Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Paradegoers line up along Southeast Court Avenue in Pendleton to take in the Fourth of July parade Sunday, July 4, 2021.

Parade: ‘It’s almost like the last year didn’t happen’

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Paradegoers stood once again in recognition of the flag as several attendees raised their hand to salute.

For Judith Burger, the parade’s grand marshal and former commander of VFW Post 922, it felt weirdly familiar to be celebrating again.

“It’s almost like the last year didn’t happen,” she said. “But yet it did.”

Riding in a yellow 1928 Model A pickup truck, Burger smiled wide as she waved to people in the crowd. While she was selected to be the grand marshal of the 2020 parade, COVID-19 restrictions led to the event’s cancellation and the delay of her role until this year.

“It was really great to see people smile again and be able to smile at people,” she said.

Burger said she loved being able to see people talking to one another as she passed by them in the parade — something she said she felt had fallen away during the height of the pandemic.

“It was so exciting to see people without masks and out and about again,” she said.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Grand Marshall Judith Burger rides in a 1928 Model A pickup on Sunday, July 4, 2021, during the Pendleton Fourth of July Parade.

Stanfield:

Continued from Page A1

the distance from a nearby building.

Whelan instructed a group of firefighters on the proper setup of the launchers and remarked on how the fireworks show had changed over the course of his time, most noticeably the rules and regulations.

“We used to not have any rules,” he said. “It’d be by the grace of God that someone didn’t get hurt.”

After 40 years of running the show, Whelan said this year’s show would be his last at the helm before passing control to fellow pyrotechnician Tom Ramsey. Ramsey and Whelan have worked closely on the display for several years, and while Whelan said he would probably still be helping out, Ramsey is the future.

“Tom and electronics are the future of the show,” Whelan said.

The modernization of fireworks has brought about the use of electronic firing. Electronic firing uses an “e-match” to ignite the firework rather than the more conventional hand-lit fuses, according to Ramsey.

“Last year was the first time I used it at the Stanfield show,” he said.

As Ramsey carefully wired up the electronic fireworks, Whelan led a crew of firefighters gently and carefully distributing a collection of 3- and 4-inch mortars into their launchers. After each launcher was loaded, Whelan took a stick and pressed down on each one.

“You have to ensure they’re well seated so that you get the maximum height out of the fireworks,” he said.

After the fireworks were loaded, the group ran a piece of tape over the top of each launcher so one can easily see which fireworks have properly fired.

With an hour or so to go until the show, Whelan gathered the crew of roughly 15 firefighters and began giving directions on where fire trucks should be stationed to respond to any potential spot fires.

“My favorite show is one that goes off with no one getting hurt,” Whelan said.

The fire trucks dispersed throughout the area, and Whelan gathered a folding chair, hard hat and earplugs from his truck and set up to watch the display. Whelan counted down the minutes until 10 p.m. before Ramsey hit the button to start the show’s introduction electronically.

As the initial volley of shots came to a close, firefighter Eldon Marcum began lighting the next volley of fireworks by hand. Whelan craned his neck to look at the fireworks directly overhead.

Roughly 23 minutes later the display came to a close, the final firework igniting a small brush fire on the hillside above the field. Fire crews quickly doused the flames as Whelan and Ramsey celebrated.

“It was a success,” said Whelan. “No major fires, and no one got hurt.”

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Tom Ramsey wires up a box of fireworks Sunday, July 4, 2021, in preparation for the Stanfield Fourth of July fireworks display.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Mark Pursel ties wire around pieces of rebar Sunday, July 4, 2021, to support the fireworks launchers in preparation for the annual Stanfield Fourth of July fireworks show.

The Oregonian, File

A dam now helps protect Heppner from flooding.

Heat:

Continued from Page A1

usually not much water in the creek, which winds through the town. It trickles and meanders. Typically, notes The Oregon Encyclopedia, it “runs only ankle-deep by mid-June.”

Spring had been particularly warm and dry in the region that year. So while “cloudbursts” were known to occur in the semi-arid area during the summer, no one on Sunday, June 14, 1903, expected the skies to suddenly darken and then open up with rain and — despite 90-degree weather — hail over an area “of at least 40 square miles and continuing with the utmost intensity for more than an hour.”

Water and debris roared down dry, overgrazed rangeland and poured into Willow Creek, speeding it toward Heppner. The result, the Heppner Gazette later reported, was a “foaming wall of water” hitting the prosperous county seat at 5 o’clock in the afternoon.

The town’s location, author Joann Green Byrd pointed out in her book “Calamity: The Heppner Flood of 1903,” turned out to be “a natural bull’s-eye for flash floods.” (A dam to head off flooding was finally completed in 1983.)

Devastation from the flood on that broiling Sunday was apocalyptic. Trees and telegraph lines fell. Houses crumpled and floated away. All escape routes, survivors said, had disappeared in an instant. The roar of the water and debris blotted out townspeople’s cries for help.

The death toll from the disaster ranges in accounts between 238 and 251 — in a town of about 1,400 people. Three of the victims were former Morrow County sheriffs.

The day after the Heppner flood, a correspondent for The Oregonian arrived to survey the scene. The resulting account called Heppner “a city of the dead” and described rotting corpses strewn about the town and washed miles away.

“Meantime,” the reporter added, “Willow Creek, as if to mock the dead, has returned to a purling brooklet.”

Bryce Dole/East Oregonian

Alex Garcia, 15, left, Violet Mitchell, 18, and Bethany Stewart, 18, work maskless around lunchtime Saturday, July 3, 2021, at Veg Out in Hermiston. Each said they were excited to see customers return to having meals in the establishment now that Oregon lifted its masking and distancing mandates.

Rebound:

Continued from Page A1

out clothes, home decor and makeup while country songs such as “Wagon Wheel” played from the overhead speakers. The shop had closed for seven months, Dilley said, until she and the other owners reached out to the community through Facebook and received overwhelming support to reopen.

“I was surprised,” said Dilley, who, along with her husband, is a disabled veteran. “I was really surprised that people would face their fears and come out and see what we have for products. But they did, so we survived. And actually, we’ve done OK. They were hungry to get back out there and live life, and they’re hungry to bring Main Street back.”

The hardest part of the pandemic, Dilley said, has seen people living in a constant state of terror. But now that she and others have been vaccinated, allowing for restrictions to be removed, she exhales relief.

“A lot of people I realize don’t trust the government, and I’m not saying they don’t have some just cause there,” said Dilley, who worked in public safety for more than two decades. “But at some point you have to obey the law to not drive 100 on the freeway, or you’re going to wreck and kill somebody.”

Now that masks are off, Dilley recently told her husband to stock up on lipstick. She expects sales to “go off the charts.”

And some businesses on Main Street are just getting started, underscoring Hermiston’s growth even after a pandemic year shuttered businesses and ravaged economies.

Martin Farias opened Imparables Nutrition Center around the first of the year. Already, Farias said he has helped more than 50 families with fitness and nutrition plans. One of his customers, he said, lost 60 pounds. He’s excited to help more eager customers now that fear is subsiding.

“All the big things in the world,” he said, “happen through crises.”

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