

EOU

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mask mandate on March 12, following steady numbers throughout the winter. After Eastern recorded 193 cases in January alone, there have been just 21 cases in February and March.

Likewise in Union County, the total case count per 100,000 has dropped to 26.1 as of March 12. That mark ranks Union County as the fourth lowest out of 35 counties, with Wheeler County not included in the graphic due to population size.

Karpilo noted that the university is seeing a number of students with typical winter illnesses such as the flu, but that self-reporting symptoms is still a priority on campus. In the case of reported symptoms,

Eastern is continuing to test for COVID-19.

Following the dropped mask mandate, Karpilo stated that there will not be any major shift in the number of events on campus — for sports or other gatherings, the only difference will be the dropped mask requirement. The university is still supplying N95 masks at the front of most buildings for those looking to be cautious.

The dropped mask mandate will see a significant shift in on-campus living situations, with students no longer required to wear masks in hallways and common areas in dorms. Karpilo noted that the university is seeing an uptick in students utilizing common spaces in living areas.

“I think students did a good job of building

community while they’re wearing masks, but we know as humans that seeing faces and things like that is preferred,” she said. “I’m really excited for students to have the opportunity to be in those common areas and being able to see people’s faces and engage in that way.”

With spring break here this week, Eastern is remaining cautious as many students and faculty travel during the break. According to Karpilo, the university has bi-weekly testing clinics scheduled for the first two weeks after spring break — the clinics will primarily focus on anyone with symptoms or those who were around a positive case.

Karpilo noted that Eastern Oregon University is continuing to consult with local health authorities in looking to prevent



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Hanna Saunders, a freshman accounting student at Eastern Oregon University, studies in the school’s library on Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021. The university has seen a drop in COVID-19 cases following a spike early in 2022.

future outbreaks or spikes in COVID-19. The university remains stocked with enough rapid test kits to administer to students in the case of an uptick.

“We’re in a good spot,” Karpilo said. “We try to

stay prepared to test the whole student population if we have to, which we can.”

As COVID-19 numbers remain low in Union County and at EOU, officials are continually monitoring trends in order to

keep cases at a minimum.

“We’re going to respond to our experts and local health authorities to make sure we’re doing what we need to be for our students and community,” Karpilo said.

SHELTER

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night, roughly 25 visitors attend the shelter for meals.

“For four months every night of the week, volunteers are providing homemade, hot meals for about 25 people,” Ladendorff said. “It’s pretty incredible when you think about it.”

According to Ladendorff, the shelter saw a steady flow of individuals throughout the year. Many of these people were regular attendees who are from La Grande.

“In the beginning of the year, we were actually not as packed full. By the time the season was ending, we were hitting full capacity most nights,” Ladendorff said. “The weather plays a big role.”

The 2022 season marked the first time that the warming station was able to employ a paid employee, thanks to grants. Cassidy Porter, the station’s manager, was able to contribute to the shelter as a paid employee starting this past December.

Many volunteers put in countless hours for the shelter, providing



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Dianna Douglas plates up roasted chicken for the warming shelter appreciation lunch at Zion Lutheran Church, La Grande, on Saturday, March 19, 2022.

any resource they can. According to Ladendorff, roughly 60 volunteers give their time to the shelter and about 15 individuals regularly volunteer efforts to provide meals for the homeless.

Ellen Martin, a volunteer, works night shifts that start at 10 p.m. and conclude at 3 a.m. the next morning. She also does laundry for the shelter,

cleaning bed sheets every time they were used by an individual.

“It’s nice that we have that place for them to be warm and safe,” Martin said.

According to Martin, any given night can be unpredictable. She noted that a core group of individuals typically frequent the station, building relationships with each



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Kate Gekeler applauds for volunteers for the warming shelter at an appreciation lunch at Zion Lutheran Church, La Grande, on Saturday, March 19, 2022.

other and with volunteers. Martin stated that, despite their perception, many homeless individuals at the warming station are attempting to become more stable.

“Last year, there was one fellow who came, had dinner and went to bed. He was up and out the door in the morning because he had a job. He just didn’t have a place to stay and couldn’t save up enough money to afford a place to live,” Martin said.

Kate Gekeler, a board member at the station, said it can take homeless individuals months to become self-sufficient enough to afford

housing. The warming station is able to serve as a warm place to stay as individuals look to get back on their feet.

Kay Durham, a volunteer, recalled fond experiences getting to know attendees at the Union County Warming Station. She noted that the perception of the homeless can often be negative, but that services like the station can help individuals in need of assistance.

“Not every situation is the same. The attitude has to change,” Durham said. “We’re all humans. It doesn’t matter what your circumstances are.”

HISTORY

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said a La Grande resident that he and his wife know spoke to Costner at the Cabin Creek Ranch. It is not known when Costner lived on Palmer Junction Road, but The Observer did report in its Aug. 19, 1991, edition that the movie star visited the Grande Ronde Hospital emergency room on Aug. 17, 1991, because his wife, Cindy, needed treatment for a scratched eye.

The stories about Rogers and Costner are among many surprising ones the authors recount in their 450-page volume.

Another concerns Upper Perry Lane and its namesake D.W.C. Perry, an engineer, for whom the community of Perry is named. Perry once lived in La Grande but never in the community which today bears his name.

Dave Yerges said that in the early 1870s Perry was part of a team of engineers who built a long tunnel under the Andes Mountains of South America. Perry later served as an executive superintendent of the St. Louis World’s Fair which opened May 30, 1904 and ran through Dec. 1, 1904.

“Perry is named after a remarkable person,” Dave Yerges said.

Mysteries the new book lays to rest include one concerning how Morgan Lake got its name — it was named in honor of Thomas Morgan who began working as a shepherd at the age of 10. He later became a major local landowner.

“Readers got familiar with article titles like



Dick Mason/The Observer

Dave and Trish Yerges pose for a photo with their new book, “Historical Guide Union County Oregon Roads,” at Market Place Fresh Foods, La Grande, on Saturday, March 12, 2022.

this: ‘Morgan Buys More Land,’” they write.

Morgan went on to have a long and eventful life and remained active into his 80s.

“Even at age 84, Thomas was making news for the local paper, and it wasn’t his obituary either. He decided he would climb icy Mt. Hood, something on his bucket list,” wrote the authors.

Morgan succeeded in climbing Mount Hood on Aug 11, 1955. After his climb he rushed off to get back to a herd of sheep he was caring for.

“He just loved his sheep, he was a true sheep person,” Trish Yerges said.

Their book answers many questions — but also raises some.

One concerns Catherine Creek Lane, which was named after Catherine Creek. Many have long believed that Catherine Creek was named after Catherine Godley, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Godley, whose family lived near Catherine Creek. The authors, though, have dispelled this notion. Trish Yerges explained that

survey maps from 1863 list the creek at the site as Catherine Creek. This was about seven years before the Godleys moved from another state to the Catherine Creek area.

“We have created a new mystery,” Trish Yerges said.

The story behind Gaertner Lane on the north edge of La Grande is another eye opener.

It was named after Emil and Lena Gaertner, who came to Union County after winning a lottery in their home country of Germany. The couple used their winnings to take a ship with family members to Ellis Island and then a train across the United States to Union County.

The couple came after Emil Gaertner wrote a letter to her brother, Paul, in Enterprise to share their good lottery news. Paul Gaertner wrote back, urging his sister and brother-in-law to come to the United States before their lottery winnings were spent. He told them that he would help pay for other family members to come with them.

MORE INFORMATION

For information on obtaining “Historical Guide to Union County, Oregon Roads,” email the authors at weframe@eoni.com.

Dave and Trish Yerges started working on the book about four years ago. They began well versed on local history. Trish has been a correspondent for The Observer since 2005, writing many articles about local history during her tenure. Dave began working at the Mitre’s Touch Gallery, La Grande,

in 1993 and later bought the business before retiring in 2021. He published many local history books, several of which he and Trish wrote during his time with the Mitre’s Touch.

The couple’s latest work is based on interviews with many people during the past two decades, unpublished memoirs and Observer archives from 1897 to 1964. The Observer’s archives provided the authors with a significant amount of information.

“For all the criticisms that newspapers must take from their reading public, they are still among the

best repositories of histories you’ll ever find and for that they must be commended,” the couple wrote in their introduction.

They said first-hand sources of history are dwindling because of age and time.

“It is with gratitude that we have been able to unearth some stories and solve a mystery or two,” Dave Yerges said.

The couple are glad that their book is out but they do not feel a sense of relief because they had so much fun producing the work.

“It was a labor of love,” Trish Yerges said.

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