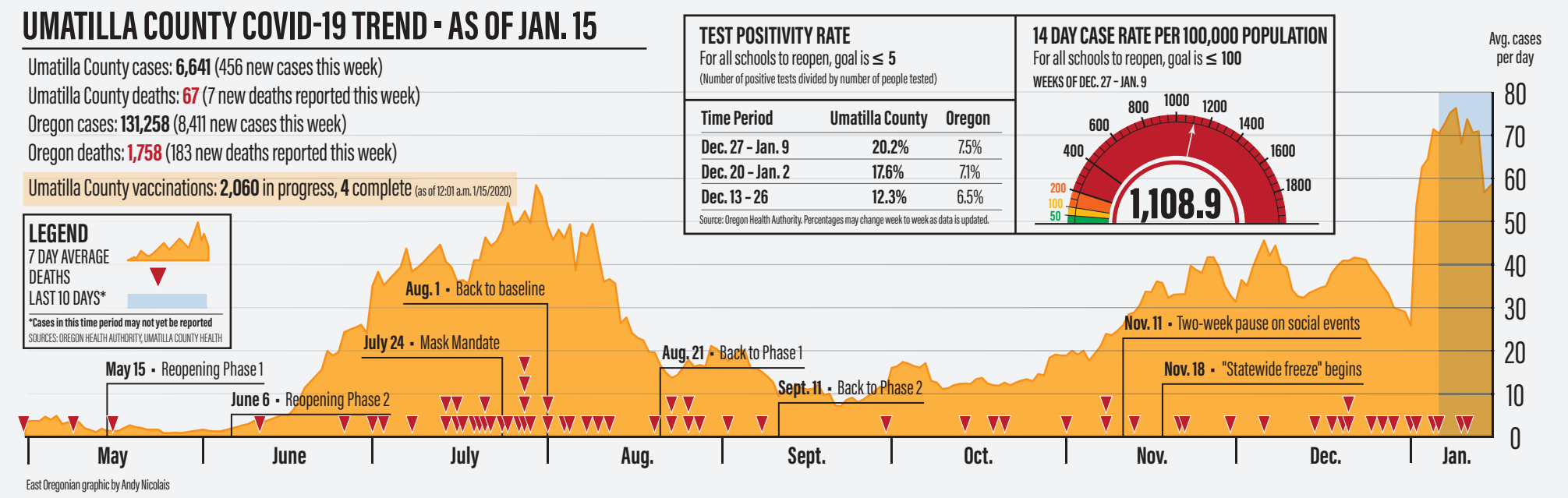




More fall ill and two die as TRCI outbreak continues

More than 100 inmates, 24 staff members test positive last week

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Two inmates at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla have died in the past

week after testing positive for COVID-19, according to press releases from the Oregon Department of Corrections, bringing the recent death toll spurred by the surge in cases at the prison to four since the beginning of January. Data from the department of corrections as of Wednesday, Jan. 13, shows that 101 inmates and 24 staff members at TRCI have tested positive

for COVID-19 in the past week. The prison’s total number of active cases among inmates has also climbed to 258, according to state data as of Jan. 13. That’s the most among prisons in Oregon, with the second highest coming from Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, which reportedly has 128 active cases among inmates.

Since reported COVID-19 cases began to spike among inmates at TRCI on Dec. 10, 2020, 494 have now tested positive, according to ODOC data. And since the beginning of December 2020, 74 have tested positive. Two Rivers has reported more COVID-19 cases among adults in custody than any other prison in Oregon since the pandemic began, with a

total of 589, according to state data. Among staff, 107 have tested positive, the third most in the state. The first TRCI inmate who reportedly died this week after testing positive for COVID-19 was a man between 70 and 80 years old who passed away at a local hospital on Sunday, Jan. 10, according to a press release from ODOC. The second inmate to be

reported dead this week after testing positive for the virus was a man between 65 and 75 years old who died at a local hospital on Thursday, Jan. 14, according to a press release from ODOC. In all, 28 inmates in Oregon prisons have died after testing positive for COVID-19. And since the pandemic began, 2,961 inmates and 739 staff have tested positive.

Winter fields



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
A checkerboard of green and gold fields lines the countryside east of Pendleton as a haze hangs over the town on Friday, Jan. 15, 2021.

New executive director ready to help underserved

Kristin Owen will lead Umatilla County services for Lifeways

By **KATY NESBITT**
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Kristin Owen has a long career of helping others, and it’s that history that has her ready for the challenges awaiting her as the new executive director of Umatilla County services for Lifeways, a nonprofit tasked with managing the county’s mental health needs. Previously the clinical director for outpatient services, Owen left her home state of Illinois 30 months ago for a lifestyle change, as well as pursuing an opportunity to continue her work in rural mental health work.

A native of Chicago, Owen said she started her work in child welfare working in a residential facility with wards of the state. She then went to work for a consulting agency that provided wraparound services for wards of the state. “I stayed at that company 17 years and monitored their residential population before shifting into the medical realm, becoming provider relations director working with Medicaid’s specific requirements, and recruiting doctors to be in our network,” she said.

Furthering her education, Owen said she earned a master’s degree in public administration and moved into a manager position, working with a children’s mental health crisis line and 45 providers across East-Central Illinois. This was her first experience in rural services. “The difference between the inner city and rural mental health is the distance and the

logistics become more difficult,” she said. “You need to think differently, ‘Where is the office located? How do you get to clients? How do they get to you?’” Owen said another big difference is that rural care is more personable and more community oriented, and organizations with similar visions work together. “With rural care there is more community involvement and participation,” she said. “It’s all about the partnerships we have and how we look at resources and how we combine them.”



Owen

These patients can be linked to other resources like anger management, budgeting and social skills that, Owen said, lead to living a better life. One of the most effective programs for outpatients, Owen said, is their peer support services staffed by people who have successfully recovered from addiction or have a strategy to manage their mental illness. “Peers share their own experiences with clients and are really encouraging,” she said. “They share their own mental health journey and work to assist others.” Lifeways has offices in Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater, including a team dedicated to serving youths that includes psychi-

atricians and psychiatric nurse practitioners that can prescribe medication. Some of what Owen called intensive services are Lifeways’ jail diversion program. “We work with those in jail, provide some groups for them and see individuals at their request,” she said. “We encourage inmates to engage with services after their release and we support the management of their probation or parole.” Lifeways offers an early assessment support alliance, Owen said, to work with psychosis in young adults age between the ages of 14 to 26. This work includes what she calls “natural support” — families and friends who are necessary to help the patient become successful. For individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, Owen said Lifeways works to keep them independent. “We provide a lot of community support, assist with grocery shopping, managing relationships with landlords and keeping people out of hospitals and residential facilities,” she said. As for their crisis services, Owen said they provide 24/7 coverage for anyone in trouble with no initial insurance verification. “Due to what they are experiencing we assist and facilitate their needs until they are stable enough to return home,” she said. “We will then follow up to provide support.” When residential care is needed, Owen said there are three facilities in Umatilla County, including the recent opening of a 16-bed acute hospital, Aspen Springs, in Hermiston. When someone in crisis is not ready to go home, Lifeways staff help them get stabilized and transitioned to either a secure residential facility like McNary or a facility like Westgate with fewer restrictions.

Owen said her staff also works closely with other care facilities and can help place patients in facilities from rural counties where no residential facility exists. “Many counties lack acute inpatient care on the east side of the state so we send placement packets to numerous facilities in every county,” Owen said. As a nonprofit, Owen said Lifeways isn’t looking at “the bottom line.” “I really think our mission is to serve underserved populations,” she said. “Being a nonprofit gives us more latitude to provide what is necessary for our clients.”

“WITH RURAL CARE THERE IS MORE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION”

— **Kristin Owen**, executive director of Umatilla County services for Lifeways

Lifeways, has offices in Idaho and Oregon, focusing on Umatilla and Malheur counties, as well as administering offices and facilities in Nampa, Caldwell and Boise, Idaho. In the 25 years since its inception, the organization has grown to employ close to 400 people — 140 in Umatilla County alone. As a community mental health provider, Owen said Lifeways is responsible for serving those on Medicaid, as well as Medicare patients and those with private insurance. “We are part of the public health safety net,” she said. Outpatient services, including therapy, are six- to 12-month programs that are solution-focused and supported by case manage-

ment. These patients can be linked to other resources like anger management, budgeting and social skills that, Owen said, lead to living a better life. One of the most effective programs for outpatients, Owen said, is their peer support services staffed by people who have successfully recovered from addiction or have a strategy to manage their mental illness. “Peers share their own experiences with clients and are really encouraging,” she said. “They share their own mental health journey and work to assist others.” Lifeways has offices in Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater, including a team dedicated to serving youths that includes psychi-

LOCAL BRIEFING

Oregon FFA receives endowment

SALEM — The Oregon FFA is more financially secure after a donation of \$500,000 from Northwest Farm Credit Services to establish an “Oregon FFA Today and Tomorrow” endowment.

Kirk Maag, president of the Oregon FFA Foundation, said Oregon FFA was deeply grateful for the generous donation — the organization’s largest ever. “This ground-breaking seed gift gives us the foundation to establish an endowment fund that will provide support for the Oregon FFA Association in perpetuity,” Maag said. “This will ensure that Oregon FFA can continue to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.” Brent Fetsch, Oregon president of Northwest Farm Credit Services, is a former Oregon State FFA Officer and current secretary of the Oregon FFA Foundation. He said students who participate in FFA are more likely to graduate from high school, and 93% continue their education beyond high school. “We hope others will join us by investing in ‘Oregon FFA Today and Tomorrow’ to provide a stable source of funding well into the future,” Fetsch said.

Hermiston man buys winning Powerball

HERMISTON — A man from Hermiston purchased a winning ticket good for \$100,000 from a Powerball drawing on Saturday, Jan. 9, according to a press release from Oregon Lottery.

Bradley Plate, the winner, bought his ticket from the Short Stop #1 in Hermiston. The store manager, Laurie Longhorn, said she’s now expecting more customers, according to the press release. “The higher the jackpot gets, the more people come in,” Longhorn said. “With this news we might see even more people.” Plate’s ticket for the Jan. 9 Powerball matched four of the white ball numbers, which left one white ball number and the Powerball number unmatched. Plate then added the Power Play multiplier option, and when the Power Play multiplier of 2 was drawn, his \$50,000 prize was doubled. According to the press release, Longhorn said the store sold a larger Keno jackpot years ago, but she believes this is the largest prize they have sold. “We have lots more people coming in and getting tickets. Customers always tell us if they win the big one they will come back and give some to us,” Longhorn said according to the press release.

— *EO Media Group*

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Outreach Food Pantry
Thanks the many individuals and organizations of our community for their tremendous support during 2020. Your generosity was unprecedented. God bless you.