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## County: Round-Up source of new COVID-19 spike

49 cases linked to Pendleton's biggest event of the year

By **BRYCE DOLE AND ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — What was long a fear among Umatilla County's health care workers appears to be coming true — COVID-19 cases are rising because of the Pendleton Round-Up.

In recent days, local governments and their public health authorities began acknowledging the rodeo was having an effect on the spread of COVID-19. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Board of Trustees on Monday, Sept. 27, ratified a public health emergency declaration made Sept. 24, which was quickly followed by new gathering restrictions.

In a statement, a tribal health official cited Round-Up specifically when talking about a new surge of cases on the reservation.

In an interview, Joe Fiumara, the director of Umatilla County Public Health, said his department has traced nearly 50 cases to Round-Up before admitting a lack of contact tracing cooperation from COVID-19 patients meant the outbreak likely was much larger. The cases stem from venues across the event from Sept. 11 through Sept. 22 and include people who came to the Round-Up already having COVID-19.

"We were dropping ahead of the state," Fiumara said. "I believe they are still dropping. And if we're not now, it doesn't take a whole lot of thought to come up with some reasons why."

Saying the Pendleton Round-Up Association has not seen the case numbers from the tribes or the county, Round-Up General Manager Erika Patton declined to comment.

Rudy Owens, a spokesperson with the Oregon Health Authority, said in an email the state is offering "assistance to local and tribal health authorities with outbreak investigation, case investigation, testing and contact tracing."

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Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Most people attending the Pendleton Round-Up on Sept. 17, 2021, did not wear masks. Umatilla County Public Health as of Monday, Sept. 27, reports 49 cases of COVID-19 trace back to Round-Up week.



## ECHO SAGE TRAIL RUN SUPPORTS WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**  
*East Oregonian*

ECHO — With the sound of shoes crunching through rocks and sagebrush, a line of runners disappeared on Saturday, Sept. 25, into the rolling hills of the Sno Road Vineyards in Echo at the Echo Sage Trail Run to raise money for women in agriculture and to beat a challenging, rugged course.

The fun run, 5K and 10K were open to anyone from runners to walkers and

was organized by the Eastern Oregon Women for Agriculture — an organization dedicated to uplifting and supporting the role of women in agriculture. Proceeds from the event went to their annual scholarship for women pursuing agriculture degrees.

Two courses split out from the bottom of the hills: a 10K winding its way south along a ridge before meeting up with the 5k course, which looped north past the winery and through rows of grape vines.

"It was brutal," said Adelaide Zumwalt,

who took first place in the 5K with a time of 32:54. Her father, Tom Baker, took second place with a time of 33:20.

Despite the difficulty of the course, many of the runners, such as Dan Stein or Gena Cook, who placed third and fourth, felt good about their race, even with slower times than a normal road 5K.

"It's amazing what people can do," Stein said. The Echo Sage Trail Run marked his second 5K.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Cole Ayres leads a pack of runners in the 5K competition Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021, at the Echo Sage Trail Run at the Sno Road Winery vineyard in Echo.

## New BMCC president eager to share college's story

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Mark Browning still was selling radio ads in Idaho when he received a piece of advice that stuck with him.

He was chatting up the owner of a local grocery chain when the man asked Browning about his college plans. Browning, in his early 20s at the time, responded with a cliché about how those that can't do attend school instead. Browning's remarks prompted the man to turn from the shelves he was stocking and deliver some impromptu advice.

"And he said, 'The school of hard knocks is the most expensive tuition you'll ever pay,'" Browning recalled. "It took me a number of years to figure that out."

It was one of the many stories Browning, 59, told over the course of two interviews during his first week as the president of Blue Mountain Community College. A former newscaster and television anchor, Browning considers storytelling to be one of his primary roles as BMCC's chief executive.

Browning will be expected lead the college out of one of its most difficult chapters, as declining enrollment, the COVID-19 pandemic and dozens of layoffs all have hit BMCC hard over the past year-and-a-half.

But Browning said he thinks BMCC still has a story to tell.

### Continuing education

Browning grew up in Stevensville, Montana, a small town less than 30 miles south of Missoula, on a family farm while his parents ran a hardware store and lumber yard. Browning described his early childhood in idyllic terms.



Browning

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## Pendleton native rises to rank of Navy master chief

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Pendleton Round-Up week features all sorts of honoraries and dignitaries, but the person with the highest rank may have just been another face in the crowd.

Kristi Pashkevich traveled from San Diego to her hometown for rodeo week, on leave from her day job as a master chief in the U.S. Navy.

"It was really nice to be home and — I know it sounds silly — to be back in my roots," she said. "I've been down in Southern California for so long that it was nice to come home and feel normal again."

Her promotion to master chief was recent, but it's the culmination of 22 years in the Navy. But she didn't start her career gunning for a senior officer position in the military. In the beginning, she was just a kid fresh out of high school looking for something more than the college classes she was taking in Eugene.

"(I joined) the Navy and I just thought that I would do it for four years, and here I am 22 years later," Pashkevich, who graduated from Pendleton High School in 1997, said.

The Navy did take her far away from Oregon with nine deployments, including a 2004 stint in Afghanistan. While the U.S. recently ended its war in the Middle Eastern

country, the war still was relatively fresh when Pashkevich arrived. She was a part of only 12 Navy personnel who were in the country at the time, traveling with a communications unit in central Afghanistan to facilitate communications between aircraft and Marines on the ground.

While Pashkevich said her deployment in Afghanistan was "scary," the rest of her deployments were on ships. Before ascending to a command position, Pashkevich worked as a survival, evasion, resistance and escape instructor, providing training to Navy members who are facing deployment to hostile situations.

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Kristi Pashkevich/Contributed Photo

Navy Master Chief Kristi Pashkevich of Pendleton poses with her partner Thomas Martin after being promoted in July 2021. Pashkevich, who has served in the Navy 22 years, recently earned the promotion to master chief.

