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## A NEW GENERATION OF FIREFIGHTERS



### Umatilla Fire District's 4 interns near graduation

By NICK ROSENBERGER  
*East Oregonian*

**H**ERMISTON — The day starts as the sun rises for the new resident interns at Umatilla County Fire District 1. With darkness slowly fading around 5:45 a.m., the interns tug

on their shoes and head out the door for an hour at the gym before getting ready to face the grueling 10-hour day in front of them.

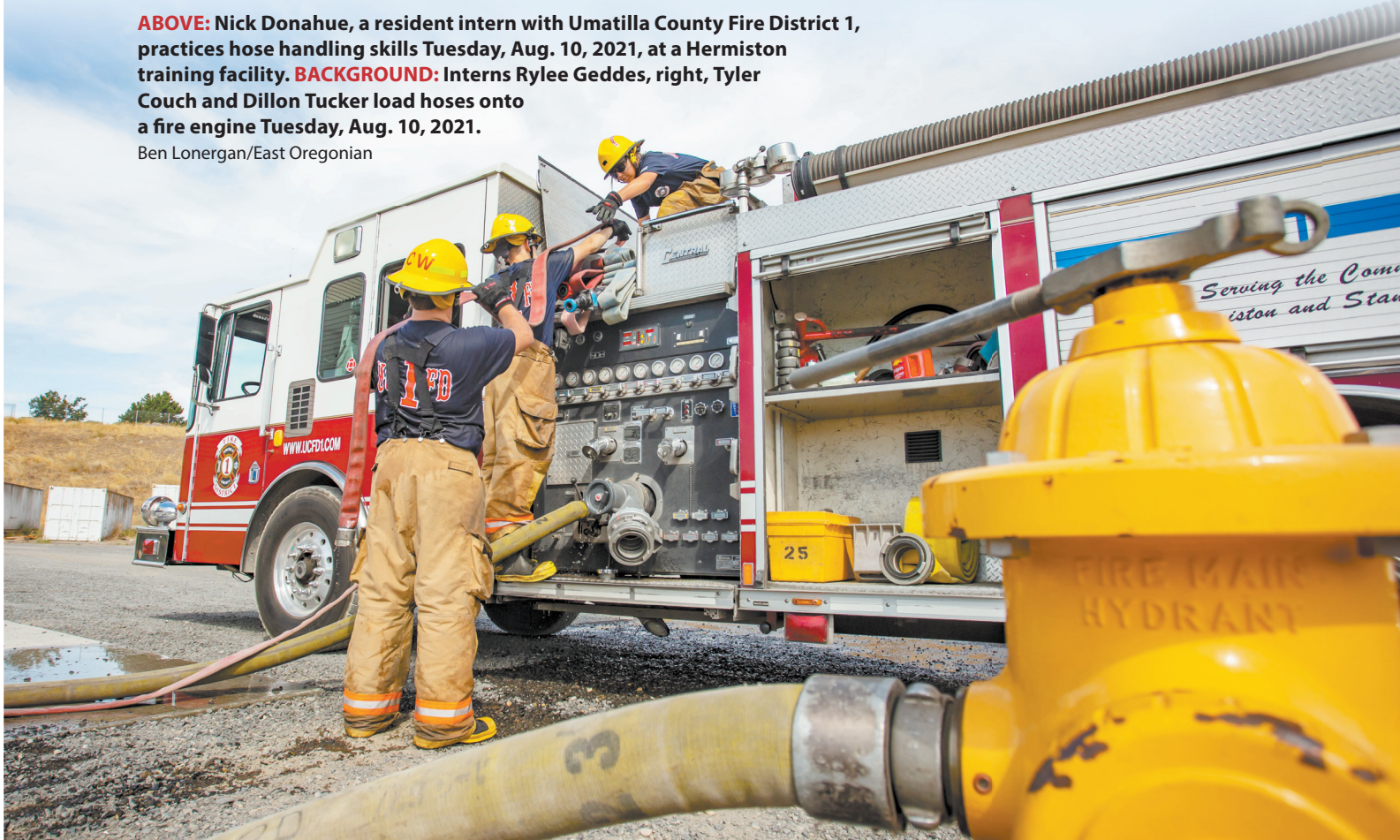
The long hours might dispel some from even trying to become a firefighter, but for Tyler Couch, Dillon Tucker, Nick Donahue and Rylee Geddes, the hours are just a part of pursuing their dreams as they approach graduation from the fire district's academy on Aug. 20.

Nick Donahue, a recent grad of University High School in Spokane Valley, has wanted to become a firefighter since his sophomore year of high school. He knew he didn't want to sit at a desk job all day and desired something more exciting.

"I've also loved helping people and I've grown up helping people," Donahue said. "And whether that's just my

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**ABOVE:** Nick Donahue, a resident intern with Umatilla County Fire District 1, practices hose handling skills Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021, at a Hermiston training facility. **BACKGROUND:** Interns Rylee Geddes, right, Tyler Couch and Dillon Tucker load hoses onto a fire engine Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian



## COVID-19 floods local hospitals

Transferring patients is nearly impossible as pandemic ravages state's health system

By BRYCE DOLE  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — In many parts of Eastern Oregon, the pandemic never has been worse.

COVID-19 infection is spreading at an unprecedented rate in Umatilla and Morrow counties. Week after week, both counties report COVID-19 case counts that dwarf previous pandemic surges. And as the latest surge continues unabated, commissioners in the two counties declared a state of emergency this week, opening the door for state help as area hospitals fill with patients.

"With the new delta variant, it's much more transmissible and many more people are getting sick with COVID than we've ever seen in the past," said Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell, who added, "There's a lot of people who have been vaccine resistant. With the new delta variant, they have to reconsider that. You need to put your personal biases behind you and look at the science."

Hospitals in both counties are facing a serious influx of patients and are finding it nearly impossible to transfer patients to other medical facilities for a higher level of care, officials say.

"Plainly put, there are little to no beds to transfer patients to," Caitlin Cozad, a spokesperson with Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston, said in an email.

And if the surge doesn't diminish soon, officials are worried the hospitals could be overwhelmed.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara pointed to Jackson and Josephine counties, where COVID-19 patients are exceeding hospital capacity and health care workers are treating people in the hallways because they've run out of beds. Fiumara said he is worried the same could happen in Umatilla County.

"We could end up with people who need care and can't get in to receive it, whether it's a vehicle accident or a heart attack," Fiumara said. "I'm dreading when we get to the point when somebody dies in the parking lot or the waiting room because there wasn't anywhere for them to go. We're not there yet. I just don't want to get there."

As of Thursday, Aug. 12, only two intensive care unit beds were available in hospitals

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### 2020 CENSUS

## Umatilla, Morrow counties lead region in growth

Hermiston grew 15.6% from 2010 to 2020

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
*East Oregonian*

UMATILLA COUNTY — In defiance of national trends, Umatilla and Morrow counties grew in the 2020 census.

The U.S. Census Bureau released city and county population data Thursday, Aug. 12, revealing Umatilla County grew by 5.5% between 2010 and 2020 and Morrow County by 9.1%. But the overall rate for each county masks growth disparities between communities, with larger population hubs continuing to grow while some smaller towns struggle to

keep up.

In Umatilla County, Pendleton and Hermiston were neck-and-neck for the title of the largest city in Eastern Oregon in 2010. By 2020, Hermiston turned its slight advantage into a solid lead, its 19,354 people edging out Pendleton's 17,107. Hermiston's 15.6% population increase prompted a celebratory email from Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan to the Hermiston City Council.

"From the raw population perspective, the (data) means that 62% of all growth in Umatilla County since 2010 has occurred within the City Limits of Hermiston, and 73% within Hermiston and Umatilla," he wrote. "My guess is

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The population of the city of Hermiston has grown 15.6% over the past decade, from 16,745 residents in 2010 to 19,354 in 2020, according to data from the 2020 Census.

