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District welcomes back elementary school students

Pendleton students, teachers excited to be back in classrooms

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — It was the second first day of school at the Pendleton School District.

After months of mostly seeing their students on computer screens, teachers at the district's K-5 schools welcomed in kids for the first day of in-person instruction on Monday, Feb. 22.

At Sherwood Heights Elementary School, staff laid down tape on the classroom floors to mark social distancing radii and walking space. Fifth grade teacher Mike Heriza

HERMISTON SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANS HYBRID LEARNING FOR MORE GRADES

In light of the "continued decline" of COVID-19 cases in the Hermiston ZIP code, the Hermiston School District said that elementary schools are planning for second and third graders to return to the classroom part time on March 1 and fourth and fifth graders on March 8. **Page A3**

called it his "spiderweb."

"It's like the first day of school but I know all of them," he said.

For all the audial reminders that in-person schools was back — the thrum of student chatter, the authoritative voices of teachers, the rumble of school buses — the visual presentation of the school was a reminder that public education was still making its way through the pandemic.

Classes were about half-empty as individual classes are split between morning and afternoon sessions to accommodate social distancing. The cafeteria will remain closed during mealtimes as students take their lunches in their classrooms. At least at the outset, students are being afforded one recess day per week.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Staff greet students as they get off the bus at Washington Elementary School in Pendleton on the first day of in-person instruction on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Irelynn Kollman serves up a pair of cookies at Breaking Grounds Coffee in Heppner on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021.

Citizen review board seeking volunteers

Umatilla County-based boards review cases on children in foster care

By ANDREW CUTLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — John Nichols knows serving as a volunteer on a foster care citizen review board is a commitment, both in time and energy.

But, Nichols said, being in a position to help foster children from getting lost in the system is a reward that makes the personal investment worthwhile.

"You're acting on behalf of these kids that are in foster care, and we know that the stats haven't been great for Oregon foster care kids. We're really reviewing the cases to see if the agency is following what they need to be following. And the (citizen review board) as a whole, including our local agency, has called attention to certain issues that are coming up that could be affecting the safety of kids."

Nichols, a field manager for the Oregon Judicial Department, oversees citizen review boards in eight Eastern Oregon counties. He is seeking volunteers to serve on a pair of Umatilla County boards in Hermiston and Pendleton.

"We really want some permanent volunteers. Now, permanent means that they're willing to keep committing to the program," Nichols said. "The first year, they're on a one-year probation period, and then from that point on, they're



Nichols

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Not interested

Some Heppner residents hope Dollar General passes them by

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HEPPNER — When Drew Brannon heard Dollar General was interested in a piece of property in downtown Heppner, he was worried.

Brannon, who has taken to checking regularly to see if the company has purchased any property in town, said it hasn't yet, and Dollar General has not responded to an inquiry sent last week by the *East Oregonian* about whether it has any plans to build a store there.

A few Heppner residents appeared before the Heppner City Council recently and have started a petition, however, hoping to send a message early that they're not interested in a large discount retail chain coming to town.

"It doesn't match the history and culture here," Brannon said. "We call Heppner our little island of paradise."

Shopping and dining options in the Morrow County town of about 1,110 residents are generally limited to small, independent local businesses, such as Bucknum's Bar and Grill or Sage Clothing Company. There is a Les Schwab Tire Center, but there is no McDon-

alds or other fast food chains, and people purchase their groceries at the local Heppner Market rather than a Safeway or Walmart.

For business owners like Brannon, who owns Breaking Grounds Coffee and a bread delivery service, a large company like Dollar General moving in feels like unfair competition. Such retail chains are able to use economies of scale to offer lower prices than a small, independently owned market or drug store.

"We want competition to come to town," Brannon said. "It keeps us (from getting)

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Mother was told 'no chance' of passing COVID to unborn infant

David James Wadley Jr. first Oregon child under age 9 to die of COVID-19

By JAIMIE DING
The Oregonian

PENDLETON — An infant boy born prematurely last month in Pendleton died the same day he tested positive for COVID-19, making him Oregon's youngest victim of the deadly coronavirus.

David James Wadley Jr. is the first Oregon child age 9 or younger to die of COVID-19. His death was one of six coronavirus fatalities reported on Thursday, Feb. 18.

Ashley Wadley, his mother, was 31 weeks pregnant when she tested positive for COVID-19 about Jan. 11 or

12. She told *The Oregonian/Oregon-Live* she first lost her sense of taste and smell — and that she was bedridden with a high fever one day later.

Doctors told Wadley over the phone that she had "no chance" of passing COVID-19 to the baby, she said.

Children are less likely than adults to develop severe cases of the virus, state epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger said in a statement, and infant deaths from COVID-19 are "extremely rare."

Wadley, a 29-year-old Athena resident, stayed home, took Tylenol and drank fluids as she waited to test negative so she could see a doctor in person. But on Jan. 14 — two or three days after she tested positive — her unborn son suddenly stopped moving in her belly.

"That's how I knew something was

wrong," she said. "Before I got sick, he was nonstop moving."

She tried to get him to move again — by rocking back and forth, for example, and drinking something sweet — but went to the hospital on Jan. 15 because her son still wasn't moving.

Her son was born that night through an emergency cesarean section. He weighed three pounds, 15 ounces, and was immediately flown to the Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington.

Wadley stayed behind at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton.

At first, the infant boy had to be intubated, but doctors took the tubes out after he was able to breathe on his own and told Wadley her son was doing much better, she said.

"He was spunky," Wadley said.

"He was doing great."

But her son's condition had rapidly deteriorated by the next night. Wadley said he had developed two brain bleeds, which were causing seizures, and that his lungs were cloudy.

He died on Jan. 17, moments after receiving results of a positive COVID-19 test.

After giving birth, Wadley was never again able to see her son alive.

"I had COVID so they wouldn't let me around him," she said.

The infant boy had undisclosed, underlying health conditions, according to the Oregon Health Authority. But Wadley said she was unaware of any health problems her son may have had, aside from his premature birth.

"I did every test to make sure he was 100% healthy, no defects, no nothing," she said.

