

Stepping forward with a boost from technology

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Each weekday morning, Mountain Valley Therapy is filled with patients with comeback stories to share.

Many are there to receive therapy for muscle or bone injuries or help in recovering from joint replacement surgeries.

And then there is Bruce Kevan, a retired La Grande educator with a comeback story so compelling anyone searching for a superlative to describe its magnitude might emerge empty-handed.

Kevan is the survivor of a spinal cord injury suffered in a bicycle accident 5½ years ago. The crash left his legs paralyzed. Today, thousands of hours of rehabilitation work later, Kevan continues to make progress in terms of nerve and muscle function. Still Kevan, who is able to drive a vehicle that is specially outfitted, needs an electric wheelchair to move about.

It is a wheelchair he may soon rise from on his own. Kevan is regaining the ability to walk thanks to a powered Indego Exoskeleton, a wearable mobile machine powered by a system of electric motors, pneumatics,



Dick Mason/The Observer

Physical therapist Rachael Dillavou, left, and physical therapy aide Angela Cain provide support for Bruce Kevan on Nov. 19, 2020, as he walks with the help of his Indego Exoskeleton at Mountain Valley Therapy in La Grande.

levers and hydraulics that allow for limb movement after receiving signals from a user's brain.

The exoskeleton arrived in October. Since then, Kevan has walked a total of 3,000 meters — about 1.86 miles — indoors at Mountain Valley Therapy with the aid of a physical therapy team that provides constant support. The indoor walks,

often made in 23-step increments, leave Kevan exhausted, a level of weariness that is nonetheless exhilarating because he has not felt this type of fatigue since his injury.

"It is an amazing feeling for me," he said.

Rachael Dillavou, a physical therapist at Mountain Valley who has been leading Kevan's therapy for the

past three years, said Kevan has made so much progress in using the exoskeleton that she believes he will be able to walk on his own while wearing it in several months. This means Kevan, who lives near Greenwood Elementary where he is a volunteer, soon may be able to walk there and plenty of other places.

This is the third type of

exoskeleton Kevan has had during his therapy. The others were much stiffer and unwieldy, and were difficult to walk in unattended.

"It was like I was Frankenstein. I was so stiff-legged," Kevan said.

However, those exoskeletons played a valuable role in his recovery.

"They helped get me on my feet," he said.

Kevan knew immediately after being fitted with the Indego Exoskeleton the first time that it would make him dramatically more ambulatory. He understood this when he realized the new exoskeleton made it much easier for him to stand.

"I said, 'I'm sold,'" he recalled.

He then went on to walk more than 20 steps with the help of his therapists, a red-letter experience for Kevan, since he had not been able to do this since his accident.

"It was an emotional day," he said.

That walk and the many that have followed reflect how the signals Kevan's legs are receiving from his brain are getting stronger. The exoskeleton would not operate if this were not the case, Dillavou said, stressing that the device is far from automatic.

"It takes a little input from the brain and maximizes it," she said. "It is not a robot. You have to work."

The State Accident Insurance Fund covers the cost of the exoskeleton.

"They have paid for everything, every step of the way," Kevan said. "They have been incredibly supportive."

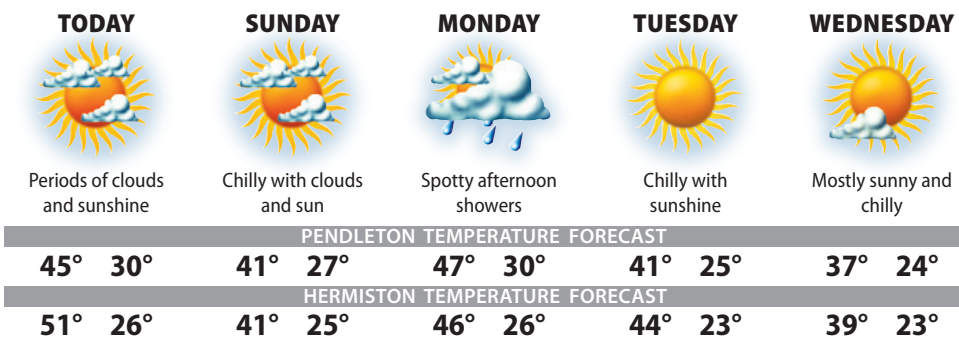
Kevan qualified for assistance from SAIF because he was injured while at work serving as interim principal at Central Elementary School. He was cycling to a meeting when the accident occurred in 2014. Kevan worked in the La Grande School District as a principal for almost 20 years, including 10 as Central Elementary's principal, before retiring in 2010 after a 34-year career as an educator.

Dillavou said SAIF officials are well aware of the remarkable progress Kevan is continuing to make. A letter from SAIF, she said, referred to Kevan's "awesome track record," which contributed to their approval of funding for Kevan's Indego Exoskeleton.

Dillavou also said she has never had a patient work harder than Kevan has.

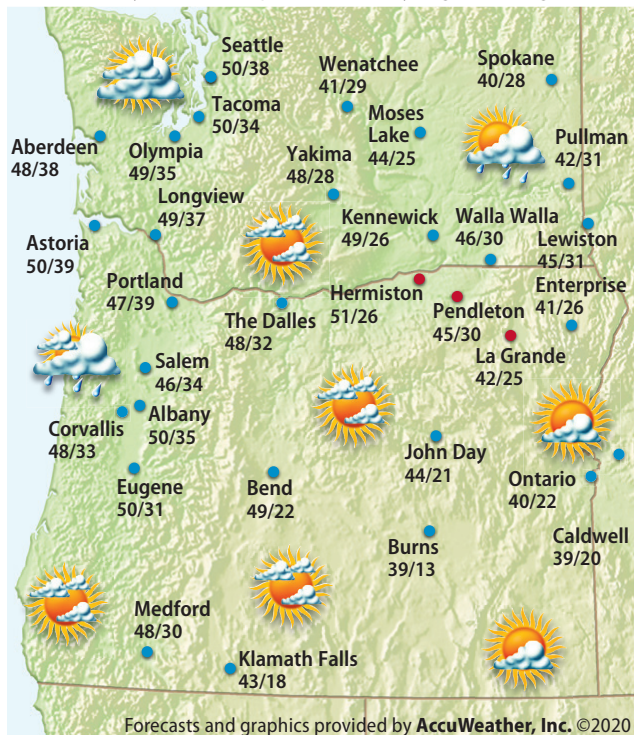
"We never have to motivate him," she said. "He motivates us."

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



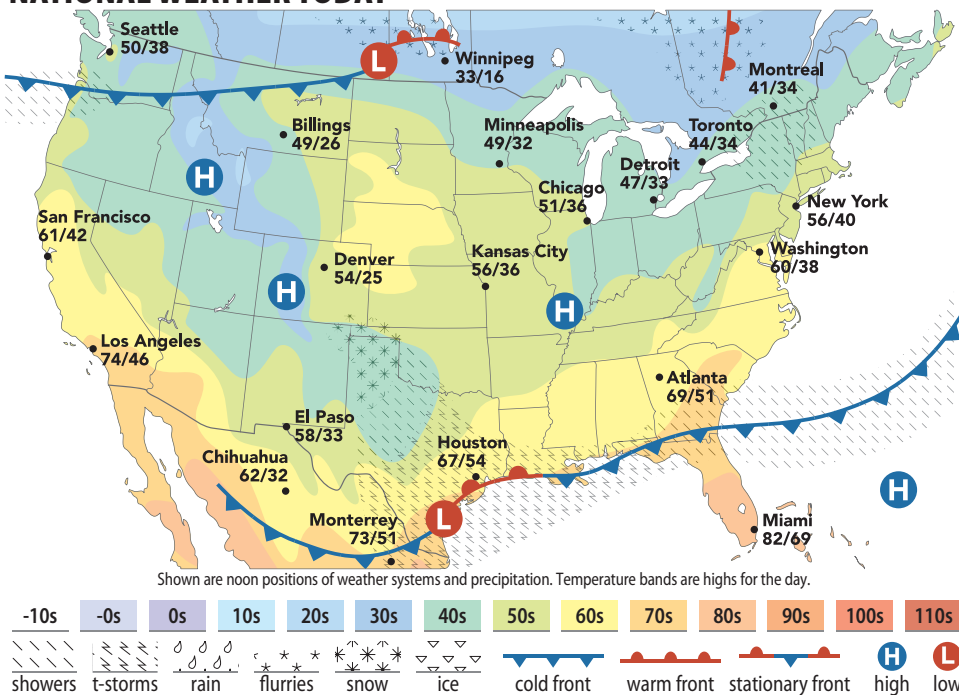
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	51°	27°
Normals	43°	30°
Records	69° (1892)	-11° (1896)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	2.42"	
Normal month to date	1.30"	
Year to date	12.18"	
Last year to date	11.56"	
Normal year to date	11.33"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	51°	30°
Normals	45°	30°
Records	68° (1949)	0° (1993)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	1.65"	
Normal month to date	1.06"	
Year to date	3.94"	
Last year to date	4.95"	
Normal year to date	8.37"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	SW 6-12	
Sun.	NE 3-6	
Boardman	SW 6-12	
Pendleton	SW 6-12	
Sun.	E 4-8	
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:12 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	4:14 p.m.	
Moonrise today	3:35 p.m.	
Moonset today	5:22 a.m.	
Full	Last	New
Nov 30	Dec 7	Dec 14
		Dec 21

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 91° in Kingsville, Texas Low -5° in Antero Reservoir, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Opening weekend set at Anthony Lakes

First two weekends of the season will be open only to season pass holders

By KALEB LAY
The Observer

BAKER CITY — Skiers and snowboarders rejoice: Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort opens to season pass holders for the first turns of the season on Saturday, Nov. 28.

Peter Johnson, who manages the resort, said that snow conditions were better than had been expected earlier in the year.

"It's looking really good," he said. "This is by far the best snow, the most snow we've had this early. All the forecasts sound really good. We'll see if those come through or not, but obviously with COVID, that changes everything for us."

The slopes at Anthony Lakes can be expected to look a bit different this year. For a start, the resort is adopting a "zero tolerance policy" regarding the wearing of masks.

"It's the state mandate, we're going to be enforcing it," he said. "We have a business to run, and it's not a discussion point. Wear a mask or not come up, there's a lot of other places to go skiing.

For the state of Oregon, it's required, so we're going to be enforcing it."

All guests and employees will be required to mask up "from the moment you pull into the Anthony Lakes parking lot to when you leave," except while eating or drinking, and Johnson said that anyone who refuses to wear one will be asked to leave.

The resort is also adopting a sort of cohort-style

"IT'S LOOKING REALLY GOOD. THIS IS BY FAR THE BEST SNOW, THE MOST SNOW WE'VE HAD THIS EARLY."

— Peter Johnson, Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort manager

approach to the ride up the mountain on the ski lift.

"If you show up in the same vehicle, you can ride the lift together," Johnson said. "No one, we're not going to force someone to ride with someone they don't know. We're going to have a lot of changes to our lift line and just asking people to ride with the people they drove up with."

For example, someone who arrives at the resort alone will ride the ski lift to the top alone, and a group who carpoled to the resort will ride only with the members of that group.

Guests also will have to maintain a social distance of 6 feet, and Anthony Lakes will have a "floor walker" patrolling the lodge during business hours to help guests maintain their distance, disinfect surfaces and answer questions as needed.

The Starbottle Saloon will feature a new ski-thru window for service and will place an emphasis on providing outdoor seating, though a reduced amount of indoor seating will be available.

Notably, Anthony Lakes will limit the number of day tickets its sells to reduce the number of people on the mountain each day.

"It's going to be a very tough year for us financially," Johnson said. "Day tickets are our main source of revenue. I've heard some people say we're just trying to push season pass sales; that is not the case at all. The reason we're doing passholders only is that passholders generally make up about 25% of our daily skier visits. So the reason we're starting with just passholders is so we can gauge and make sure we're not going over capacity."

IN BRIEF

College Place man faces new child sex crime charges

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Charges of second-degree rape of a child and indecent exposure have been added against a College Place, Washington, man already charged with other crimes against children.

Ryan Brandon Norman Dahlin, 30, pleaded not guilty to the new charges on Wednesday, Nov. 25, court documents show. Bail for the new charges has been set at \$25,000.

His previous charges are second-degree child molestation and communication with a

minor for immoral purposes. He pleaded not guilty to those charges on Nov. 23.

Dahlin was arrested in College Place following an investigation by the Walla Walla Police Department.

A trial date has been set for Jan. 13, 2021, at 9:30 a.m. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled for Dec. 29 at 1 p.m.

A 12-year-old girl told police that Dahlin had touched her inappropriately dozens of times, court documents state. According to the documents, the girl said the abuse has been going on since mid-September.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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