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Motorcycles thunder through Echo for annual toy run

Community continues event despite COVID-19 pandemic, founder's death

By **BEN LONERGAN**
East Oregonian

ECHO — The sound of more than 50 motorcycles thundered through the town of Echo on Saturday, Dec. 5, as the 17th annual Echo Toy Run departed to take donated gifts to children at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston.

The parade of riders left Echo with their motorcycles adorned with stuffed animals and brightly colored toys, a small line of cars



A stuffed animal adorns a motorcycle during the Echo Toy Run on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

trailing behind them loaded down with even more gifts.

The event, started by Al Sells 17 years ago, has taken on new meaning following Sells' death in a motorcycle crash in 2019. Sells' daughter, Amanda Silvani, said it was incredible to see support from the community for the event and her father's memory even in the midst of a global pandemic.

"I was a little worried about this year," she said. "But there was a great turnout."

Silvani, who works in home health for Good Shepherd, said she used to work in the emergency department at the hospital and had the opportunity to see firsthand the joy the toys would bring to children spending the

holidays in the hospital.

"It's usually their worst day that they're in the ER," she said. "To be able to give them a toy is incredible."

Silvani expressed her gratitude to the many people involved in carrying on the toy run in her father's memory and the many people who donate toys each year. This year, participants filled three large hospital linen carts with toys and stuffed animals.

"I think it's pretty incredible to see everyone's support — that they want to help with this every year," Silvani said.

Leading off the group of riders were Phil and Beth Spencer

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PREP SPORTS

OSAA adjusts start dates

Prep sports seasons now will be six weeks, with the sixth being a culminating week

By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

LAKE OSWEGO — The Oregon School Activities Association executive board on Monday, Dec. 7, voted to revise the 2020-21 OSAA calendar by moving the start dates of Season 2 to February 2021, with Seasons 3 and 4 to follow in the spring. The seasons now will be shorter than they were under the previous plan, which was slated to see the season start on Dec. 28.

Under the new plan, each of the three seasons would be six weeks in length, and the sixth will be a culminating week to conclude the season, akin to what was adopted by the OSAA in August.

One change is that Season 2, which the OSAA announced later Monday will start Feb. 22, would consist of the traditional fall sports of football, volleyball, soccer and cross-country, it was discussed in the meeting. Spring sports would take place in Season 3, and winter sports in Season 4.

The OSAA also announced the start date for Season 3 is April 5, and the start date for Season 4 is May 10. The start dates in the announcements are the first practice dates, with contests slated to start the next week. The exception is for football practices, which begin Feb. 8, and in baseball and softball, with pitchers and catchers slated to report March 22.

The changes were made due to an increase in COVID-19 cases

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A heated tent for outdoor dining sits in the parking lot of The Bridge in Umatilla on Monday, Dec. 7, 2020. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Taking it outside

Umatilla County restaurants offering outdoor dining under current set of COVID guidelines

By **JADE MCDOWELL AND ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — It was 33 degrees during lunchtime on Friday, Dec. 4, but that didn't stop some restaurants from offering outdoor dining.

It also didn't stop some customers from taking them up on it.

"I don't mind sitting in the cold," Shawn Jordan said. "It's not bad."

Jordan was sitting under a large tent outside The Bridge in Umatilla, eating one of the bistro's signature pizzas. Next to his table, a large, gas-fired outdoor heater helped take the chill away.

He said he would rather sit and enjoy his food rather than take it home, and he is trying to continue supporting local businesses during the pandemic.

"We've still got to support restaurants," he said. "They're doing what they can to get whatever business they can."

Paulette Dufloth, who owns The Bridge with her husband, Daren Dufloth, said they pur-

chased the heaters and tent after the newest set of state COVID-19 regulations were announced, allowing restaurants to add outdoor dining to their previously allowed takeout and delivery options.

"We try to evolve with the changes," she said.

Restaurants in Umatilla County have been on a journey of frequently shifting rules this year, getting put on takeout only rules three separate times — during the initial statewide shutdown in March, when Umatilla County got sent back to "baseline" status in August, and when the state was put on a "freeze" in November. Restaurants were allowed to add outdoor seating, but not indoor

dining, on Thursday, Dec. 3.

Dufloth said it's been a difficult year to be in the restaurant business, but at this point her family has invested too much in The Bridge to give up on it.

Under the current set of guidelines for COVID-19, restaurants in counties that are classified as an "extreme risk" level — currently including Umatilla and Morrow counties — can offer takeout, delivery or outdoor seating. The outdoor seating must have a limit of six people per table, and tents are supposed to be kept open on three sides.

Restaurant owners across the state have voiced complaints

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Development commission cool on Byers Plaza idea

Idea for a riverfront plaza at Byers originated in 2007

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Development Commission has shown a renewed appetite for public projects, but its appetite only goes so far.

At a Dec. 1 meeting, the council seemed cool to the idea with proceeding on plans to design a Byers Riverfront Plaza just west of Main Street on Southwest Byers Avenue. This was the second time staff pitched the commission on the idea of paying \$85,400 to a firm for a design report after the commission

asked for more information at a previous meeting.

The idea of a riverfront plaza at Byers originated in 2007, when the city was working with the Oregon Department of Transportation on making improvements to Court Avenue ahead of the Round-Up's 100th anniversary in 2010. Some of those ideas — downtown wayfinding signs and a riverfront park between Southwest Fourth and Fifth streets — came to fruition, while the Byers project went on the back burner.

"(The Plaza was) intended as the keystone project among the entry ways planned to connect with the Umatilla River," a city report states. "The Plaza was intended to provide a connection to the river, a



The site of the Byers Plaza concept at the corner of Southeast Byers Avenue and Southwest First Street in Pendleton on Monday, Dec. 7, 2020. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

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