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“It was a compulsion to use even though I hated every second of it.”
— Michelle Frizzell, on her ten-year addiction to opioids



Dr. Joel Rice interviews a patient, who did not wish to be identified, about his recovery at an anti-addiction clinic Friday in Pendleton. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

KICKING OPIOIDS

Addiction to painkillers affects people from all walks of life

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Michelle Frizzell got hooked on painkillers after breaking her foot. She spent the next 10 years addicted to oxycodone and then heroin, which was cheaper and easier to procure. Her day of reckoning came when a Department of Human Services worker showed up at her front door and removed her son from the home. He was placed with a family member. Frizzell desperately tried to stop using, but continued for nine more months.

“It was a compulsion to use even though I hated every second of it,” she says now. “I would cry and inject drugs because I couldn’t stop. I felt like I was going to die without it. Your brain is completely hijacked.”

Finally, a kindly pharmacist gave her some advice after she entered a Rite Aid one day to buy syringes.

“The pharmacist gave me Joel Rice’s phone number,” Frizzell said. “He said, ‘This man can help you.’”



This Aug. 2017 file photo shows an arrangement of pills of the opioid oxycodone-acetaminophen, also known as Percocet. AP Photo/Patrick Sison

‘It’s not what you think’

Dr. Joel Rice’s business is helping people kick opioids. The psychiatrist operates Grande Ronde Recovery Center with two anti-addiction clinics, one in La Grande and the other in Pendleton’s John Murray building, which Rice bought about a month ago. His therapy is a mixture of anti-addic-

tion medication and talk therapy.

On a recent morning, Rice greeted the first in a steady stream of patients. By 9 a.m., he’d already seen three and expected 30 more by day’s end. These patients don’t fit into a particular demographic mold, ranging from retirees, business people and soccer moms to college students and homeless people living in tents. One patient, a wheat farmer, once lined up four syringes on his combine seat to get him through the day, before he finally got help.

“They’re nice, good people,” Rice said. “It’s not what you think.”

Rice prescribes Suboxone, with active ingredients buprenorphine and naloxone, to help addicts break free. Critics say using Suboxone, which is also an addictive opioid, is simply exchanging one drug for another. But Rice considers the drug a critical tool to help people break the hold of painkillers.

“It’s easier to get off of,” he said. “Your brain clears and you go back to normal thinking.”

Deaths from opioid abuse rose sharply in the United States from 2015 to 2016, the latest year in a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. About 100 people die every day in this country from opioid overdoses. In a recent joint news conference, Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services Eric Hargen and CDC Director Brenda Fitzgerald sounded the alarm.

See OPIOIDS/8A

Bike ride to cycle through Pendleton

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

One of Oregon’s biggest bike rides is cycling back through Pendleton this September.

Cycle Oregon, a nonprofit that coordinates group bicycle rides to benefit community organizations, announced Wednesday night that its main ride route will be in Eastern Oregon this year, including a layover in Pendleton Sept. 12-13. A group of Pendleton Round-Up directors and the Round-Up and Happy Canyon courts were on hand to celebrate the announcement in Portland.

As an expected 2,000 to 2,200 cyclists descend on the city, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce will help coordinate the local effort to host the riders.

Kristen Dollarhide, the tourism and hospitality manager for Travel Pendleton, said the 383-mile ride will start in Baker City before heading to overnights in Halfway, Wallowa Lake State Park and Elgin. On

See CYCLE/8A

Elgin trapper arraigned for illegally killing wolf

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

Authorities in Oregon say a 58-year-old wildlife trapper caught a juvenile female wolf late last year in rural Union County, then illegally shot and killed the animal.

David Sanders Jr., of Elgin, was arraigned Jan. 23 in Union County Circuit Court for unlawful taking of wildlife — a “special status game animal” — and using unbranded traps, both misdemeanor offenses. A plea hearing is scheduled for March 27.

Sanders did not immediately return a call seeking comment. Court documents obtained by the *East Oregonian* show he remains out of jail on a release agreement that prohibits him from trapping.

According to information released Wednesday, the case

See WOLF/8A

Outpost owners taking over former Tollgate store

Alpine Outpost to offer groceries, coffee bar and restaurant

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

If you’re coming off a long day in the mountains, you can now warm your hands and fill your stomach without going too far.

The owners of the Blue Mountain Outpost, a farm stand outside of Weston, will be taking over the former Tollgate Store and Restaurant and offering hot food, coffee and baked goods.

Ren and Victoria Williams have owned the Outpost for about two years, and are in the process of purchasing the mountain store, which

is located on Highway 204 between Weston and Elgin. They will rename it the Alpine Outpost, and offer basic goods and groceries, as well as a coffee bar and restaurant.

The store used to serve skiers and snowmobilers, as well as people who lived in the mountains. It was the only place to buy food and drinks on the mountain, but the former owner, Jeff Pinsker, closed the store in June.

Ren said he and his wife will hold a soft opening next week.

“It won’t be the full menu,” he said. “But we’ll be up here all week — my wife says that we’ll take care of the hunger if people come.”

The couple decided to purchase the store and restaurant about two months ago, at prompting from their regulars.

“Everyone’s been begging us to

See OUTPOST/8A



The Blue Mountain Outpost will be taking over the operation of the former Tollgate Store east of Weston. EO file photo