign, stepping down because of differences with President Andrew Jackson.

**In 1895,** the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, held the first public showing of their movies in Paris.

**In 1908,** a major earthquake followed by a tsunami devastated the Italian city of Messina, killing at least 70,000 people.

**In 1945,** Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance.

**In 1972,** Kim Il Sung, the premier of North Korea, was named the country's president under a new constitution.

**In 1973,** the Endangered Species Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

**In 1975,** the "Hail Mary pass" entered the football lexicon as Dallas quarterback Roger Staubach tossed the ball to Drew Pearson for an improbable 50-yard touchdown with 24 seconds left to help the Cowboys come back to edge the Minnesota Vikings 17-14.

**In 1981,** Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American "test-tube" baby, was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

**In 1991,** nine people died in a crush of people trying to get into a rap celebrity basketball game at City College in New York.

**In 2007,** Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was laid to rest as the country's army tried to quell a frenzy of rioting in the wake of her assassination.

**In 2015,** a grand jury in Cleveland declined to indict a white rookie police officer in the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a Black youngster who was shot while playing with what turned out to be a pellet gun.

**Ten years ago:** North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong Un, escorted his father's hearse in an elaborate state funeral, bowing somberly and saluting in front of tens of thousands of citizens who wailed and stamped their feet in grief for Kim Jong Il. Turkish warplanes mistakenly killed 35 smugglers and other villagers in an operation targeting Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Kaye Stevens, a singer and actor who performed with the Rat Pack and was a frequent guest on Johnny Carson's "The Tonight Show," died in The Villages, Florida, at age 79.

**Five years ago:** Film star Debbie Reynolds, who lit up the screen in "Singin' in the Rain" and other Hollywood classics, died at age 84 a day after losing her daughter, Carrie Fisher, who was 60. Former world No. 1 Ana Ivanovic said she was retiring from tennis after a series of injuries meant she could no longer play at the highest level.

**LOTTERY**

**Friday, Dec. 24, 2021**

**Megamillions**  
16-17-25-36-37  
Megaball: 16  
Megaplier: 2x  
Jackpot: \$201 million

**Lucky Lines**  
3-8-10-13-17-21-28-30  
Jackpot: \$56,000

**Pick 4**  
1 p.m.: 7-1-4-1  
4 p.m.: 4-8-0-5  
7 p.m.: 0-9-5-5  
10 p.m.: 4-1-5-3

**Saturday, Dec. 25, 2021**

**Powerball**  
27-29-45-55-58  
Powerball: 2  
Power Play: 3x  
Jackpot: \$416 million

**Megabucks**  
1-13-35-43-44-45  
Jackpot: \$7.5 million

**Lucky Lines**  
1-5-10-13-18-24-26-30  
Jackpot: \$57,000

**Pick 4**  
1 p.m.: 7-6-9-3  
4 p.m.: 9-0-7-9  
7 p.m.: 7-2-4-1  
10 p.m.: 7-5-8-4

**Win for Life**  
1-9-30-48

**Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021**

**Lucky Lines**  
2-5-10-16-18-23-25-32  
Estimated jackpot: \$58,000

**Pick 4**  
1 p.m.: 0-8-6-2  
4 p.m.: 6-1-0-9  
7 p.m.: 2-9-8-8  
10 p.m.: 9-6-9-5

# Ringling in 2022

Downtown ball drop, Metal at Midnight highlight La Grande's New Year's Eve events

By **DICK MASON** and **DAVIS CARBAUGH**

The Observer



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

**Ashley O'Toole, left, and Tyson Brooks pose for a photo with a lighted 2022 sign after installing the New Year's Eve ball on top of the Phoenix Apartments building on Depot Street in La Grande on Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021.**

**LA GRANDE —** La Grande's annual downtown New Year's Eve celebrations will be back in full force the evening of Friday, Dec. 31.

The celebration, hosted by La Grande Main Street Downtown, will again feature a block party and a ball drop. A year ago the outdoor downtown celebration had a ball drop but no block party due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The party will be able to be conducted this year because of Union County's falling COVID-19 infection rates.

"We are going to go full steam," said Ashley O'Toole, the founder of the ball drop and block party and an organizer of this year's event.

The party, which will be conducted at Adams Avenue and Depot Street, will start at 10 p.m.

Recorded music will be played at the party and there will be burn barrels and a warming tent offering free hot chocolate and cider.

A scavenger hunt is

planned in connection with the party. Participants will visit landmarks in La Grande and have their pictures taken.

The ball drop will start at 11:59 p.m. The ball for the event was installed the morning of Sunday, Dec. 26, with major help from the La Grande Fire Department.

**Metal at Midnight**

For those looking to enjoy some live music in La Grande and rock in the new year, HQ on Depot Street is the place to be.

The local music venue will be hosting the fourth rendition of Metal at Midnight, a New Year's Eve concert celebration. The event was canceled the last two years, but is set to make its return on the final day of 2021.

Nogero, a metal band based in La Grande,

will take the stage and play a set to ring in 2022. According to HQ co-owner Chris Jennings, the band will play a pre-midnight set and then perform headbangers at midnight.

The festivities at HQ will include a beer garden, burn barrels and interim dance music. The event will coincide with the La Grande ball drop — attendees in the HQ beer garden will be able to watch the ball drop from the outdoor area.

Nogero officially formed about seven years ago, but most of its members have been playing together since high school. Its members are Shawn Turley, Ian Dill, Nick Hackney, Jim Noyes and Ricky Marwick.

"It's a cool thing to have Metal at Midnight because it brings that live

music downtown when downtown is at its finest," Turley said. "Everybody is down there and having a great time."

The event has drawn upward of 100 attendees in years past, feeding off those drawn to downtown for New Year's Eve. The band is emphasizing COVID-19 precautions ahead of the show.

"It has been really successful in the past. I understand people's hesitancy. I'm a very COVID-conscious person," Turley said. "We think it can be done responsibly and still have a good turnout. People really do look forward to it."

Nogero will perform a mix of originals and covers during the show. According to Turley, an original called "Metal at Midnight" will be played right after the clock hits midnight.

Doors will open at HQ at 8 p.m. on Dec. 31 and the event will go until about 1 a.m. Tickets for Metal at Midnight are \$10 at the door and funds go toward paying the band and supporting HQ into 2022.

"We can't stress enough as a band that we are excited to play, but we want to do it safely and responsibly," Turley said. "We encourage everyone coming to be vaccinated or to wear a mask. We just want to have the safest and most responsible experience possible."

# Ronald Lee murder trial delayed

Defense granted additional time to review new interview with co-defendant

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**

The Observer

**LA GRANDE —** The murder trial for Ronald Lee is facing another delay.

A new interview with co-defendant Steve Hamilton added a wrinkle to the trial process, prompting Circuit Court Judge Thomas Powers to grant a motion to postpone the trial scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. The interview and motion came up during a pretrial hearing on Dec. 23 at the Union County Courthouse, La Grande.

The state has accused Lee of slaying his wife, Loretta Williams, in

November 2018 at her home in Cove. The 73-year-old is charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder. He is lodged at the Union County Correctional Facility, La Grande, and is to be tried with a 12-person jury.

Following the new interview from Hamilton regarding his potential involvement in the murder of Williams, Powers stated the new evidence should be investigated further before the trial. The pretrial hearing will be continued on Jan. 19, when the judge will hear the state's pending motions.

The recent Hamilton interview caused concern from the defense, noting the Russell Law Group would be unable to review the new informa-

tion and continue evaluating jail phone calls in time for the trial. Both the defense and the plaintiff agreed interviews with Hamilton have been inconsistent, with the co-defendant changing his story multiple times in the past.



Gushwa



McDaniel

District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel and Deputy District Attorney Reed West appeared for the state, while attorneys Craig Russell and Dean Gushwa attended via telephone on behalf of Lee, who appeared via videocam from his jail cell. The defense filed a slew of motions, which were addressed at the hearing.

Of the 14 motions, the court granted three and denied four, and the remainder were either deferred or granted in

part. The court denied motions to exclude media from pretrial hearings, to prohibit the state from referring to the defendant as anything other than his formal name, and to limit and exclude autopsy photographs and images from the crime scene.

Powers granted motions to require jury excusals and deferments to be on the record, to require the state to disclose and produce forms of media and follow discovery obligations, and to require any sidebars to be on the record.

The state will have four pending motions at the Jan. 19 pretrial hearing. Powers and the defense both noted the new Hamilton investigation will not change the status of the defense motions. The hearing is set for 9 a.m. in Courtroom 2 of the Union County Courthouse.

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**20 new COVID-19 cases reported in Union County over holiday weekend**

**SALEM —** The Oregon Health Authority released its COVID-19 report on Monday, Dec. 27, which showed 20 new cases in Union County from Dec. 23 to Dec. 26.

The new cases increased Union County's total to 3,508 since the start of the pandemic. Wallowa County recorded zero cases in the latest report and currently stands at 775 cases. Neither county tallied any newly recorded COVID-19 deaths over the four-day period.

Across Oregon, 3,585 new confirmed and presumptive COVID-19 cases were reported — the state's total increased to 414,140 since the beginning of COVID-19. The 25 new deaths across the state brought Oregon's death toll to 5,623.

There are currently 381 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 across Oregon, which is an increase of 23 patients from yesterday. Out of 649 adult ICU beds in the state, 56 are available. There are 311 open adult non-ICU beds out of 4,082 in Oregon.

The seven-day running average of vaccine doses per day across the state is 18,801.

**Strutz wins Joseph lighting contest**

**JOSEPH —** Caitlin Summer Strutz was recently declared the first-place winner of the City of Joseph Holiday Light and Decoration Contest, according to a press release.

First place receives \$200 off their city water bill and \$200 to be donated to the winner's choice of a local charity or school group. Strutz is choosing to donate to the Wallowa County Humane Society.

The second-place winner is the Thomas family. They received \$100 off their water bill and chose the Joseph Charter School drama class to receive a \$100 donation.

The cash donations come from city coffers.

**Three arrested after failed Christmas Eve burglary attempt, USCO says**

**SUMMERVILLE —** Three people were arrested on

Christmas Eve after being caught in the act of removing items from a residence on Summerville Road, the Union County Sheriff's Office stated in a press release Monday, Dec. 27.

A Union County deputy who was patrolling Summerville Road about 8:30 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 24, recognized a suspicious vehicle at the residence, and a call to the property manager found there should not have been anyone at the residence.

The investigation led to the arrest of Nickole L. Thamert, 47, Jon M. Weathers, 51, and Emily A. Wilson, 38. According to the UCSO, the three were in the process of removing items from the residence and were loading them into a vehicle. K-9 Molly was dispatched and helped deputies and Oregon State Police locate a suspect who was attempting to hide.

Thamert, Weathers and Wilson are charged with first-degree burglary, first-degree conspiracy to commit burglary and possession of burglary tools. All three are lodged in the Union County Jail.

— *The Observer*

# Children getting vaccinated against COVID-19

By **BILL BRADSHAW**

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**ENTERPRISE —** About 22% of children ages 5-17 have received a complete series of COVID-19 vaccinations in Wallowa County, according to data reported by the Oregon Health Authority on Monday, Dec. 27.

This breaks down to 10% of the 5-11 age group and 37.4% of the 12-17 age group, the OHA reported. Just under 42% of the 12-17 group and 16.3% of those age 5-11 have had one shot, the data shows.

Pfizer is the only brand of vaccine available to children and is readily available in Wallowa County, according to Brooke Pace, communications director of Wallowa Memorial Hospital.

Part of the OHA's goal is to reach a vaccination rate of 80%. To reach that goal, another 382 children ages 5-11 need to be vaccinated and 177 children ages 12-17 need their shots.

Pace said the hospital does not give the pediatric vaccines, but they are available at the hospital's Wallowa Memorial Medical Clinics. Countywide, she said in early December, 90 children 5-11 years old had received the vaccine and 191 ages 12-17 had received it.

Nic Powers, CEO of Winding Waters Medical Clinic, did not have an exact breakdown for vaccines provided by his clinic, but deferred to the OHA in a Dec. 17 email.

Pace said the pediatric vaccine requires two doses at least 21 days apart.

"Our staff are now experts in ensuring patients get access to the vaccine that's best for that patient," Powers said.

Neither Pace nor Powers was aware of any patients having adverse reactions to the vaccines.

Pace said the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends everyone age 5 and older to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Powers agreed, but was eager to defer the decision to patients and their families.

"In general, it's up to each person and family to make health care decisions that are best for their particular situation," he said.

Asked if there has been any resistance among children's families to having them get the vaccine, he said there is a broad range of perspectives on the issue.

"We're encouraging each family to make the choice that's right for them and have all the information that they need to make a decision," Powers said.

Pace also deferred to the CDC and to families.

"The decision to get your child vaccinated is an incredibly personal choice that parents should discuss with their child's primary care provider," Pace said.

Powers also expressed confidence in dealing with the pandemic in the county.

"Due to strong partnerships here in Wallowa County, and with the OHA, we have excellent access to COVID testing, vaccination and treatment," he said. "Local health care providers work hard to be here for the people (who) need us. I'm proud of our team and all the work we've done to build and maintain a strong, resilient organization."

The OHA said the number of children by age group vaccinated statewide as of Dec. 27 was 29.5% of the total population in the 5-11 age group and 66% of the total population in the 12-17 age group.

According to the Oregon Health Authority on Dec. 23, among Wallowa County's population of 7,160, there have been 775 COVID-19 cases, 13 of whom have died — or 2%. Of test results, 921 people tested positive (12%), while 6,941 tested negative (88%).

Statewide, there have been 9,619.5 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people.