

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, MAY 11, 2021

145th Year, No. 88

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

BMCC not likely to require vaccine this fall

School officials say county's low vaccination rate a factor in decision

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — As they look to reopen in the fall, colleges and universities are all trying to answer the question of whether to require their students to get their COVID-19 vaccinations before returning to the classroom.

Three of Oregon's largest public universities answered affirmatively: Oregon State University, Portland State University and University of Oregon have all announced that students need to be fully vaccinated before returning to campus.

According to Casey White-Zollman, the communications director for the Oregon Community Colleges Association, none of the state's 17 community colleges have made a decision on vaccination requirements. Although the decision



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File
Blue Mountain Community College Nursing Program Director Laurie Post, second from right, leads a class of students at the college's Pendleton campus on Jan. 11, 2021. The school's nursing program is one of the few programs that has been operating in-person since the start of the pandemic.

isn't final, interim Blue Mountain Community College President Connie Green said BMCC is planning to let students return in the fall without their shots.

Green said the state is allowing higher education institutions to resume in-person classes as long as they require face masks and enforce some sort of social distancing rule, although a stringent 6-foot standard isn't mandatory.

Given that Umatilla County sports one of the lowest vaccination rates in the state, Green said requir-

ing students to vaccinate against COVID-19 would be a big ask.

But the situation could change based on vaccination rates and case rates, as well as what other institutions of higher learning decide to do.

"We're not going to be trendsetters," Green said.

The closest four-year university in Oregon, Eastern Oregon University, hasn't publicly announced its vaccine policy yet, according to *The Bulletin* in Bend. But just across the border

See BMCC, Page A10

Oregon House honors Umatilla leader

Former Umatilla superintendent, city councilor George Fenton honored by House resolution

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

SALEM — A former Umatilla superintendent and city councilor was recently honored in the Oregon House of Representatives.

The House voted unanimously to adopt House Concurrent Resolution 13 honoring George I. Fenton, who died in 2019 at the age of 88. The resolution is headed to the Senate for a vote there.



Fenton

Kristle Wyant, Fenton's daughter, said it meant a lot to her to hear state legislators praise her father's life work on the House floor.

"It's nice knowing people held him in such great respect," she said.

The resolution states Fenton "will be forever remembered as a dedicated educator and a gentleman statesman who touched countless lives and made his community a better place."

Wyant said after her father passed away, many teachers in Umatilla School District told her stories about his kindness during their job interview, or how he let them stay with the family while they tried to find housing, or even

See Leader, Page A10



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
East Umatilla Fire & Rescue Fire Chief David Baty explains issues with backing fire trucks into the district's Weston fire station on Wednesday, May 5, 2021. The primary issue is the steep angles of the driveway, which results in unnecessary stress and twisting on the vehicles' chassis and has caused vehicles to scrape the concrete if not backed perfectly.

A game changer

Sen. Bill Hansell, Rep. Bobby Levy to direct stimulus funds to fire district

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

WESTON — Money from the American Rescue Plan could be a game changer for East Umatilla Fire & Rescue, according to Fire Chief David Baty.

As money from the federal stimulus package comes to Oregon, state senators are being given \$4 million to allocate to a project in their district and state representatives are given \$2 million. Baty said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, are on board with allocating a portion of their funds to build a new fire station for the district.

The money should be enough to build the new station in Weston without going to taxpayers for more.

"It's going to be close, but I think if we keep a real sharp pencil, we'll be all right," Baty said.

The station would serve as headquarters for East Umatilla Fire & Rescue, which covers about 420 square miles in eastern Umatilla County after three smaller districts merged in 2020. Baty said they already have the

See Fire station, Page A10



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
A firetruck from East Umatilla Fire & Rescue provides mutual aid at a structure fire in Pilot Rock on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
East Umatilla Fire & Rescue Fire Chief David Baty indicates on a map how the fire district has grown over the years during a tour of the Weston station on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

COVID-19

Latest numbers reveal mixed results

Umatilla County drops nearly 10 points to 136.2 cases per 100,000

By GARY A. WARD
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Eastern Oregon showed a mixed set of results under the latest weekly COVID-19 risk level numbers released by the Oregon Health Authority on Monday, May 10.

Because of the wide difference in population, a smaller county's numbers can often show wide swings based on smaller samples. The state has often put counties in lower levels than the statistics might indicate because of underlying information.

Umatilla County — categorized as a large county — dropped nearly 10 points to 136.2 cases per 100,000, a rate that would rank it as moderate risk. The only downside was an uptick in the percent of positive cases to 5.5% in the new reporting period, up from 5% reported last week.

Baker County's statistics were trending down but remained high compared to other areas in the state. The county showed a decline in cases to 47 and a drop in cases per 100,000 to 277.9 from 360.7 in the previous report. The positive infection rate is 9%, down from 10.6% in the last report.

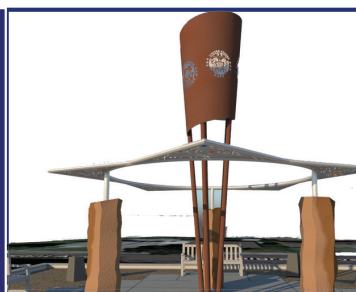
Union County held the line for the most part on cases. It showed a small uptick in positive test rates, to 2.7% from 2%, but its case numbers were almost identical to the last reporting period.

Cases and rates are up in Wallowa and Gilliam counties, but the small population leaves their risk level status to be announced Tuesday, May 11, more up in the air than other counties in the region.

Grant County, a hot spot in recent weeks, showed an overall decline in cases, but reported positive cases were up to 10% — twice the level that OHA says is

See COVID, Page A10

Buy a Brick!
Be On A Brick!



Contribute to the Beacon of the Sentinels, an exciting new tribute to Pendleton's military, past and present, developed by the VFW Let'er Buck Post and the Pendleton Arts Commission. Get all the details. Visit the website:

www.pendletontribute.com

