

Pride: 'It takes bravery. I'm proud of everyone that showed'

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Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, sang a prayer to bless the day.

"I've been loving getting in touch with the kids because, specifically, I want to be the person that I didn't have growing up," said Kenneth Prince, a drag queen who is gay and non-binary.

Prince, a local bartender and barista, said they had little to no support growing up in southeast Texas, and would sometimes get in fights about their sexual orientation. That's why the Pride event meant the world to them.

"I didn't think that this town, being so little and so red, that it would actually have anything like this," they said. "I haven't felt any negativity, and it's honestly been the world."

After the success of last year's Pride march, United Pendleton founders Aiden Bork and Noah Wallace decided to follow up with a larger parade through town this year, getting permission and support from Turner and Pendleton Police Chief Chuck Byram. Police were on every corner during the parade, blocking off the streets.

"This is Pendleton," said Bork, who is non-binary. "Depending on where you



A group of drag queens cheer and wave from a trailer Saturday, June 12, 2021, in downtown Pendleton as they ride away at the end of the Proud Together Pride Parade.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

are in the town, it seems that there is a different side of Pendleton that you see. And I wanted to make it clear that all of this is Pendleton."

PFLAG Pendleton, a group that has supported

the local LGBTQ community since the mid-2000s, also helped sponsor and organize the event. But due to a disagreement between leaders of the two groups, PFLAG as an organization

was not present.

"It was a conflict of views," Bork said. "We decided we wanted United to stand on our own."

Among the residents who have seen first-hand how

Pendleton has changed is 35-year-old Ashley Jones, who attended the event.

At age 12, Jones came out as lesbian when she wore rainbow suspenders and ran through her school hallways

yelling she was gay.

"I was the only gay person I knew in school," she said.

In high school, Jones said she had to change in a separate room during gym class. To attend prom with her girlfriend, she said the school forced her to bring along a boy. And after kissing her girlfriend in the hallway, she was called to the principal's office, where she said she was threatened with suspension. She fought back.

"I told them that's not OK," she said. "It's not OK to allow other people to kiss their significant others in the hallway and single me out."

One day, she recalled, a man even chased her down the street with a bat, calling her a name not appropriate to print.

Things have come a long way since then, Jones said. Now, she works for Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living, finding housing for people with HIV. The organization donated \$1,000 to United Pendleton at the event.

"It takes a lot of bravery to come down here and know that the whole town is seeing you here and you could possibly be in the newspaper," she said. "It takes bravery. I'm proud of everyone that showed."

She added: "Love is greater than hate."

Museum:

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us for a manageable price," McBee said. "Amy and the EO board helped us tremendously by seeing the value of a children's museum in our community and pricing the building in a way that we could purchase it."

McBee, who was the nonprofit's first board president and served four years as an unpaid executive director, wrote a grant proposal to the Meyer Memorial Foundation. After securing the building, the board and nearly 200 people rolled up their sleeves with exhibit planning, fundraising efforts, recruiting volunteers and more.

Pendleton experienced a harsh winter in 1994 when McBee, her husband, John, and their three children, ages 1, 3 and 5, returned to Eastern Oregon. With snow blanketing the region in October, McBee longed for a safe and educational venue where young families could take their children and have fun throughout the year.

Organizing a public meeting to gauge interest and brainstorm ideas, McBee said at least 40 people showed up and expressed enthusiasm. Thus, the initial effort began with many people joining committees.

"We worked very intensely for a full year and were able to open up after just one year," McBee said.

Surviving the shutdown

And just as it took a village to see McBee's dream come to fruition, it took a community to ensure the museum would survive a lengthy closure because of the global pandemic. Tight finances aren't new to the museum. It nearly fell victim to the Great Recession, closing out 2009 with a \$33,000 deficit.

During the pandemic closure, Engle said the children's museum focused on paying the bills. Also, the organization wanted to maintain visibility and bring in revenue.

For more than a dozen years, the children's museum hosted the Doxie Dash each



Ricardo Lara, 7, pieces together a hospital out of large blue blocks on Saturday, June 12, 2021, at the Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon in Pendleton. The museum reopened June 1 after a 444-day closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian



The Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon in Pendleton reopened on June 1, 2021, after a 444-day closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

June as its major fundraiser. In 2020, museum officials hoped it only would be postponed, but continued pandemic-related restrictions nixed the event. With things just beginning to open up, Chavez-Sierra and Garrigues said the board decided to forgo the Doxie Dash this year, instead opting to focus on the museum's upcoming 25-year anniversary.

In addition to a pair of rummage sales that board members spearheaded, the museum's toy store was open on Saturdays. And when the Pendleton Farmers Market resumed, the store opened on Fridays, too. The annual appeal, Engle said, highlighted the museum's basic needs of paying its insurance and utilities.

"It was difficult because we knew a lot of people in town were struggling," Engle said. "To ask them to give when they're struggling was hard to do."

However, she said the response from the commu-

nity was heartwarming. Answering the call, the end-of-the-year effort brought in nearly \$8,000.

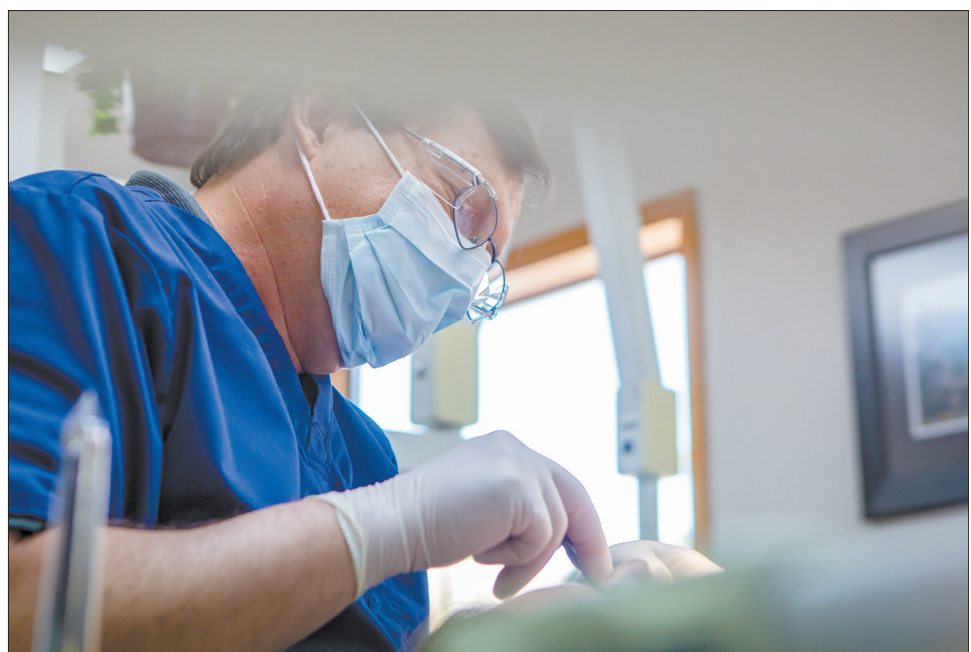
Board members, who maintain the museum's social media presence, recorded their own story times, conducted family-fun challenges and posted virtual child-related activities.

"We tried a few things online," Garrigues said. "We didn't want to lose contact with the community."

But nothing replaces the hands-on interactive experience of going to the museum, he said. With the doors open again, the board, Engle and McBee are excited to see it thrive again.

"A child's work is play, and this wonderful nonprofit has been able to provide children and families a fun place to learn and play together for many years," McBee said.

The Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon is at 400 S. Main St. For more information, visit www.cmeo.org, Facebook or Instagram.



Dr. Greg Jones, dentist for Fourth Street Dental, inspects a patient's teeth during an exam Thursday, June 10, 2021, at the office's Hermiston location.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Care:

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emergency services during the spring of 2020, to help preserve personal protective equipment that was in extremely short supply.

In a weekly survey of 13,000 dentists nationwide by the American Dental Association, 76% of dentists said their office was only open for emergency patients and 18% said they were closed completely on March 23, 2020. Those numbers slowly shrunk over the year, and by December, 39% described their practice as operating normally and 60% said they were open but seeing fewer patients than usual.

Jones said dentists already practiced many of the guidelines for preventing COVID-19 transmission even before the pandemic, including instrument sterilization and wearing gloves and masks while working on patients. But they have also added new precautions, including more frequent sanitization of the waiting room area and temperature checks when patients arrive.

Cancer screenings

One of the times delaying preventative care can

have the most serious consequences is when cancer is involved.

Dr. Nattamol Hosiriluck, a hematologist with Tri-Cities Cancer Center, which has offices in Hermiston, said she has seen a few cases of people whose cancer is more advanced after delaying a routine screening, such as a mammogram, because they were trying to avoid catching COVID-19.

"Right now, the queue is really long to get a colonoscopy, so if you delayed a colonoscopy I would say book it down because it could be a few months from now," she said.

Some cancers grow faster than others, she said, but in certain cases, not catching something for an extra six months could be fatal.

Hosiriluck said while cancer patients are in treatment, they have a higher risk of severe cases of COVID-19, so she strongly encourages patients to get vaccinated before treatment.

"If they're not willing to get the shot, I recommend careful social distancing, because they're more at risk," she said.

Eye exams

Some patients put off eye care during the pandemic.

Dr. Michelle Monkman,

an optometrist with Vision Pendleton, said they were shut down for five weeks in spring of 2020, then opened to lower patient volumes. Things have been rebounding, however, as people who have gotten vaccinated have felt more comfortable coming in.

Monkman said she hadn't personally seen anyone lose vision because they hadn't caught something soon enough after skipping appointments during the pandemic. But she had seen people live longer with easily fixable issues like cataracts. One of her biggest concerns, she said, is seeing people try to wear their contacts much longer than recommended rather than come in for a new prescription.

If someone wears contacts for five or six months that were meant to be replaced monthly, she said, they can cause serious problems, including blood vessels growing into the cornea, dry eyes, scratches in the cornea and infections.

If people are wondering whether to book an eye appointment, Monkman said, "I think it's time."

"Eyes need to be, especially in the elderly population, checked yearly," she said.

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