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PENDLETON WHISKY MUSIC FEST

OHA to investigate outbreak tied to festival

State has identified 64 COVID-19 cases stemming from the July 10 event

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Oregon Health Authority is investigating a COVID-19 outbreak stemming from the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest. The state so far has reported 64 COVID-19 cases tied to the

music event in Pendleton on July 10. Forty-one of those cases were Umatilla County residents, according to Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara. Cases have so far been identified in Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Wallowa counties, as well as Washington state.

“This outbreak is the first one of its size and scope to be traced to an outdoor entertainment event since the lifting of statewide COVID-19 prevention measures at the end of June,” the state said Friday, July 30.

The reported cases almost certainly are an undercount, Fiumara said, adding that more than 25% of

people with presumed cases do not cooperate with contact tracers. The total also does not include people who did not attend the concert but were infected by people coming to town.

Cases already were rising in Umatilla County before the 12,000-person event — a surge health officials attributed to the state lifting virtually all pandemic restrictions at the end of June, just as the delta variant was reaching Oregon. But county health data shows a “big jump” in cases between four to six days after the concert, Fiumara said.

“While I am by no means saying

all of these cases are tied to Whisky Fest,” Fiumara said. “It does seem like that concert taking place kind of jump started some additional spread in the area.”

Cases rise after concert

The county now is experiencing one of the largest COVID-19 surges in Oregon, with 412 cases reported last week alone. That’s more than 8% of the state’s total case count last week, according to state data.

The county’s case rate is by far the highest in Oregon. Hospitals in Pendleton and Hermiston reported an uptick in COVID-19 hospitaliza-

tions last week.

Two Umatilla County residents who recently tested positive for COVID-19 died last week, raising the death toll to 94, according to the state.

The concert, however, did not appear to break any rules. The state lifted virtually all pandemic restrictions less than two weeks before, and although health officials voiced alarm about the delta variant and cases rising in Umatilla County, no officials publicly recommended stopping the event. It likely was the largest event Eastern Oregon has seen since the

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RIVER DEMOCRACY ACT

Eastern Oregon counties object

By **GEORGE PLAVEN AND ANTONIO SIERRA**
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — At least two counties in rural Eastern Oregon are raising objections to the River Democracy Act, an ambitious federal bill that would add nearly 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers across the state.

The Wallowa County Board of Commissioners opposed the legislation in a resolution passed July 21, citing impacts to ranching, forest management, public access and recreation.

Commissioners in neighboring Union County sent a letter July 6 to the bill’s architects, Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, outlining similar concerns.

Representatives for Wyden and Merkley will meet Aug. 10 with the Eastern Counties Association in Pendleton to brief commissioners on the bill.

The association’s members include Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties.

Created in 1968, the National Wild and Scenic River System calls for preserving rivers with “outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values,” shielding them from development.

The River Democracy Act would roughly triple the number of wild and scenic rivers in Oregon, and was developed based on more than 15,000 nominations submit-

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

HotRod-A-Rama attendees and a 1930 Ford Roadster reflect in the hubcap of a show car Saturday, July 31, 2021, in the parking lot of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce as roughly 400 hot rods rolled into Pendleton.

BIGGER AND BETTER

HotRod-A-Rama rolls into Pendleton with 400-plus rides

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — With a thunderous boom of engines and the smell of rubber filling Pendleton’s hazy air, the city welcomed thousands of attendees from around the country to the revival of HotRod-A-Rama Thursday, July 29, through Aug. 1.

The hot rod show, a classic and iconic event throughout the Pacific Northwest, brought in hundreds of cars from pre-1965 in all makes and models. From beat-up

muscle cars to freshly painted roadsters and drag racers with beefed up back wheels, there was a little bit for everyone. “We’ve been having a blast out here for sure,” said Rod Wilkinson, an attendee who drove from Puyallup, Washington, and brought two 1932 Fords — a three-door coupe and a roadster.

Like so much in the hot rod community, the event was a family thing when it first began, said Dale Seaholm, but it snowballed into something much bigger.

Father-son duo Terry and Dale Seaholm started HotRod-A-Rama in 2002 to bring together people who shared their passion

for traditional hot rods and old-school customs. The show stopped in 2010, however, and attempted a resurgence in 2020 before COVID-19 shut down the country.

This year, thanks in part to the efforts from Rodney Bullington from the Oregon Grain Growers Distillery, Pendleton, and his cousin Hugh Tucker, HotRod-A-Rama came back with a force, drawing in 425 cars and an estimated 2,000-2,500 people, according to Dale Seaholm.

“We are really thankful for how every-

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New application aims to reopen Easterday Dairy

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

BOARDMAN — Plans to reopen Oregon’s second-largest dairy are back on the table, with a third owner at the helm.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture received a new application from Cole Easterday to operate the dairy near Boardman. Cole’s father, Cody Easterday, was forced to withdraw his application on July 15.

It is the latest development for the property formerly known as Lost Valley Farm, which opened in 2018 and closed less than a year later due to repeated violations of its confined animal feeding operation, or CAFO, permit.

Former owner Greg te Velde eventually declared bankruptcy and the

site was sold in 2019 to the Easterday family, which ran several farming businesses around Pasco.

However, Cody Easterday ran into legal troubles of his own and pleaded guilty earlier this year to defrauding Tyson Foods in a “ghost cattle” scheme, selling more than 200,000 animals that existed only on paper.

He agreed to pay \$244 million in restitution and faces up to 20 years in prison for felony wire fraud. Sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 5.

Meanwhile, both Easterday Farms and Easterday Ranches have filed for bankruptcy, and Cody Easterday’s sons — Cole, Clay and Cutter — purchased controlling interest in the family’s dairy business, known as Easterday Dairy LLC.



EO Media Group, File/Capital Press

The former Lost Valley Farm outside Boardman, which Cole Easterday proposes to reopen.

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