

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Tip of the hat, kick in the pants



**A tip of the hat to the Pendleton Round-Up Association's Tough Enough To Wear Pink campaign and its donation of \$11,000 raised in 2020 to help local cancer support organizations.**

The funds were split between St. Anthony Hospital Cancer Care Clinic and the Kickin' Cancer New Beginnings program. In an ordinary year, contributions usually come from generous sponsors, donations, fundraising events and merchandise sales. But 2020 was hardly ordinary, and with no 2020 Pendleton Round-Up there was no Tough Enough To Wear Pink event. Instead, this year's contributions came from two primary sources — the Let'er Buck Cares Fund and Oregon Grain Growers Brand Distillery. Kudos to those organizations for stepping to the plate.

The American Cancer Society says that in 2020, there will be an estimated 1.8 million new cancer cases diagnosed and 606,520 cancer deaths in the United States. So there's no question that organizations that provide care and support for those dealing with the disease and their families continue to need our financial help.

**A kick in the pants to the agencies responsible for promoting Oregon Health Authority's free COVID-19 testing event, held Wednesday, Dec. 30 in the Pendleton Convention Center parking lot. The lack of public outreach was astounding.**

There was never any mention of this free testing event on Umatilla County Public Health's website, and the only time it was mentioned on their Facebook page was back on Dec. 16. No mention on the Umatilla County Recovery website. Neither the *East Oregonian* nor the *Hermiston Herald* received a press release about this event from Oregon Health Authority, nor did OHA approach us about any print or digital advertising.

In order to get tested on Dec. 30, one would have had to find the link to [www.doineeda-covid19test.com](http://www.doineeda-covid19test.com), and then register in advance for a specific time between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. OHA required people to download and print out a voucher — that detail alone deserves another kick in the pants — and bring it to the test site.

Not surprisingly, there were more than a half-dozen, PPE-clad health care workers standing around for five hours, mostly doing nothing. Only 50 people had signed up for testing as of the morning of Dec. 30.

In contrast, on Dec. 3, Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center and OHA held a similar drive-thru testing event at Wildhorse. It was also free and open to the public, and well-publicized by the Confederated Tribes. In six hours, 447 people were tested.

**A kick in the pants to our country's extremely disappointing performance in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine so far.**

The urgency with which scientists worked to create the vaccine has fallen far short of the urgency that federal, state and local governments in the United States have shown in administering it. Instead of creating a cohesive national strategy with dedicated resources to get shots in arms as fast as possible, the so-called Operation Warp Speed has essentially told states they're on their own in figuring something out, and states have often told the same thing to local health departments and hospitals, which are facing shortages of labor and money.

The result is that a majority of the vaccines that have been distributed have yet to be administered, despite their strict expiration date looming. On Dec. 30, Oregon Health Authority reported that only 31,382 of the 138,400 delivered to Oregon had been administered. While we were thrilled to see local hospitals begin administering the vaccine, we were disappointed to see that they waited until after Christmas, despite having received the doses the week before.

At our current pace it will take years for the United States to reach herd immunity. Officials have stated their optimism that this slow start is merely a speed bump and the pace of vaccinations will get much faster as we move into 2021. Given how much is riding on it, we hope they're right.



## YOUR VIEWS

### A new path to homeownership gives hope to region

I grew up in the Walla Walla Valley in Washington, going to Dixie Elementary School and Pi-Hi; and graduating from Wa-Hi in 1972. In Walla Walla, I worked at Whitman College, Key Technology, Inland Counseling, and Walla Walla Community College. This is my hometown, but living out my retirement here seems less and less likely.

Currently, mAvy rent alone takes over 45% of my Social Security check — and my rent is low by Walla Walla standards. Add to rent the cost of health care insurance (which is incredibly expensive), the rising cost of utilities and groceries, and I am grateful to get through each month. I am not alone in this dilemma. Every single, retired woman friend I have struggles to cover her living expenses, and we all know the trend is unsustainable. I make too much to be eligible for public housing assistance, but not enough to qualify for a home loan. I am sure that there are plenty of others — working and retired — who find themselves in similar situations.

As a matter of fact, the statistics are grim. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, for a home to be affordable, it should take up no more than 30% of a household's pre-tax income. A household spending over 30% of its income on housing is considered "cost burdened." A high percentage of renters in our region are cost-burdened: Prescott (81%); Walla Walla (57%); College Place (52%); Waitsburg (52%); Dayton (46%); and Milton-Freewater (43%). More broadly, 41% of people paying rent or mortgages in our region are living in homes they cannot afford.

I started looking for proactive solutions to these affordable-housing challenges. A friend suggested I contact the

### EDITORIALS

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### LETTERS

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to

withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

### SEND LETTERS TO:

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211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801

Community Council, which is working with volunteers to form the Common Roots Housing Trust. I am encouraged and have joined in the effort.

Common Roots' goal is to help keep homes in the region affordable by helping people like me buy a modest home on land owned by the trust. If you are interested in learning about Common Roots, I encourage you to check out their website at [www.commonrootshousing.org](http://www.commonrootshousing.org) and register to attend a free, live Zoom town hall explaining this important new initiative on Jan. 11 at 6 p.m.

To register, visit [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_V7kZiNm3Qva8PUCwvsQ7jg](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_V7kZiNm3Qva8PUCwvsQ7jg).

Patricia Divine Wilder  
Walla Walla, Washington

### Protecting our rivers, crucial for our future

I have experienced gratitude, peace, and moments of joy over this most difficult year by spending time on the Eagle, Powder, and Grande Ronde rivers. These rivers are not only beautiful, but essential to our way of life.

I was born and raised in Prineville and am grateful to now be raising my own family in Baker City. I've spent many years of my life working in the

woods as a wildland firefighter and educator, and am privileged to have explored some of the most remote stretches of our public lands. I now recognize the importance of those experiences, and see the value of these wild places, through the eyes of my daughter.

Our wild rivers and natural places around them are the lifeblood of our community. Some think of Eastern Oregon as an empty sea of sagebrush, but it's so much more. Not only do wild rivers offer a necessary respite from an increasingly wired-in world, but they are home to wildlife and the source of our clean drinking water. Millions of Oregonians, including those of us in places like Baker, La Grande and Pendleton, depend on our public lands for their drinking water.

Currently, less than 2% of our state's rivers are protected. These rivers, upon which our communities depend, deserve greater protection. I encourage Sen. Ron Wyden to introduce legislation to protect our state's Wild and Scenic Rivers, and hope the rivers of Eastern Oregon are well represented. As the world changes, it's critical we act quickly and boldly to protect what we cherish about rural Oregon — solitude, sustenance and joy.

Sarah Cuddy  
Baker City