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INSIDE COUNTY FAIRS BEGIN, GET THE SCOOP IN **GO!**



Hospitalizations spiking in Pendleton

CHI St. Anthony admits 22 patients last 10 days of July

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The COVID-19 surge sweeping Umatilla County continues to drive up hospitalizations at CHI St. Anthony in Pendleton.

Roughly two-thirds of the hospital's inpatients over the past week tested positive for COVID-19, Geller said, and more than a quarter of patients admitted to the emergency department had the virus.

"We urge everyone to become vaccinated," said Harold Geller, the president of CHI St. Anthony.

On Saturday, July 31, the hospital had 13 COVID-positive patients in their care, the highest total since the pandemic began, according

to Geller. If that total exceeded 18, Geller said the hospital "may need to suspend elective surgeries, but not emergency surgeries." On Aug. 2, the number of hospitalized patients had dropped to 9.

As infection ramped up in the county in July, the hospital admitted 24 patients with COVID-19, with 22 of those patients coming in the last 10 days of the month. Those patients were spread across the hospital's critical care and medical units.

And as hospitals throughout Oregon and Washington fill with COVID-19 patients, transferring patients to other hospitals for a higher level of care continues to be a challenge for St. Anthony, according to Emily Smith, a hospital spokesperson.

Of the 25 staffed intensive care unit beds available in Eastern Oregon, only five were available as of Aug. 3, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

"The governor is incredibly concerned about the increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations we are seeing due to the spread of the delta variant in areas with low vaccination rates," Charles Boyle, a spokesperson for Gov. Kate Brown, told the Oregon Capitol Bureau. "Severe illness from COVID-19 is now a preventable disease, thanks to vaccines."

See COVID-19, Page A9

FARMER FIGHTS FIRE

Echo farmer Lloyd Piercy joins fight at Elbow Creek blaze

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

ECHO — Lloyd Piercy was looking for a bit of adventure.

Piercy, who turns 70 on Aug. 12, spent the last few weeks helping fight the Elbow Creek Fire with a team of more than 400 firefighters in the Blue Mountains near Troy. A self-described adrenaline junky, he drove a bulldozer and cleared roads and cut fire breaks for fire crews.

But it had been more than two decades since he worked for a fire department near Moses Lake, Washington.

"It was kind of fun," said Piercy, a longtime Echo resident and farmer who owns

wineries outside of the town.

The fire has so far burned through roughly 22,960 acres in Oregon's Grande Ronde River Valley, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry, which on Aug. 2 reported was 95% contained, up from 50% last week. The forestry department also reported it's Type 1 Incident Management Team 3 handed management of the fire to a smaller Type 3 organization on Aug. 3.

After heading up to the town of Maxville, in Wallowa County, to help a friend protect his cows from the wildfires that had begun to sweep through the nearby mountains weeks ago, Piercy got a call from fire-

See Farmer, Page A9

ELBOW CREEK FIRE INFORMATION

The Oregon Department of Forestry reported the Elbow Creek Fire is getting under control.

The department's Type 1 Incident Management Team on the morning of Tuesday, Aug. 3, handed over management of the fire in Wallowa County to a smaller Type 3 organization.

The Type 3 organization will be working for the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests, the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management and the Northeast Oregon District of the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The main responsibility of the new team will be to complete any remaining mop-up, patrol the perimeter, backhaul fire cache supply such as hose, pumps and portable water tanks, and continue suppression repair work.

The fire camp at the Stampede Grounds in Elgin will shut down. All personnel working the south end of the fire will work out of the main fire camp about 3 miles up Promise Road from Highway 82. A spike camp for crews working on the north end of the fire will be on Forest Road 62 at Fry Meadow Seed Orchard. Resources working under the team will include eight 20-person crews, nine engines, four water tenders, four dozers and two excavators.

Information sources will remain in place for the Elbow Creek Fire, including Facebook and Inciweb. Fire authorities now will provide updates on the Elbow Creek Fire as needed.

PGG sells its former HQ

La Grande business pays \$1.8 million

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The former headquarters of Pendleton Grain Growers is officially off the market.

More than five years after members of the grain cooperative voted to dissolve the organization, PGG agreed to sell its 42,000-square-foot building to the La Grande-based Braseth Properties for \$1.8 million, according to Umatilla County property records. The new owners posted a sign at the building advertising for open commercial driver and sales positions, but they did not return a request for comment as of press time.

Braseth Properties does business as Eastern Oregon Rentals & Storage, a personal storage company with facilities in La Grande and Island City. But the Braseth family has its fingers in several pots in the La Grande area.

The Braseth family also owns the similarly named Eastern Oregon Rentals & Sales, a heavy equipment rental company with locations in La Grande, Pendleton and Baker City. The Braseths bought Eastern Oregon Rentals & Sales in 1989, four years after they

See PGG, Page A9



Echo farmer Lloyd Piercy poses for a portrait atop his Caterpillar D6N bulldozer Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021, in Stanfield. Piercy spent the last several weeks working on the Elbow Creek Fire in Wallowa County using the large piece of equipment to cut fire lines and roads. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Into the sunset

Rolly and Carol Biegler sell Sun Ridge Retirement Community to Colorado man

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — As morning peeked its head through the clouds Sunday, Aug. 1, Rolly and Carol Biegler woke up on their last day as owners of the Sun Ridge Retirement Community, after nearly 16 years serving Pendleton, to follow their own dreams of retirement and becoming full-time grandparents.

The Bieglers bought the retirement community at 3234 S.W. Nye Ave. on the steps of

the Umatilla County Courthouse in August 2005. They had been looking at retiring for a while but needed to find someone younger who would follow their goals of keeping it family-oriented. They needed someone who would have the energy to keep up with the business, keep it as a retirement community and take care of the patrons.

This is when they found Bill Bent, a senior housing investor and life coach from Colorado who had a near-death experi-

See Sunset, Page A9



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Sun Ridge Retirement Community was recently sold by Rolly and Carol Biegler, of Pendleton, to Bill Bent, of Denver. Bent is a partner and chief operating officer of Haven Senior Investments, which will manage the facility.

