

# Parade: 'It's just fun to watch the people'

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parade route. "The energy is awesome."

All along the route children with plastic bags collected candy thrown out by those going past in a multitude of colors, outfits and rides — from horses and carriages to classic cars and beefy trucks burning rubber.

Sour Patch Kids and Tootsie Rolls dotted the clear blue sky as the local youths hollered and tried to snap up the best sweets. Bouncy balls, beach balls and even a water bottle added to the mix of projectiles chucked out windows.

For some, it was a continuation of a family tradition going back generations. For others, such as Jayden Yeigh and his friends Ryan, Abel and Elvis, the parade was a way to kill some time and enjoy the last two weeks of summer vacation before the school year started.

While they were disappointed the Optimus Prime tractor-trailer didn't show up this year, they still managed to grab some candy and thought the watermelon they'd been given was the best part.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Children scramble to pick up candy Saturday, Aug. 7, 2021, at the Umatilla County Fair Kick-Off Parade in Hermiston.**

"It's been great to get out with people," said Gary Hall, a Navy veteran who said he and his wife, Roma, have been coming to the parade for about 30 years.

Roma mentioned they had gone to larger parades in Honolulu and San Francisco while Gary had been stationed there, but that she liked Hermiston's better.

"I like to come and watch the people," Roma said. "You see the funniest outfits and the funniest hairstyles. It's just fun to watch the people."

Fair offers COVID-19 vaccines

Ever since the pandemic canceled last year's fair, locals have been eager for the upcoming week's events. And the packed schedule

suggests another fun-filled fair.

The fair's main gates will open to the public at 10 a.m. Aug. 11. The Davis Shows Northwest Carnival opens each day at 2 p.m. and will run until 11 p.m. All the while, the 4-H/FFA competition will occur in different areas of the fair, with the grand champion market

animal selection announced at the Burns Pavilion at 6 p.m. The livestock exhibition also will occur in the three barns on the northeast end of the fairgrounds. The Farm City Pro Rodeo begins at 7:45 p.m. at the FCPR Arena. And Stone in Love, a Journey tribute band, caps the night with a performance on the Wildhorse Main Stage at 9 p.m.

In addition, attendees can receive free COVID-19 vaccines at two sites in the event center throughout the event. People who receive the vaccine will have their choice to either receive two \$10 fair food vouchers or a free carnival wristband. There will also be a COVID-19 testing site at the fairground.

On Aug. 12, the day will begin with a series of swine, cattle, sheep and small animal showmanship competitions in the barns and pavilions. Attendees can see magicians, jugglers and a circus in various places throughout the fair. That night, the rock and roll band Everclear will perform on the Wildhorse Main Stage at 9:00 p.m.

The weeklong festivities will ramp up on Aug. 13

with more 4-H/FFA showings in the Burns Pavilion in the morning and master showmanship competition announced at 6 p.m. A group of Latino musicians will take to Wildhorse Main Stage from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. that night. Those performers include Tierra Cali, Diana Reyes, Alfa 7 and Fortaleza De Tierra Caliente.

The final day of the fair will begin with the youth livestock auction at the Burns Pavilion at 10 a.m., and a cutest baby contest at the Les Schwab stage at that same time. The carnival opens at noon instead of 2 p.m. A Hermiston watermelon seed spitting competition takes place at the Les Schwab Stage at 2 p.m., and at 4:10 p.m., the Steppin' Country Dance Club from Walla Walla takes the same stage. The Umatilla County Fair concludes with country, blues and rockstar Frankie Ballard at the Wildhorse Mainstage at 9 p.m.

For a more detailed fair schedule, go to [www.umatillacountyfair.net/fair-schedule](http://www.umatillacountyfair.net/fair-schedule).

— East Oregonian reporter Bryce Dole contributed to this feature.

## Bentz: 'I don't demand it. Don't mandate it, but I suggest you do it'

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Right off the bat, Bentz was asked what he would do to promote the vaccine in Umatilla County. A recent surge in COVID-19 cases has pushed Umatilla County beyond 10,000 total cases, and during the first week of August, Umatilla County had the highest test positivity rate of any county in the state. While the share of county residents who have received at least one dose of the vaccination has risen to about 45%, Umatilla County remains one of the least vaccinated counties in the state.

Bentz said one of his close, personal friends was battling COVID-19 from the hospital before mentioning state Sen. Bill Hansell, who was in the audience, adding he recently recovered from the virus despite getting vaccinated.

"I will say it clearly: I recommend you get vaccinated," he said, crediting former President Donald Trump for Operation Warp Speed, a White House effort to accelerate the development of the COVID-19 vaccine. "I've said it over and over again. I recommend it, I don't demand it. Don't mandate it, but I suggest you do it."

Bentz took a more guarded stance on infrastructure, as the Senate is on the verge of passing a bipartisan \$1.1 trillion infrastructure bill. The bill's future is complicated by Speaker Nancy Pelosi insisting the Senate also pass a complimentary \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bill before the House holds a vote. Bentz said he would need to hold more conversations with his caucus before supporting the bipartisan bill, but he would not be able to support the passage of both, adding the increase in federal spending could result in inflation that would hurt constituents' pocketbooks.



Antonio Sierra/East Oregonian

**U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, speaks to a crowd of more than 30 at a town hall meeting Monday, Aug. 9, 2021, at the Pendleton Convention Center.**

"No one's going to count that as the cost that each of you are going to pay, which you're already paying 5% off each one of your dollars in savings," he said.

Bentz said he shared concern with one town hall attendee about the national debt and would try to eliminate pork barrel spending, the practice of tying local projects to federal legislation to get a bill passed, but cutting bigger programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, were harder to do. "You want to go to a bunch of doctors and say guess what, we're going to cut what you're getting paid for Medicare?" he said. "Better be close to the door, because they're going to try to hurt you."

With the exception of a stint as a member of the Ontario School Board, Bentz said he's been in the

minority during his entire political career, dating back to his time in the Oregon Legislature.

"I found it very easy to throw rocks," he said. "When you're in the minority, by the way, that's what you do most of the time."

But Bentz said he still wanted to find solutions to the country's problems and wanted to work on water issues, should Republicans retake the House in 2022. A water attorney by trade, Bentz pointed to the drought in the Klamath Basin, which is heightening tensions between irrigators, the government and local American Indian tribes. But he also said other areas in his district are facing dire circumstances, including the Deschutes Basin and the Owyhee Basin, which he said was going to dry out in the imminent future.

## Inmates: Important opportunity to 'get beyond the razor wire'

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"We do have offenders that have engaged in crimes and will not be released from prison because they're not safe and the community isn't safe," said Mandy Perry, assistant superintendent at the prison. "But we have to understand that we have an even larger population that is going out into our communities. They're becoming our neighbors. They're becoming our baseball coaches. They're going to reintegrate back into our society, and we would be failing if we didn't provide opportunities to rehabilitate them and get them prepared for the community."

In an email, Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said, "I wouldn't say we are a partner in/with this event TRCI is holding, but we are going to participate."

He said the prison did not ask for his officers to provide security but "wanted to know if we could make an appearance since many children of inmates are hesitant to engage with police officers proactively and positively."

"I am aware of the politics in play with this program and my intent was solely to engage the children in a positive atmosphere because law enforcement would love nothing more than to see crime cycles broken," Edmiston said, adding that his department is lending a hand despite being down six officers. "For officers, there is nothing more disheartening in this profession than arresting the children of people who we deal with all the time."

The inmates who participate are carefully screened by officials to be those with exceptional behavior, Perry said. The prison also does "pretty intense intel" by listening to phone calls and reading letters between inmates and their families to "make sure they have established a positive and healthy relationship



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Members of an inmate work crew from Two Rivers Correctional Institution help clear flood-damaged material from a home at the Riverview Mobile Home Estates in Pendleton Feb. 12, 2020. Ten adults in custody at the state prison in Umatilla get to participate in an outing the morning of Aug. 20, 2021, at the Hermiston Splash Pad. The events are part of the Oregon Department of Corrections efforts to help inmates break cycles of criminal behavior.**

with their families," Perry said.

They also are inmates who regularly go out into the community as work crews, pulling weeds, mowing lawns and helping set up for local rodeos.

"We, the city, we utilize TRCI for work crews fairly regularly," said Mark Morgan, Hermiston's assistant city manager. "We feel pretty confident and comfortable having used them in those capacities in the past, knowing the level of security detail that comes along with that, and with the professionalism that they run those things, that's why we felt comfortable with" the splash park event.

For those work crews, one officer tags along, TRCI officials say. But for the upcoming programs, groups will be joined by a bigger group of counselors and law enforcement officers.

"This event is so everyone feels comfortable," Perry said. "But what they don't realize is that this event is also therapeutic and rehabilitative."

Last month, inmates went fishing with their families at ponds near McNary Wildlife Nature Area. A group of local dentists donated the fishing poles, which children got to bring home with them. The Oregon State Police also

attended the event and handed out free bracelets to kids.

"The positive interaction with police at that fishing event, the children, the care providers and the AICs, was phenomenal," said Kaycie Thompson, a spokesperson for TRCI. "And if we keep doing that kind of thing, we're going to help break the cycle of incarceration for these families."

The event at the Hermiston Splash Park takes place 8:30-10:30 a.m., when the facility is not open to the public. The Hermiston Police Department is attending to handing out gift certificates for free Slurpees at 7-11.

Perry said it's meant to be a therapeutic event for inmates and their families.

Thompson said this is an important opportunity to "get beyond the razor wire."

"We've had AICs come up to us while we're watching our grandchildren in our community and say, 'Hey, I'm out and I'm staying out and I'm down here with my child,'" said Kaycie Thompson, a spokesperson for TRCI. "This is a transition."

Perry said the prison has yet to plan any more events in the future because of the status of COVID-19 cases in the county, but said she hopes more will come.

## Judge: 'There can be no construction without a detailed plan'

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The complaint filed by Stop B2H and other plaintiffs argued that BLM should have updated its environmental analysis of the project — known as a final environmental impact statement or FEIS — with new information about sage grouse populations, which have plummeted from historic levels.

While studies completed after the project's approval provided new information about population counts and

the effects of transmission lines, the judge said they're "not significant or seriously different" enough to warrant a supplementary analysis.

The new information about the declining population of greater sage grouse is not significantly new or different circumstances from what is discussed in the FEIS," Simon said.

Likewise, news articles about the financial feasibility of burying transmission lines do not trigger the need for a supplementary environmen-

tal analysis because they don't "rise to the level of significant information," as would scientific studies, he said.

The judge dismissed claims that BLM relied on improper data about sage grouse numbers and that it was impermissibly vague and confusing in examining the risk of "extirpation" to a local population of the species.

"Although not a model of clarity, the discussion is not indecipherable," he said.

The agency wasn't "arbitrary and capricious" in

analyzing the indirect effects on "leks," where sage grouse congregate during mating season, within 3 miles of the transmission line, rather than using a longer distance, Simon said.

The judge found that BLM's steps for mitigating the adverse impacts to the species were sufficient because "there can be no construction without a detailed plan."

"This is not a case in which the action will commence before it can be determined whether mitigation will be

effective," he said.

The judge said BLM "worked closely" with the Idaho Power utility company on the project and relied on "sufficient evidence" to decide against burying the line near an interpretive center for the Oregon Trail.

The agency wasn't required to update the FEIS regarding the environmental effects of alternative routes for the transmission line that it ultimately didn't choose, he said.

While the BLM wrongly failed to "consider grazing in

the cumulative effects analysis" of the project, that "error was harmless" because it wouldn't have altered the agency's conclusions, the judge said.

"Plaintiffs do not show how adding grazing to the cumulative effects analysis would have materially affected the substance of BLM's sage grouse mitigation decision or other decisions relating to sage grouse," Simon said.

— The Observer reporter Dick Mason contributed to this report.