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Nearly back to normal

Local educators welcome the state's COVID-19 guidance as new school year begins

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — School district officials in Union County are expressing positive feelings about a guidance recently issued by the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Education regarding what COVID-19 health and safety protocols they will be required to follow as a new school year opens.

The guidance indicates that some statewide rules are still in effect, including the vaccination requirement for teachers and other staff. But decisions regarding whether to require masks, social distancing and other protocols remain in local hands, just as they did at the end of the 2021-22 school year.

Elgin School District Superintendent Dianne Greif is pleased that school districts will continue to have freedom with regard to COVID-19 protocols.

"I think what we had in place previously worked well," she said.

Greif credits school districts with doing a good job of making individual decisions and choices that helped keep their communities healthy.

New Imbler School District Superintendent Randy Waite supports the state's decision because it allows school districts to address specific issues related to the virus.

"Each district is unique," he said. "This is a step in the right direction."

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza also said he feels good about the state's approach. He noted, though, that school districts still are required by the state to take many steps, including submitting updated communicable disease plans to the state and monitoring COVID-19 levels.

La Grande School District's rules for COVID-19 protocol include not allowing students to come to school if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

"Things are like they were when the school year ended," Mendoza said.

The La Grande School District's policy does not require anyone to wear a mask due to low COVID-19 levels. La Grande High

See, *School*/Page A3



Shannon Golden/The Observer

Marjie Olson spends time with two of her rescue horses in a corral on her Union County property on Monday, Aug. 15, 2022. Olson has plans to move to the East Coast this fall, but will continue to rescue horse and run her nonprofit, Shotzy Sanctuary, wherever she lands.

A safe haven for HORSEWOMEN

Union County nonprofit provides shelter for victims of domestic violence, their horses

By **SHANNON GOLDEN** • The Observer

LA GRANDE — In the fall of 2021, Marjie Olson received a call. For the first few seconds after she picked up, she heard nothing but a woman's sobs.

Olson, the founder of Shotzy Sanctuary — a nonprofit organization that provides shelter for horsewomen of domestic violence — said she was trying to listen for noises in the background, and was poised to call 911 with her other phone.

"What's going on?" Olson remembered asking. "I can't help you unless you

talk to me."

Maggie replied on the other end of the line, saying she was currently not in danger — more than anything, she was in shock.

"I didn't believe that she existed," she recalled of Olson.

Maggie, who asked to be identified by only her first name, was seeking help after enduring more than



Shannon Golden/The Observer

A sign for Shotzy Sanctuary hangs on the side of a shed on Marjie Olson's property near Elgin on Monday, Aug. 15, 2022. Olson named the nonprofit after her top lesson pony, Shotzy, which she rescued decades prior.

three decades of domestic violence. But she couldn't bear to leave her animals behind. She had reached out to a Facebook support group about her dilemma and someone replied with Olson's number.

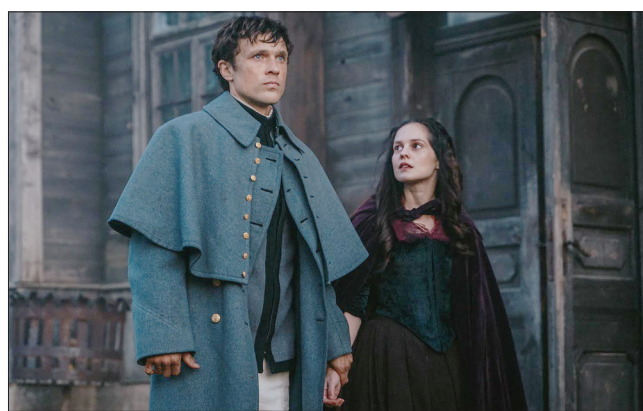
Less than a week later, Olson drove 11 hours from

her home near Elgin to Southeastern Oregon to pick up Maggie, her daughter, her 34-year-old horse, her three dogs, two cats and her belongings.

"She's a remarkable woman," Maggie said,

See, *Shelter*/Page A3

Union County director to release film based on Edgar Allan Poe



Chris Hatton/Contributed Photo

William Mosley and Melanie Zanetti are two of the stars in the new movie "Raven's Hollow," which starts streaming in September 2022 on Shudder. Chris Hatton, the movie's director and cowriter, is a graduate of Imbler High School and Eastern Oregon University.

Chris Patton's "Raven's Hollow" debuts in London

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LONDON — A 15-year journey and a single word.

Each have helped create what might be a Halloween hit this autumn for Chris Hatton, a movie director and writer with deep Union County roots. Hatton is the director and cowriter of "Raven's Hollow," a fiction-

alized story of legendary writer Edgar Allan Poe that is receiving positive reviews. The film is about Poe's days as a cadet at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, which he attended in the 1830s before mysteriously dropping out.

The streaming service Shudder will be carrying "Raven's Hollow" starting in late September. This week, the film is debuting in London at FrightFest,



Hatton

an annual film festival at Cineworld Leicester Square, where moviegoers view dozens of the world's latest horror films. Time Out's London-based digital magazine rates Hatton's work as one of five "must-see" films at FrightFest, which runs through Monday, Aug. 29.

"If you like your chills to come clad in period garb and with a gothic vibes this Shudder-produced

See, *Film*/Page A3

INDEX

ClassifiedB2	Horoscope.....B2	Opinion.....A4
Comics.....B5	Local.....A2	Outdoors.....B1
Crossword....B2	Lottery.....A2	Sudoku.....B5
Dear Abby....B6	Obituaries....A5	Weather.....B6

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 48 LOW Mainly clear		Sunday 80/44 Mostly sunny
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