

BLOOD

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have begun to feel the effects. Most blood that is donated goes to local hospitals, according to Caitlin Cozad, marking and communications director for Good Shepherd Health Care System, Hermiston.

“Community support of American Red Cross blood drives is essential to return our blood supply to pre-COVID minimum stocking numbers,” she said. “We especially need O-negative donors. This is one way you can serve your community and help ensure a stable blood supply for local hospitals.”

It is unclear to what degree the pandemic has affected the amount of blood donations. Some areas, such as La Grande and Baker City, have experienced an uptick in donations this year in comparison to other areas in the region. Still, the American Red Cross noted that nationwide blood donations have gone down 10% since the beginning of the pandemic.

“We have experienced critical blood supply issues in the past months. We have had no units of O-negative on the shelf two times and zero O-positive one time,” said Ronda Reisdorph, a laboratory manager at Hermiston’s Good Shepherd Medical Center. “We have been running with less than minimum thresholds in the past few months and no chance for restocking even with



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Jake Yoste, a phlebotomy technician with the American Red Cross, explains the blood donation process to Elena Nightingale at the community blood drive at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in La Grande on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022.

emergent cases.”

While the medical center expects to receive an increased supply over the coming weeks to supplement its stockpile due, there’s no indication that the national blood shortage will improve in the near future.

The American Red Cross supplies approximately 40% of the nation’s blood supply, according to the organization, and some hospitals might receive as little as 25% of their requested blood supplies in the coming weeks. Hospitals normally keep a steady supply of blood for routine procedures but can request more in the event of a mass casualty or injury event.

Since much of the blood that arrives in hospitals

comes from the arms of local community members, due to the large turnout for Union County blood drives, some local hospitals have fared better in the national crisis.

Mardi Ford, director of communications at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, credited the work of husband and wife duo Linda and Sheldon Strand, who run La Grande’s American Red Cross blood drives, as a key factor in ensuring Grande Ronde Hospital has an adequate blood supply. Ford said the hospital works closely with the American Red Cross and has an internal system that is used to track blood supply levels.

Ford said the hospital has only had a couple of instances in the past few

years where blood supplies reached critical levels.

“We are proactive in making sure that we have what we need to serve our patients,” she said. “That’s one of the beauties of being small and independent. We have options on how we’re able to do things.”

Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, recently received shipments where the requested blood supply was not provided.

“Fortunately, we work with the Red Cross on a blood rotation to keep us at optimal levels and have held on to a supply of the shorted products,” said Brooke Pace, director of communications and public relations. “We do this to ensure that nothing is wasted because of out-

dating. We can still transfer units to regional hospitals in our area if dating becomes a concern.”

Stefanie Davidson, Wallowa Memorial Hospital’s lab director, urged residents to donate blood amid the growing national shortage, even as local supplies remain steady.

“Even though we still have an above critical supply, the national shortage is a concern, and we would like to encourage anyone who can to get out and donate,” she said.

Pendleton’s CHI St. Anthony Hospital fared better than other hospitals in the region, according to the hospital’s president, Harold Geller, who noted the hospital was well stocked.

“There is always a concern, pandemic or not,” he said. “We here at St. Anthony have taken steps to be prepared as best as possible.”

Even still, the hospital president did not mince words about the national shortage.

“Please donate blood,” he said. “Now.”

Changing the rules

The blood crisis has also renewed an effort by lawmakers to change the rules regarding donations by those in the LGBT community.

Senators from across the nation signed a letter on Jan. 14 urging the Food and Drug Administration to change the rules to allow men in same-sex relationships to donate blood. In total, 22 senators signed their names to the letter, including Dem-

ocratic Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

“In light of the nation’s urgent blood supply crisis and to ensure that Americans have access to life-saving blood transfusions during the pandemic, we urge you to swiftly update your current blood donor deferral policies in favor of ones that are grounded in science, based on individualized risk factors, and allow all potentially eligible donors to do so free of stigma,” the senators wrote Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock.

In 1983, the federal government placed a lifetime ban on gay men from donating blood, at the height of the HIV/AIDS scares of the 1980s. Those rules were relaxed in 2015 by requiring one year of abstinence, and then reduced further to three months in 2020.

The letter noted that advances in testing technologies would allow for gay and bisexual men to safely donate blood, and criticized the time-based guidelines that perpetuates stereotypes.

“It is critical that all patients have access to the health care services they need during this pandemic, and for many, the availability of blood and blood products is a necessary component of care,” the letter said. “Unfortunately, a significant drop in the number of donations during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a serious shortage of available blood.”

GEOMETRY

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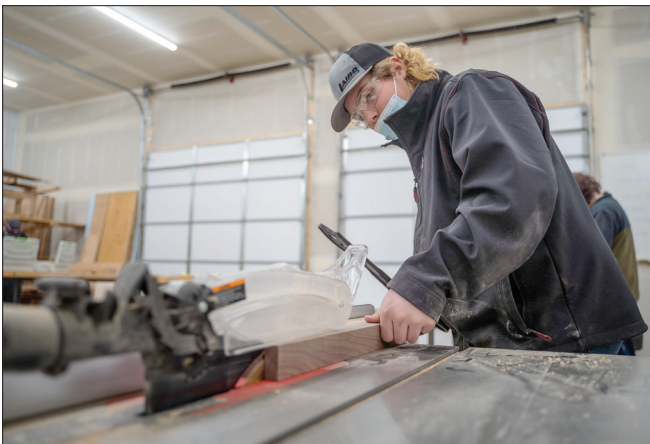
have studied parallel lines, they may construct wall frames under the guidance of Wyatt and Townsend.

“They will see how parallel lines are important to framing a wall. Instead of reading about this in a book, they are learning about parallel lines in real life,” Wyatt said.

Geometry in Construction students are busy building structures including outdoor pet shelters and soon will start building chicken coops. Wyatt, who has taught math at Union High School for several years, said that earlier her students often asked her about how geometry applies to real life.

Wyatt is rarely asked such questions by the students in the Geometry in Construction class.

“They see the connec-



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Kyle Boren, a student with the woodshop class, pushes a piece of wood through a table saw at Union High School on Monday, Jan. 31, 2022. Boren is building a cutting board as a personal project. The new woodshop and welding building at Union High School was renovated from a bus barn, and includes several woodshop tools such as miter saws, planers, a CNC router, table saws, drill presses, palm sanders and large working tables.

tion right away,” she said.

The woodshop students are also beginning to note how math applies to the real world outside of construction.

“They see that math is all around us,” Wyatt said.

The Geometry in Construction class is modeled

Superintendent Carter Wells.

The geometry students are doing construction work in what was formerly the school district’s old bus barn. The structure was dramatically renovated last summer, and the new woodshop provides the additional space necessary to offer Geometry in Construction, Townsend said.

The bus barn was renovated with funds from a \$140,000 state Career Technical Education grant the school district received in 2021. The application for the grant was written by Carolyn Kelley, Union High School’s agriculture sciences teacher and FFA adviser.

“None of this would have been possible if Carolyn Kelley had not written the application for the CTE revitalization grant,” Wells said. “We are very excited and very grateful for all of the work she has done to make this

possible.”

The grant money covered the cost of new woodshop equipment, including circular saws, table saws, planers and hand tools. The grant also paid for the addition of new equipment for the school’s metal shop, including new welding equipment.

The school district’s CTE program was also boosted by money from the state’s Student Investment Account fund, which allowed the school district to hire Townsend, who is in his first year as the school’s woodshop teacher.

Wells hopes that his school district’s woodshop space can later be expanded by about 2,500 square feet with additional grant funding from the

state, which, he said, could allow the Geometry in Construction class to take on larger projects, such as modular homes. Wells stressed, though, that it may be some time before Union’s CTE program reaches this point

But he is optimistic. “This is an exciting time,” he said.

MERA

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recreational area.

“The MERA was purchased with the objective of making it a multi-use recreational area, an objective that has been successful beyond what anyone imagined,” said Meg Cooke, reading a letter from Kate Pfister-Minogue on behalf of Friends of MERA. “We would like to honor that success as forest management proceeds.”

While those opposed to the project favor fire prevention, the written letter voiced two major concerns over large trees at MERA and mastication. The letter also called into question the process in which Union County planned the project, questioning the decision-making process amid a perceived lack of public input.

The group expressed a desire to work together moving forward, seeing as the logging project is underway.

The letter stated opposition to cutting down large-diameter trees, saying that larger trees are already in short supply in the region due to logging, large trees survive fires better than shorter ones, and are essential for forest restoration after fires.

“We are entirely supportive of forest restoration on MERA,” Cooke read from the letter. “We think that one of the main priorities of this project should be to preserve and protect the large trees to the greatest extent possible.”

The second concern voiced in the letter was the use of mastication on shrubs and bushes, which the letter stated is destructive to soil integrity and leads to inva-

sive species.

Sean Chambers, Union County’s parks manager, spoke throughout the meeting and answered several questions regarding mastication. He stated that the project is not a mass mastication plan, with minor work being done on shrubs in particular. Chambers noted that the mastication will not be nearly as considerable as the firebreak project conducted at MERA a year ago.

Chuck Sarrett, a forester contracted by Union County, further explained at the meeting that shrubs and brush are not a main target of the project. He stated that there may be a slightly

heavier mastication alongside two of the main roads connecting MERA.

Chambers also stated that ReedCo has been cognizant of public concerns regarding work on MERA.

“They’re very aware of the concerns of the general public and the product we’re looking to achieve here,” he said. “I’ve been impressed with their being attentive to that.”

Chambers said the time frame of the project moving forward is dependent on weather and ground conditions. Frozen grounds allow for more productive work, while daily rises in temperature can adjust plans quickly.