

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021

145th Year, No. 58

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

Restaurants glad to reopen doors to customers

Limited capacity indoor dining returns to Umatilla County

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Ever since local businesses shut down in the state-mandated “freeze” back in November, Rodney Burt, the co-owner of OMG Burgers & Brew in Pendleton, estimates that heat-

ing his outdoor seating area has cost about \$40 in propane each day. That’s about \$1,200 each month.

“You’re not raising any prices, cutting any labor,” he said. “It’s just another thing right out of your pocket.”

Burt, who runs the restaurant with his wife, Kimberly, said that he had to lay off eight of his 20 employees when the freeze began. It was the second time during the pandemic he had to do so.

“It’s hard, because they’re part of your family, and you know they’re

struggling too,” he said, adding that several of the employees laid off last March didn’t receive their unemployment relief checks until August. “But you do what you gotta do so you can keep it going.”

Last week, when Umatilla County was lowered from Gov. Kate Brown’s extreme risk category to high risk, allowing indoor dining at limited capacity, Burt was able to rehire his employees and prepare for a weekend he said was sure to be packed with eager customers, who immediately came calling as restaurants through-

out downtown Pendleton reopened on Friday, Feb. 26.

“Hopefully, things will stay open, just like they were a year and a half ago — summer of 2019,” he said. “Rockin’ and rollin’, making lots of money, all the staff’s making lots of money. Everybody will be happy. It’s going to be like that, I hope.”

Community has been very supportive during lockdown

Some Pendleton businesses said they were able to get by steadily throughout the most recent three-

month lockdown due to a steady stream of takeout orders, financial support from groups like the local Chamber of Commerce, and the support and encouragement in the tight-knit community of Main Street businesses.

“The community has been really supportive,” said Joe Meda, the owner of Joe’s Fiesta Mexican Restaurant. “Saying anything less than that would be ungrateful on my part.”

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WILDHORSE VACCINATIONS

Event marks turning point for CTUIR

Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center vaccinates nearly 1,000

By **BRYCE DOLE AND ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

MISSION — Since the COVID-19 vaccine was introduced late last year, there have been dozens of mass vaccination drives across the state. But the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation’s two-day vaccination event at Wildhorse Resort & Casino was likely the only one to begin with a Washat prayer.

On Friday, Feb. 26, and Saturday, Feb. 27, Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center teamed up with the Oregon National Guard to vaccinate 932 people. Another 46 people were vaccinated using leftover doses after the event to push the total to 978.

But before needles met arms, Armand Minthorn, a member of the Tribes’ Board of Trustees and a spiritual leader, opened the day with a song.

“The song was a welcoming song that we do when we’re trying to bring in all the good light to an event,” Chuck Sams, the interim executive director of the CTUIR, said. “We wanted the room lit up bright with the good energy in order to provide the vaccine.”

Leaders believe the two-day period represents an important milestone for the Tribes. Once

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“I really wanted to be in a play again. I thought, ‘Nobody else in our school is going to make a play that I can be in so I’m going to make one myself.’”

— **Megan McLouth**, Weston Middle School sixth grader



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Megan McLouth, right, cracks up up at her friend Hazel Hammersla during a rehearsal of the play the sixth graders wrote together while video chatting during pandemic isolation.

Pandemic playwrights

Weston sixth graders write play from pandemic isolation while video chatting

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

ATHENA — About a month and a half ago, Megan McLouth and Hazel Hammersla felt oh, so tired of social distancing and pandemic isolation.

So Megan emailed Hazel and asked her friend and Weston Middle School classmate if she’d like to write a play together virtually.

Hazel quickly agreed. The two sixth graders figured out a way to write their script while video chatting on their phones. Deciding to start immediately, they fired up their laptops. Megan sat on a carpeted stairway at her house. Hazel divided her time between a couch and the floor.

“I Googled ‘good themes for kids’ plays’ and it came



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Sixth graders Megan McLouth and Hazel Hammersla (fourth and fifth from the left) practice a curtain call during a rehearsal of the play they wrote during pandemic isolation during a video conference and using a shared Google document.

up with plays about messengers and warriors. We decided to combine the two themes,” Megan said. “Hazel set up a Google document and we just started writing.”

Megan did most of the

writing, while Hazel supplied dialogue ideas and proofread copy. Together they dreamed up characters and fleshed out their personalities. About two hours later, “The Messenger” was a fait accompli. The girls

felt exhilarated.

“We were both screaming over the phone, we were so excited,” Megan said.

Their seven-page, approx-

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