

INSIDE

EXPANDED EMPLOYMENT SECTION SEEKS TO LINK EMPLOYERS WITH JOB SEEKERS



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Rodeo fans stroll through a line of food vendors Sept. 15, 2021, at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds in advance of the grand entry of the 111th Pendleton Round-Up. Local business owners report crowds were smaller than usual.

COVID-19 sets monthly record for local deaths

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County reported more COVID-19 deaths in August than any month since the pandemic began.

The county in a press release Wednesday, Sept. 22, reported its 126th COVID-19 death. The latest victim is a 54-year-old woman who tested positive for COVID-19 Aug. 7 and died Aug. 31 at Oregon Health & Science Hospital, Portland. She had unspecified underlying health conditions.

The disclosure raises August's death toll to 22, topping the county's previous monthly record set in July 2020.

The record-setting spike in COVID-19 deaths come after a dramatic surge in cases driven by the delta variant, which shattered pandemic records, infected large amounts of unvaccinated people and filled regional hospitals.

This year, the unvaccinated have accounted for approximately 49 out of every 50 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Umatilla County, according to data from the county's health department.

"Our hospital system is plugged up right now with unvaccinated people with COVID," said Dr. Jon Hitzman, Umatilla County's public health officer.

Delta surge breaks grim records

Since the pandemic started, the rate at which COVID-19 has infected and killed Umatilla County residents has been among the highest of all Oregon counties, according to a newsroom analysis of state data. Just six Oregon counties have reported a higher death rate than Umatilla County.

The county's death rate is now nearly twice as high as some densely populated Portland metro counties such as Multnomah County, which has more than 10 times as many people, state data show. The downtown Portland county's vaccination percentage is nearly 30% higher than Umatilla County's.

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BOOM OR BUST?

Downtown businesses see mixed impact from Round-Up week

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The streets are clear, the cowboys are gone and the Round-Up Grounds are dormant once again. The 2021 rodeo is over and local business owners are starting to assess what kind of financial impact the Round-Up had after canceling last year's event.

The conventional wisdom surrounding the economy of the Round-Up is that visitors need somewhere to eat, drink and sleep when the rodeo isn't happening, lifting all boats as

tourists spread their money throughout the economy.

But the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has scrambled some of that conventional wisdom.

Joe's Fiesta Mexican Restaurant owner Joe Meda said he had nothing to report on Round-Up week because his restaurant was closed. Meda said he decided to take the week off so he wouldn't have to worry about enforcing the mask mandate, especially since many potential customers come from states where there are no face covering rules. "I would either end up dead or in prison,"

Meda said about the prospect of enforcing the mandate during Round-Up week.

Instead, Meda said he spent the week "sipping Coronas in California," adding that he has no regret about passing over potential business while he kept his business dark. Even before the pandemic, Meda said business has been steadily shifting away from the area around his restaurant and rest of South Main Street and more toward Southwest Court Avenue, closer to the Round-Up Grounds.

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Pandemic pauses House work on redistricting

Sept. 27 deadline looms as Republican walkout a possibility to block Dems' plans

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A political showdown in the House over political redistricting was put on hold for at least a day amid reported COVID-19 cases traced to the session Monday,

Sept. 20, in the Capitol.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, announced just after 1 p.m. that a COVID-19 case had been traced to the House session. She canceled the House floor session until the morning of Sept. 22.

"This is obviously a developing situation and hopefully we will be back tomorrow to complete our business," Kotek said.

No additional information was given on the identity



Kotek

of the person who tested positive. The House had been interrupted at least three times during the past year by outbreaks among lawmakers and staff.

Kotek's announcement was made to a nearly empty chamber. The House was scheduled to vote on final passage of new legislative and congressional maps required

to reflect population changes in the 2020 U.S. Census.

However, there were questions as to whether the GOP lawmakers would show up at all.

Republicans are considering a boycott or walkout to block a Democratic redistricting plan they say includes a broken promise by Kotek on partisan parity on the committee deciding the fate of legislative and congressional district maps for the 2022 election.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Christina Garcia, right, receives her first shot of the COVID-19 vaccine from Sharon Waldern during a vaccination clinic at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston on Feb. 12, 2021. Umatilla County in August set a monthly record for COVID-19 deaths.

Water from data centers reused for agriculture

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

UMATILLA — The tiny city of Umatilla and the internet giant Amazon have come up with a unique use for the cooling water from the company's massive server farms.

They are using it irrigate the region's other farms — the kind that grow crops.

Perched along the Columbia River in Northeastern Oregon, Umatilla is a haven for irrigated agriculture where farmers grow everything from hay and wheat to high-value potatoes, onions, carrots and melons.

In 2009, Amazon broke ground on its first campus of data centers in Umatilla. Data centers are large warehouses filled with computer servers. All the information gathered



Wikimedia/Capital Press

Umatilla and Amazon have built a system for using cooling water from the internet giant's server farms to irrigate the region's farms.

by websites like Amazon and Facebook is stored in the server farms.

Amazon was attracted to the Columbia Basin, in part, by the availability of clean water that could

be used in cooling systems for all those servers. A single data center consumes between 250,000 and 1 million gallons of water per day in the warmer summer months, when

outside temperatures can top 100 degrees.

That water still is mostly clean once it comes out the other end, said Umatilla City Manager Dave Stockdale.

With two data center campuses now online and another two being built, Stockdale said it didn't make sense, nor was there capacity, to treat all that mostly clean water at the city's sewer plant.

Both the city and Amazon began pondering ways they could reuse the water, adding benefit for the community.

The answer, they decided, was to deliver the water to the same farmers that have powered Umatilla's economy for decades.

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