

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A sign on Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021, lists the Hermiston FFA section at the Umatilla County Fair in Hermiston.

Fair:

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After last year's showing went virtual, Carolyn said she felt sad and furious. She had worked hard getting her pig ready, bathing, walking and feeding it from early mornings through the heat of the day. She was sure her pig would place well at the fair.

But as she watched her pig take fourth place over livestream last year, for once, she didn't cry. Because of the pandemic, she felt less connected and committed to her animal.

"We would just feed them and then we would go," Carolyn said. "We didn't stay and bond with them as much. COVID just made a real dent with me and my animal."

It's been two years since she last competed at the fair. This year, Carolyn's nervous. Her days begin around 4:30 a.m. so she can be one of the first people in the barn. Then she does her daily chores to get the pig ready. All the while, she's thinking about the judge and the spectators.

'It feels like it's our first year again," she said.

Carolyn is a member of the Barnyardigans 4-H club. She grew up on a farm off of Highway 395 in Hermiston, where the family raised lambs, horses, pigs, cattle, chickens and where more than 100 feral cats roam. Her father is a butcher, and being a part of 4-H is a family tradition she said she was glad to uphold. She said it's taught her to be humble

"It teaches me that I can do anything," she said.

Watching Peach go, Carolyn said she's sure she'll cry this year. She'll miss calling Peach over and running around and playing games with her. a new pig, and she couldn't be more excited.

"My dad always tells me not to name my animals because I'll get too attached," she said. "But you just can't resist their cute little faces.'

Unlike some of of her fellow competitors, Leathers, who described herself as a "city kid," began her experience with the Hermiston FFA as a freshman in high school and has spent the



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Weston Golightly, 11, of Hermiston, sits with his goat Friend 2.0 on Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021, at the Umatilla County Fair in Hermiston.

'Any kid can do this'

Like many others showing livestock at the fair this week, Alexis Leathers, 18, will spend the next few days caring for, showing and attempting to keep her hog cool as temperatures climb to triple digits. But the heat had already taken a toll on her hog Lady. High temperatures earlier this summer meant neither Leathers' nor her brother's hogs made sale weight.

'The heat was really hard on the animals," Leathers said.

Despite the missed weight, Leathers decided to stay and show her animal as practice for the Pendleton Junior Livestock Show next month, where she hopes to be

last three years learning the ropes and encouraging others to join the

"A lot of the kids competing against me have been doing this since they were 7," she said. "It really opened my eyes to the fact that any kid can do this."

Leathers said her experiences with FFA have encouraged her to pursue a career in agriculture education to help others understand and work with animals. She added her first year in the program was a learning experience and required work to create a pen and facilities for her hog.

"They don't come with a manual," Leathers said. "Doing this is about the love you have for

Park:

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Brown said the Stillman facility would serve 60-70 children, a smaller number than what the center planned when it sought to partner with the Pendleton School District.

In June, Brown pitched the Pendleton School Board on leasing the property near the Pendleton Early Learning Center, land that once featured the district's central office and Hawthorne Alternative High School but has been empty since the passage of the 2015 bond. Under the proposal, the children's center would pay a nominal rent and place a new building on the property that would serve 150 children.

The board didn't commit to the center's proposal, but would later talk about it privately at a subsequent meeting. The board didn't provide a public response until Aug. 10, when the board voted to formally reject the proposal.

In a memo to the board, Superintendent Chris Fritsch wrote the property was appraised for \$375,000 in 2018 and its value likely would increase in the future. The district is anticipating up to several million dollars in facility costs over the next five to seven years, a number that could be offset by selling the property.

"Leasing the property to a third party to develop would essentially amount to 'gifting' of publicly owned property," he wrote. "Once developed, the property may be of little use to the District. Additional



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A section of chain link fence surrounding the Stillman Park tennis courts sits in disrepair Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021, in Pendleton. The Pendleton Parks and Recreation Commission during an Aug. 10 meeting recommended the city approve leasing a section of the park to the Pendleton Children's Center.

expenses may be incurred should the property revert back to the District in the event the project was unable to identify sustainable funding for ongoing operations."

The board for the children's center attempted to preempt the school board vote by writing an Aug. 7 letter rescinding its request for the school property. But the school board decided to vote on the issue regardless, broadening the language of the action to indicate the district would not entertain any offers on the property at this time.

The center's potential partnership with the city also would end the nonprofit's pursuance of building space at Blue Mountain Community College.

The center had discussed launching its services at BMCC as a stopgap measure while it raised money for a permanent facility, but Brown said the Stillman facility would offer more space than what BMCC had available. Brown added the children's center still would like to eventually relocate to a larger facility, but the Stillman building would offer Pendleton residents a sound proof-of-concept that affordable child care was worthy of further investment.

Masks:

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everything they can to make sure they are able to stay open," which includes requiring masks.

"It was such a hit to our local businesses when everything was shut down and nobody could go inside," he said. "I've heard from business owners who said, 'We couldn't survive another shutdown.' For those businesses, yeah, when I walk in there I'll be wearing a mask."

Oregon will become the third state, along with Hawaii and Louisiana, with a statewide mask mandate.

The action Aug. 11 was a policy U-turn for Brown and the Oregon Health Authority, who had relinquished decisions on COVID-19 restrictions to county supervisors as of June 30.

With the delta variant rapidly filling hospitals to capacity across the state, Brown urged counties to require masks indoors in public spaces. Only Multnomah County, which includes Portland, did so.

Multnomah County's infection rate was reported at 5.3% in the latest OHA weekly report. That is nearly half the state average of 9.5%, which is twice the maximum 5% that epidemiologists says will keep spread of the virus under control.

Counties with high infection rates, low vaccination numbers and swamped health care centers were not budging, despite calls from the governor and OHA about the critical hospital situation in their areas.

"I expected local elected officials to step up and do the right thing," Brown said. "What is clear is they are not taking action. That is why we are moving forward."

Shafer disagreed with Brown's comments during the press conference that county officials haven't taken sufficient action to curb the spread of infection. He pointed to mask requirements in county buildings and recent vaccine incentives at the county fair as examples of the county's action. He said he isn't sure how much more the county could do to recommend masking.

Meanwhile, Shafer said he wouldn't mandate COVID-19 vaccinations among county officials.

"That's a bridge too far. I'm OK with recommending a vaccine, and I'm on the record recommending the vaccine," he said. "What I will not be on the record for is mandating a vaccine."

Round-Up says vaccinating 'up to you'

Within hours of the Aug. 11 ress conference, the Pendleton Round-Up posted a video on its Facebook page to Jimmy Durante's rendition of the popular song "I'll be seeing you." The video includes images of past events, and ends with what appears to be the image of a Band-Aid, the words "It's up to you" and "COVID-19 Vaccination," and a link to a vaccine information site.

No ban on county fairs, the Pendleton Round-Up, the Oregon State Fair in Marion County, Oregon Ducks and Oregon State Beavers and other college football games, concerts or other major events in Oregon was in the works "at this time," Brown said.

The Pendleton Round-Up, the major event of the year in the area, held in mid-September, was cancelled in 2020 because of the pandemic. Amid months of declining infection rates, Brown earlier this summer said "Let 'er buck," a popular saying of fans of the event, which draws more than 50,000 to the region.

With the delta variant hitting Umatilla County especially hard, the pandemic was once again raising questions about large-scale events.

In an Aug. 10 newsletter for local officials, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said the rising infection levels and low county vaccination levels were not going without notice in Salem.

'Putting an event in jeopardy that means \$60 million to the local economy is dangerous, particularly knowing that for some of our businesses, it could be the final nail in their coffin," Murdock wrote. "In the coming weeks, we need to

dramatically increase our vaccination rates to demonstrate we are serious and that we care."

The most recent spike in Eastern Oregon was pushed higher by the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest, an outdoor concert last month that attracted more than 12,000 people to Pendleton. Umatilla County Public Health Director, Joseph Fiumara, said 66 cases are tied to the festival, according to KATU, and five of those were vaccinated. But state officials did not step in to block the Umatilla County Fair this week or similar events in high-infection areas.

OHA and OHSU officials have pointed to several counties where no action was taking place despite having infection rates double the state average of 9.5%. The state percentage already is twice the OHA target of no more than 5% that epidemiologists say is the highest rate at which growth of the virus can be kept under control. Statistics show the highest

rates concentrated in two areas -Umatilla, Baker, Union, Malheur and Wallowa counties in Eastern Oregon, and Jackson, Josephine, Douglas and Curry counties in Southwestern Oregon. Crook County in Central Oregon also has twice the state rate.

Nearly all are in areas that have been resistant to masking mandates and other restrictions throughout the pandemic.

Vaccination rates were low in part because of what Allen, during testimony this spring before the Legislature called, "vaccine belligerence" by activists and some offi-

Though Brown had ceded daily control to the counties, her emergency order dating back to March 2020, and renewed by her several times since, allowed the state to take back control at any point.

In recent weeks, Umatilla County's case rates have surged to the highest levels since the pandemic began, and to some of the highest levels in Oregon. CHI St. Anthony in Pendleton recently reported its largest spike in patients hospitalized with COVID-19 since the pandemic began. And last week, the county surpassed 10,000 total cases, meaning more than one in eight residents have had the virus. A COVID-19 death reported this week brought the county's total death toll to 95 since the pandemic

"We are hopeful that the mask mandate will reduce the spread of COVID in our area and help take some of the burden off hospitals," Emily Smith, a spokesperson for CHI St. Anthony in Pendleton, said in an email. "We are continuing to experience high volumes of COVID inpatients and Emergency Room patients daily. We urge everyone to wear their mask and get vaccinated."

Health officials have pointed to the delta variant spreading rapidly through the county's unvaccinated residents as what's driving the surge.

"We're highly encouraging people to get the vaccine," Shafer

Vaccine mandate among executive branch officials

Brown on Aug. 10 ordered all state executive branch employees will be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine by Oct. 18.

"Delta is a different virus — it has changed everything," Brown

The mask rules will go into effect Friday. The state will not immediately enforce the rules as people and businesses make the change.

But the order does not have a target end date, as the delta variant's impact is still being gauged by state officials.

OHSU officials on Aug. 10 said the peak of the current wave is expected around Sept. 7, with its effects continuing at least into the late autumn.

Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen said the state would be sending nurse crisis teams to areas where the medical workforce is "overwhelmed and overtaxed" by the non-stop flow of new patients.

OHA will work to free up more hospital space in other health care facilities that could be used for recovery after the most acute phase of the infection recedes.





