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Wife remembers husband lost to COVID-19 virus

Roger and Gail Wickers were married 18 years; he died on Aug. 24

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Gail Wickers knew something was terribly wrong with her husband.

It had been three days since Roger Wickers, 70, tested positive for COVID-19. His breath was shallow as he lay on the couch at their home in Umatilla on the morning of Aug. 22. Wickers wanted to take him straight to the emergency department, but he insisted they wait until his appointment at 3 p.m. that day.

About 30 minutes after Gail dropped her husband off at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, health care workers called and told her Roger's blood oxygen was far too low. He was in the emergency department fighting for his life.

Gail called again and again. Health care workers told her that Roger's heart was beating rapidly and they administered heart medicine and remdesivir. A day later, health care workers told her that Roger required intubation and they needed to fly him to another facility.

Before he left that afternoon, Gail asked to speak to her husband, but health care workers told her Roger could no longer speak. She demanded they put the phone next to his ear so she could say goodbye.

"When we were talking to him on the phone, I could hear him struggling, trying to make sounds," she said.



Gail Wickers and her son Blake Wickers pose for a portrait Friday, Aug. 27, 2021, in front of their Umatilla home. Wickers' husband, Roger Wickers, died of COVID-19 on Aug. 24 at the age of 70. She and her son are each recovering from the disease.



Roger Wickers, center, smiles alongside his wife Gail Wickers and their son Blake Wickers in 2019.

Emergency services flew him nearly 200 miles to Providence Portland Medical Center. By that point, health care workers told her there was little they could do.

Roger Wickers died at 6:14 a.m. on Aug. 24. He was 70 years old.

"I don't know what I'm going to do without him," Wickers said

while writing his obituary two days after he died.

COVID-19 deaths follow delta surge

As of Friday, Aug. 27, at least 17 Umatilla County residents who tested positive for COVID-19 have died since the month began, according to the county health department. That total does not include Roger, as the county has yet to receive note of his death, said Joe Fiumara, the county's health director.

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CTUIR officials concerned over Round-Up

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

MISSION — Members of the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation have participated in the Pendleton Round-Up since the early days of the rodeo, but its government has some serious concerns about the 111th edition.

CTUIR members inhabit the Round-Up's Indian Village, walk or ride in the Westward Ho! Parade and act in the Happy Canyon Night Show, among other activities, but tribal government doesn't directly control any of the properties on the Round-Up Grounds or who participates in the festivities, instead offering support services during Round-Up week. The CTUIR Board of Trustees on Thursday, Aug. 26, videoconferenced with members of the Round-Up Board of Directors to discuss the rodeo's health and safety measures as the former contemplates taking an official position on this year's event.

Round-Up Vice President Nick Sirovatka reiterated the Round-Up's position that it intends to follow the governor's orders on masking at large outdoor events. He said the Round-Up was in the process of acquiring thousands of masks, which would be distributed to audience members at the entrance if they don't bring a face covering to the rodeo.

The Round-Up also provided its health and safety plan to the board of trustees, but the public is not likely to see it. Round-Up intends the plan to be an internal document only. Sirovatka said the directors were responsible for communicating to their volunteers about this year's standards and expectations.

"Our plan is to lead by example as directors," he said.

In response to questions from tribal government officials, Sirovatka said there would be no capacity reductions at Round-Up or Happy Canyon arenas. The Round-Up Arena seats 15,800 while Happy Canyon Arena holds another 4,200. In accordance with new masking rules, Sirovatka said attendees would be allowed to take off their masks when eating or drinking, even in the Let 'er Buck Room.

"It's a petri dish in a good year, let alone a COVID year," he said, adding that going to the bar would be personal choice left to each attendee.

Armand Minthorn, an at-large member of the board of trustees, said he was concerned that the arenas would be at full capacity, which wouldn't allow for social distancing. He added that cases were surging in not only Umatilla County but across state lines in Washington, in Benton and Franklin counties. He anticipated more cases would come after Round-Up.

"The steps the Round-Up is taking are great, but I believe it's not enough," he said.

Other speakers told the Round-Up board about the loved ones they lost to the virus and an uptick in cases on the Yakama Indian Reservation in central Washington.

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Anger over mandate prompts protest

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Gov. Kate Brown's recent vaccine mandates for state employees, health care workers and school staff drew more than 150 people to Pendleton for a protest.

As COVID-19 continues to rip through Oregon and overwhelm hospitals, those attending the event Thursday, Aug. 26, at Roy Raley Park went without masks, including health care workers, teachers, firefighters and members of law enforcement.

The protest drew a multitude of voices, ranging from those completely rejecting vaccines and masks to those who were supportive of vaccines but felt the govern-

nor's orders from Aug. 19 to either get the vaccine or lose their jobs violated their rights.

Some of the speakers, including HollyJo Beers, the leader of the Umatilla County Three Percenters, trotted out conspiracy theories, such as alleging Brown runs "reeducation camps," while another at the mic asserted the vaccine mandate is putting the United States on the path of genocide. However, a nuanced line seemed to run through much of the crowd.

Many were attendees who work, or know people who work, as state employees and first responders who came in opposition to flatly mandating the vaccine across the board.

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Protesters line the sidewalk Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021, at Roy Raley Park in Pendleton during a rally against Gov. Kate Brown's vaccine mandates for healthcare workers, teachers and state employees.

No National Guard troops on the way — yet

Most hospitals in Northeastern Oregon have not asked for help from National Guard

By **ALEX WITTWER**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Aug. 13 issued an emergency order to deploy nearly 1,500 Oregon National Guard soldiers throughout the state to help support hospitals.

In Eastern Oregon, only the Blue Mountain Hospital District in Grant County has received any of those resources.

As of Friday, Aug. 27, several hospitals in Northeastern Oregon have not sent in a request for National Guard support, according to Oregon Health Authority officials. Those hospitals include CHI St. Anthony

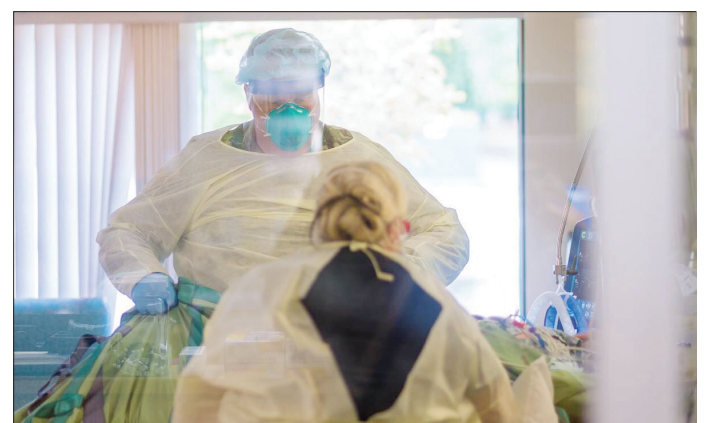
Hospital in Pendleton, Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande, Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston and Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner.

CHI St. Anthony communications and marketing director Emily Smith said the hospital has not made a request because at this point it does not need the help. But, she added, it's not off the table if the situation changes.

Good Shepherd Medical Center marketing and communications director Caitlin Cozad said, "At this time, we have not requested help from the state."

According to an OHA spokesperson, Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City was one of the few hospitals to put in a request for guard members to bolster resources but did not specify when the order was placed.

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Maj. Chris Clyne/Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Blaine Williams of 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, Oregon National Guard, helps health care technician Heather Smith change COVID-19 patient bedding Aug. 21, 2021, at Mercy Medical Center ICU in Roseburg. Williams' service is part of a statewide effort to help Oregon hospitals with support functions due to reported increased COVID-19 cases and staff shortages.



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