



Jade McDowell/East Oregonian

A spinning wheel sits in the main room of the Umatilla Museum.

## Umatilla Museum preparing to reopen

Museum's grand reopening slated for May 8

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — After more than a year of closure, the Umatilla Museum is preparing to reopen.

Unless Umatilla County gets shut down with additional COVID-19 restrictions, board member Judy Simmons said, the museum plans to hold a grand reopening on Saturday, May 8. The museum closed during the initial COVID-19 shutdowns in spring 2020 and hasn't been open to the public since that time.

Simmons said volunteers held a cleaning party on Saturday, April 24, to dust shelves and do other things needed to prepare.

The museum used to have a paid employee, but no longer does. Simmons said the Umatilla Historical Society, which runs the museum, is in need of volunteers who can work shifts during the museum's hours, Thursday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"Having an employee here really helped with getting volunteers," she said. "Now we're going to solely rely

on volunteers."

The museum features a variety of displays, including sections on the Native American tribes that first settled the area, the McNary Dam, the railroad, pioneer household items and antique farm equipment. The building was once the Umatilla city hall and jail, and Simmons said the most popular room is the old jail cells.

"People like that because they step inside and shut the door and get a picture of themselves in jail," she said.

Staff, students and alumni of Umatilla School District are working on a new room, featuring items from the school district's past and a display about the district's robotics teams. The historical society also filmed interviews with some of Umatilla's oldest residents, which Simmons said they plan to show on a television after the videos are done being edited.

The Umatilla Museum, 911 Sixth St., has a wheelchair-accessible side entrance for those who aren't able to make it up the step to the main entrance. People interested in volunteering for the museum or donating Umatilla-specific artifacts can contact Simmons at 541-571-8780 or j205simmons@gmail.com.

## Officials warn of conditions in Umatilla National Forest

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Officials with the Umatilla National Forest are warning visitors looking to adventure into the forest as spring begins to use caution or refrain from traveling on forest roads.

Though snow is beginning to recede in the foothills of the Blue Mountains, most roads remain impassible due to snow or mud caused by the melting snowpack, a press release from the Umatilla National Forest said. "We typically see incidents this time of year where families head up for the day, get stuck, and end up spending the night or making a very long hike out to look for help," said Shane Dittlinger, the recreation program manager for the Umatilla National Forest.

Much of the Blue Mountains also lack cellphone service, so officials are advising that people looking to explore the outdoors bring along extra warm clothing, food and water in case they get stuck and have to spend the night in the forest.

Officials are also encouraging visitors to "minimize" their impact on the forest as the weather warms and snow melts and roads become more susceptible to rutting, the press release said.

"Forest roads are not constructed to be all-weather roads, so they can be easily

damaged when wet, especially during the spring season," said Shaun Oliver, Umatilla National Forest engineer. "Tire ruts that are just an inch deep can leave lasting impressions that only grow with rain and erosion."

Officials said that although some early-season forest visitors seek "mudding" or "mud-bogging" opportunities, they note that "it is illegal to operate a vehicle on or off-road in a manner that damages or unreasonably disturbs land and vegetation."

Officials are asking people who see evidence of damage to report it. "We encourage forest users to responsibly enjoy their National Forest roads and trails," said Umatilla National Forest Supervisor Eric Watrud. "This will not only avoid further damage of the resources, but also ensure that there are future riding opportunities across the Forest."

Despite the early accessibility, some roads are seasonally closed for wildlife or resource concerns. Others are also closed in areas damaged by the 2020 February and May floods, the press release said.

Maps and updates on closures and flood repair activities can be found on the Forest Service website and at any Forest Service office. Closure signs will also be posted on the ground, the press release said.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### County has first coronavirus death since April 7

PENDLETON — Umatilla County recorded a coronavirus-related death on Friday, April 23, its first such instance since April 7.

The man who died was 61, according to a Umatilla County Public Health release. He tested positive on Nov. 4, 2020, and died at his home on April 9.

His death brings the county's total to 84 since testing began last year.

— EO Media Group



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