

**TODAY**

**On Dec. 31, 2019,** the health commission in the central Chinese city of Wuhan announced that experts were investigating an outbreak of respiratory illness and that most of the victims had visited a seafood market in the city; the statement said 27 people had become ill with a strain of viral pneumonia and that seven were in serious condition.

**In 1775,** during the Revolutionary War, the British repulsed an attack by Continental Army generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold at Quebec; Montgomery was killed.

**In 1862,** President Abraham Lincoln signed an enabling act paving the way for Virginia's western counties to become the state of West Virginia, which took place in June 1863.

**In 1879,** Thomas Edison first publicly demonstrated his electric incandescent light by illuminating some 40 bulbs at his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey.

**In 1904,** New York's Times Square saw its first New Year's Eve celebration, with an estimated 200,000 people in attendance.

**In 1946,** President Harry S. Truman officially proclaimed the end of hostilities in World War II.

**In 1972,** Major League baseball player Roberto Clemente, 38, was killed when a plane he chartered and was traveling on to bring relief supplies to earthquake-devastated Nicaragua crashed shortly after takeoff from Puerto Rico.

**In 1974,** private U.S. citizens were allowed to buy and own gold for the first time in more than 40 years.

**In 1978,** Taiwanese diplomats struck their colors for the final time from the embassy flagpole in Washington, D.C., marking the end of diplomatic relations with the United States.

**In 1985,** singer Rick Nelson, 45, and six other people were killed when fire broke out aboard a DC-3 that was taking the group to a New Year's Eve performance in Dallas.

**In 1986,** 97 people were killed when fire broke out in the Dupont Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (Three hotel workers later pleaded guilty in connection with the blaze.)

**In 1999,** Russian President Boris Yeltsin announced his resignation (he was succeeded by Vladimir Putin).

**In 2010,** tornadoes fueled by unusually warm air pummeled the South and Midwest, killing a total of eight people in Arkansas and Missouri.

**Ten years ago:** President Barack Obama signed a wide-ranging defense bill into law despite having "serious reservations" about provisions that regulated the detention, interrogation and prosecution of suspected terrorists. A NASA probe fired its engine and slipped into orbit around the moon in the first of two back-to-back arrivals over the New Year's weekend.

**Five years ago:** Mariah Carey ushered in 2017 with a botched performance on "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest" on ABC; Carey blamed the show's producers for technical difficulties, while Dick Clark Productions called Carey's claims "absurd." Actor William Christopher, best known for playing Father Francis Mulcahy on the TV series "M.A.S.H.," died in Pasadena, California, at age 84.

**One year ago:** Around the world on New Year's Eve, pandemic restrictions on open air gatherings saw people turning to virtual celebrations or made-for-TV fireworks displays. In New York's Times Square, the ball dropped as always, but police fenced off the site to prevent crowds from gathering. Authorities arrested a suburban Milwaukee pharmacist suspected of deliberately ruining hundreds of doses of coronavirus vaccine by removing them from refrigeration. (Steven Brandenburg, an admitted conspiracy theorist who believed vaccines were the product of the devil, would be sentenced to three years in prison.) Britain completed its economic break from the European Union.

**LOTTERY**

**Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021 Megabucks**  
 1-6-18-19-25-43  
 Jackpot: \$7.7 million  
**Lucky Lines**  
 3-8-12-16-20-23-25-30  
 Estimated jackpot: \$61,000  
**Powerball**  
 2-6-9-33-39  
 Powerball: 11  
 Power Play: 2  
 Jackpot: \$483 million  
**Win for Life**  
 50-56-70-71  
**Pick 4**  
 1 p.m.: 7-3-3-7  
 4 p.m.: 2-9-5-6  
 7 p.m.: 5-1-4-9  
 10 p.m.: 7-3-9-8

**Digging out**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer  
**Corvin Goodman, with Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales, plows a parking lot and alleyway between Chestnut and Depot streets in downtown La Grande on Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021.**

**Winter makes for dangerous travel**

By **ALEX WITTWER**  
 EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — It's a "full-coverage insurance policy" kind of season on Interstate 84. From Wednesday, Dec. 22, through Tuesday, Dec. 28, Oregon State Police responded to 56 individual crashes on the interstate between Hermiston and Ontario. Road conditions have deteriorated as snow blankets the Pacific Northwest and leaves travelers contending with slick roads.

A total of 15 crashes were reported on Dec. 28 alone as freezing weather and snowfall accumulated overnight — including a semi-roller near milepost 252 that had no reported injuries and did

not impede traffic. The interstate was closed eastbound and westbound from Pendleton to La Grande from 6:06 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Dec. 30 due to high winds, blowing/drifting snow and whiteout conditions in some areas, according to a press release from the Oregon Department of Transportation. Crews reported zero visibility with multiple spun-out trucks. Crashes closed the freeway for several hours on Dec. 23 and Dec. 26. The interstate has been closed six times in December alone due to inclement weather and crashes.

"Road conditions continue to be icy," Oregon State Police Capt. Steph-

anie Bigman said. "If you drive, go prepared and please allow plenty of time to get to your destination." Locally, the La Grande Police Department responded to 13 crashes in the last seven days, according to LGPD Lt. Jason Hays. Many more, according to Hays, go unreported — such as incidents involving motorists getting stuck in the snow, sliding off the road and any minor fender benders that don't require police intervention. "From my 23 years of experience, I can tell you winter storm related motor vehicle accidents are all preventable," Hays said. "My biggest advice is for people to slow down when driving in snow and adverse conditions, espe-

cially when approaching stop signs." Hays cautioned motorists to increase following distance, use traction devices such as chains or cables and to avoid driving on steep, unsanded roads. Tollgate Highway, a detour route for the interstate, was also closed Dec. 30 due in part to the road receiving 12 inches of snow within a three-hour period, according to ODOT. Across the state, OSP responded to nearly 1,000 crashes over the previous holiday weekend, according to The Oregonian. As well, between Dec. 23 and Dec. 27, state troopers handled 912 crashes, up from 365 crashes during the same period in 2020 and just 237 crashes in 2019.

**Normandy sex abuse trial scheduled for May**

The Observer

LA GRANDE — A trial for a local man facing sex abuse charges was delayed to the spring. The Union County Sheriff's Office on June 25 arrested David Normandy, 32, of Cove, on a Union County warrant based on a secret indictment. The district attorney's office has charged Normandy with using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct, second-degree

encouraging child sexual abuse and 12 counts of first-degree sexual abuse. The indictment detailed accusations of sexually explicit conduct with minors under the age of 14 between October 2014 and January 2020. The Union County Circuit Court has scheduled the trial to start May 16, 2022, in front of a 12-person jury at the Union County Courthouse, La Grande. Public defender James Schaeffer

represents Normandy. The trial was scheduled for Dec. 13, but Circuit Judge Thomas Powers granted the defendant's motion to postpone. The defense cited ongoing issues with discovery and unresolved pretrial motions as the reasons for the postponement. Powers on Dec. 20 also granted the defense motion for a lower bail, reducing the amount to \$150,000. Conditions attached to Normandy's release

include a written waiver of extradition, weekly phone check-ins with a court officer and no contact with alleged victims or their mother and place of residence, and no contact with places where minors are known to congregate. On April 15, 2022, Powers will preside over a hearing of pretrial motions, and Normandy is set to appear in person for a settlement conference on April 22 with Judge Matthew Shirtcliff presiding.

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Community Connection seeks new Union County board member**  
 LA GRANDE — A Union County community service nonprofit is searching for a new board member. Community Connection, an organization focused on assisting those in need in Northeastern Oregon, is taking applications to fill one of its board member positions. The nonprofit focuses on assisting senior citizens, children, low-income individuals and those with disabilities. "Union County is fortunate to have a lot of people willing to give of their time and expertise to organizations like ours," executive director Margaret Davidson said in a press release. "This is an opportunity for someone new to get involved in shaping the services in the region." The candidate is expected to represent the needs of low-income individuals, regardless of the candidate's own income status. The Community Connection board typically meets four to five times per year. Community Connection provides a number of services, such as senior citizen programs, transportation services, food banks, self-sufficiency programs and housing services in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties. The organization also oversees the Rivieria Activity Center, conducts health promotions and provides food services. Interested candidates can reach out to executive assistant Diana Parks at 541-963-3186 or diana@ceno.org.

Parks can be contacted for an application, which is due by Jan. 21. **Cove City Council to hold first meeting of 2022**  
 COVE — The Cove City Council is set to meet for its first monthly meeting of the new year at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 4. The meeting is open to the public for in-person attendance at Cove City Hall, 504 Alder St., with virtual attendance also available. The council will take an opening public comment section before approaching three items on the consent agenda. Council members will vote on prior council minutes from Oct. 5 through Nov. 16, approve council minutes from Dec. 7 and approve bills to be paid. In the new business section, the council will review its rules of procedure and city charter from 2020. Following the new business, reports will be presented from the city council municipal court committee, transportation system plan committee, the city recorder and the public works director. The closing public comment section will allow three minutes per person, in regard to items not on the agenda, suggestions for future meeting agendas and workshops, and comments about the decisions made during the meeting. Public comments may be emailed to cityadmin@cityofcove.org prior to 6:45 p.m. on Jan. 4. The meeting can be attended virtually via computer, smartphone or tablet at www.gotomeet.me/City-

ofCove. The public may also call 1-877-309-2073 and use access code 566-891-733. **New Year's Eve metal concert canceled due to COVID-19 concerns**  
 LA GRANDE — A fan-favorite New Year's Eve tradition in La Grande has been canceled. HQ on Depot Street in La Grande announced on Wednesday, Dec. 29, that Metal at Midnight was canceled due to a rise in COVID-19 case counts. Local band Nogero was slated to play at the event, which included live music before and after midnight of the new year. "With case counts rising sharply, increased public safety concerns, and the close-contact nature of live music and revelry, we have decided to err on the side of caution to protect our community," HQ co-owners Chris Jennings and Jesse Cimon said in a Facebook post. The event has drawn upward of 100 attendees in past years when live music venues did not face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nogero band members and the HQ co-owners were encouraging vaccinations and mask usage prior to the show, but ultimately decided to cancel in the wake of the recent omicron variant. "We look forward to bringing more opportunities to local audience in 2022," the owners said. "For the time being, be kind, be safe, and have a happy new year." — The Observer

**Wallowa County passes 700 cases in 2021**

Total is an increase of more than 900% over 2020 count

By **RONALD BOND**  
 Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — More than 700. That is the number of COVID-19 cases that have been tallied up in Wallowa County during 2021. The county passed that threshold Tuesday, Dec. 28, when the Oregon Health Authority reported five cases in Wallowa County. That moved the pandemic total at the time to 780, and the total for the year to 703, amounting to a more than 900% increase in cases over the total at the end of 2020. Two additional cases were reported on Dec. 29, putting the total at 782 for the pandemic and 705 for the year. The county's infection rate for the pandemic is about 10.9%, per OHA data. To review, Wallowa County was among one of the lowest case rates in Oregon at the end of 2020, with the county reporting 77 cases from the start of the pandemic through Dec. 31, 2020. Cases trickled in over the next six months. The county reached 100 on Jan. 26, and 150 cases on April 2. It was still another 3-1/2 months until the 200th case was reported on July 19. The rate for the year was higher than 2020, but the county remained on the lower end of the case spectrum until the delta variant spike hit the state. It's unknown exactly how many cases were the delta variant. Regardless, the count shot through the roof. An additional 39 cases were reported during the final 12 days of July, putting the number at 239 by the end of the month. By early August, the county's case count was past 250. In the same month, 300, 350 and 400 were reached, and by the end of August the total was 419. There were 180 cases in August alone, matching the total the county had from when its first case was confirmed in April 2020 through May 6, 2021. Totals that were once coming in over several months were now coming in just days. The case count ebbed from that peak, but slowly. September saw 163 cases, October had 123 and November had 55. The three highest months in 2021 each had a total that surpassed the case count of 2020. December's total has been tame in comparison, with the average under a case a day, and a total of 22 reported during the month as of Dec. 29. The number of deaths in the county has remained at 13, with nine of those coming during 2021 and five being reported during a one-week span in late August. There were three deaths reported in 2020, and a fourth reported later in 2021 that was from the previous year. As of Dec. 29, the county is at a vaccination rate among adults of 70.7%, which ranks it 15th among the 36 counties in Oregon. The 70% threshold was broken through on Dec. 7. Currently, 66% of the county's adults have received a full set of shots, and 33.7% have also received a booster shot. In this area, the county is actually ninth in the state, above the state rate of 32.4%, while it sits below the state rate in the other categories, which are 80.7% and 73.9%, respectively. Union County, meanwhile, has seen an increase in 2021 of about 260% in its case count over 2020. There were more cases and deaths overall during the year — 2,535 and 49, respectively — which have the pandemic totals as of Dec. 29 at 3,517 cases and 63 deaths. The county's pandemic-long infection rate is about 13.1%. Union County has had one of the lower vaccination rates in Oregon, and is in the bottom third of the state — 25th, to be exact — with 59.8% of adults getting one shot, and 55.6% having full inoculation. An additional 23.1% have received a booster.