

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, JULY 6, 2021

145th Year, No. 112

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

Hermiston rebounds with end of restrictions

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — It's been a challenging year for Laura Avila.

At 32, Avila has four children, ages 5, 9, 11 and 15, and lives off the tips she makes as a waitress at the La Palma Mexican Restaurant in Hermiston. Taking care of her kids while schools were closed was difficult, she said.

And earlier this year, some of her friends and family members contracted COVID-19 — including two of her children.

"It was really scary," she said. "They had a fever, their body ached. But I never got it. I was tested and was negative. That's why I got vaccinated. I didn't want to get sick."

When pandemic restrictions were lifted last week, Avila, like so many others, said she felt happy. Business has remained steady at La Palma — which her parents opened using their life savings in the mid-2000s — and yet things still picked up last week. Now, her biggest hope, she said, is for the community to stay safe and healthy.

"We just don't want to lose the support that we have by people getting sick," said Avila, who, along with her coworkers, has been vaccinated against COVID-19.

For some business owners and employees in downtown Hermiston, it was a wash of relief to have masking and distancing mandates lifted last week, allowing customers to reenter businesses smiling and carefree. But for others, they are remaining wary as COVID-19 variants are on the rise and Umatilla County sits among the least-vaccinated and most-infected counties in Oregon.

"All the guards are going down, and there's great potential for problems again," said Michael Gormley, the owner of Neighborhood Books & Gifts in downtown Hermiston.

Because he is a 70-year-old diabetic with a heart condition, for which he is undergoing testing, Gormley said he plans to keep up the plexiglass that divides him and customers for at least another year. He doesn't plan to make customers wear masks and keep store capacity down. But he still is wiping down the counters and doors with sanitizer and wearing his double-layered mask with books displayed on the front. Just to be safe.

"I think we needed to move on," he said. "But the bad side is that people are going to put their guards down. And that's the problem. Being cautious is different from being paranoid. Overall, being cautious is not a bad thing."

For others, seeing people's unmasked faces, their smiles and expressions, has brought joy and relief after nearly 500 days of isolation and fear.

Jeanine Dilley, a partner at Bella Grace Boutique, spent her day laughing and helping customers as they checked

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CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Billy Turner recites the Pledge of Allegiance on Sunday, July 4, 2021, on South Main Street, Pendleton, prior to the Fourth of July Parade.

Putting smiles on faces

Fourth of July Parade returns with cheers in Pendleton

By **BEN LONERGAN**
East Oregonian

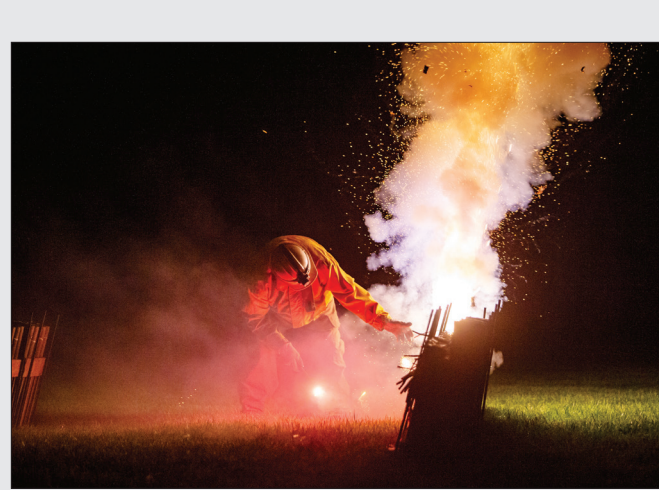
PENDLETON — After a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the familiar sound of horseshoes on pavement, old cars and cheering crowds returned to downtown Pendleton Sunday, July 4, for the annual Independence Day parade.

"It was amazing," said 10-year-old Tyler Smith.

Smith and his family gathered along South Main Street to watch the parade. As passing parade participants tossed candy, he darted from the sidewalk to collect it. Smith's only gripe about the parade was a lack of variety in the candy, though he said it felt good to have the parade return.

Melissa Smith, the boy's mother, said the parade seemed like the perfect way to kick off a summer without COVID-19 restrictions.

"I loved seeing everyone out and celebrating," she said. "There's just this sense of pride in the town and the country."



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Eldon Marcum ignites a firework during the Stanfield Fourth of July fireworks show Sunday, July 4, 2021.

Stanfield lights up the sky for Fourth of July

By **BEN LONERGAN**
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — For the last 51 years Jim Whelan has spent his Fourth of July blowing up fireworks over the city of Stanfield, and Sunday, July 4, was no different.

Whelan, a career firefighter and licensed pyrotechnician, got his start in fireworks when he joined the Stanfield Fire Department

in 1970. Within a decade, he was running the annual show.

While Sunday's firework show started at 10 p.m., Whelan and a small army of firefighters took to the Stanfield High School football field three hours earlier to begin setting up the display.

"You have to take into account surroundings and wind," said Whelan as he used a rangefinder to check

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That sense of pride was noticeable to Billy Turner as parade-goers rose, removed their hats and recited the Pledge of Allegiance alongside Turner before the parade began.

"It gives me and everyone else a great sense of hope," he said. "It feels just amazing."

In the minutes before the parade's 10 a.m. start time, Turner took to the middle of the street, turned toward a large United States flag suspended from a pair of ladder trucks and recited the pledge into a microphone.

Turner said he began reciting the pledge at the parade roughly four years ago as an eighth grader in an attempt to add a more festive start to the parade.

"It was kind of bland without a grand entrance," said Turner. "It just puts a smile on everyone's face."

As the parade got underway, crowds dressed in red, white and blue filled the downtown sidewalks as children clutched bags or buckets to collect candy thrown from floats. Masks were few and far between as people greeted one another and celebrated a return to normalcy.

Shortly after 10 a.m., members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Let 'Er Buck Post 922 turned the corner from Southwest Dorion Avenue onto South Main Street as they carried the American flag.

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Heat wave joins list of deadliest disasters

State's deadliest natural disaster remains Heppner Flood of 1903

By **DOUGLAS PERRY**
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Oregon has a long history of terrible natural disasters, and almost all of them come in one of four bitter flavors: flood, fire, windstorm and earthquake.

But now, with the temperature getting as high as 116 degrees in the past week, a heat wave can be added to the list of the worst that Mother Nature has thrown at the Pacific Northwest. The brutal temps led to

the deaths of at least 95 people in Oregon, making the hot weather one of the deadliest events the state has ever seen.

The worst loss of life from natural disasters in Oregon's recorded history comes from flooding, and the ultimate such event, taking place in the small Morrow County town of Heppner, is linked to summertime heat, not winter rain or snow.

Heppner is proud of its proximity to the Blue Mountains, embracing the nickname "Gateway to the Blues."

In 1903, that gate swung the wrong way.

Willow Creek emerges from the Blue Mountains southeast of Heppner. In the summer there's



Bruce McCurtain/The Oregonian, File

Much of downtown Heppner was a mess in 1971 after a flash flood. Smaller floods continued to hit in later years. Nothing matched the destruction of 1903, however.

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