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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
A covered wagon ferries attendees at the Morrow County Harvest Festival Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021, at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

Cases decline slightly after Round-Up spike eases

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County health officials have traced nearly 180 COVID-19 cases to events that occurred during the week of the Pendleton Round-Up.

But the initial spike in cases that followed the week-long rodeo seem to be on a slight decline, said Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara.

“I’m hoping we’ve gotten past the initial bump,” Fiumara said after reporting the 179 cases. “Time will tell. It will be important for people who are sick to stay home.”

County officials were expecting to report a record-high COVID-19 case count last week, but as the week wore on, case counts began to lower. Last week’s total amounted to 487 cases, making it the county’s third most infectious week since the pandemic started.

It’s a positive sign after an alarming initial bump in cases, Fiumara said, but infection rates remain far higher than they were before the delta variant surge began in mid-July.

“It’s hard to be happy with cases dropping to 50 or 60 each day,” Fiumara said.

The decrease, Fiumara said, also doesn’t mean increased COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths won’t follow, as they have after previous pandemic surges.

“Both of our hospitals have seen cases and hospitalizations go up a little,” Fiumara said of Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, and CHI St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton.

Harry Geller, St. Anthony’s president, said in an email that the hospital has seen a “significant increase” in patients admitted to its emergency department during the past two weeks. Staff are treating between 45 to 55 patients per day.

“During normal times, we average 32 patients per day,” Geller said.

As of Monday, Oct. 4, 10 out of the hospital’s 18 inpatient beds had COVID-19.

“With 25 inpatient beds set up and staffed, we have not yet gone over capacity,” Geller said. “We’ve come close on many occasions, but so far, so good.”

Unvaccinated account for 85% of cases from Round-Up

Data provided by the county health department late last week showed 85% of COVID-19 cases traced to the week-long rodeo were among unvaccinated people. Health officials have said some of the cases came from people who had COVID-19 symptoms prior to Round-Up but still chose to come.

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CELEBRATING THE SEASON

The Morrow County Harvest Festival was a success, organizer says

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — More than 1,000 people showed up Saturday, Oct. 2, for the return of the Morrow County Harvest Festival.

The SAGE Center in Boardman was the site for the eighth festival, which went on hiatus in 2020 due to the pandemic. Harvest Festival ran 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Breena Beck, SAGE Center assistant manager, said she was happy to bring back the Harvest Festival for its eighth year and set an attendance goal of 1,000.

Attendance neared that mark by 2 p.m.

“We’re so excited to be back in full force,” Beck said.

Pleasant weather — temperatures were in the 70s — helped make the Harvest Festival a success, according to Beck, and the vendors created fun for people. New vendors included sign makers, jewelers and clothing makers. Beck said she believes lockdowns may have inspired people.

“I think the quarantines have brought out the makers in all of us,” she said.

The number of returning vendors was another point of pride, Beck said.

Around 30 vendors — including general vendors, food vendors and volunteer groups at Kid’s Corner — participated in the festival. That was a drop from 2019, when 40 vendors set up, although Beck said the decline was expected as Harvest Festival was using only its outdoor space. Organizers closed off the inside area because of the pandemic.

Live music, mule-drawn wagon rides, food and children’s activities were present. There also was a pinewood derby race, which was new to the festival. Sponsors included Amazon Web Services,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Makenzie Karl, 10, ropes a plastic steer Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021, during the annual Morrow County Harvest Festival at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

Lamb Weston, Threemile Canyon Farms and Wildhorse Resort & Casino.

Sierra Simmons, Irrigon High School sophomore, was among local 4-H members who were in attendance. Simmons was showing goats and cattle, which she described as “pretty fun.” She said she especially liked introducing the animals to small children who had never seen such critters up close.

Harold Rietmann, Ione resident and self-described hobbyist, brought his woodcrafts to the Harvest Festival. Among the items he was selling were earrings and necklaces. He said he started this work in the 1980s and began selling his products at events in 2010.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Painted pumpkins sit below an irrigation line Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021, at the SAGE Center in Boardman during the Morrow County Harvest Festival.

Redistricting draws new lines, new questions

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Redistricting made little change to Northeastern Oregon’s political trajectory. Congressionally and legislatively, Republicans will continue representing Umatilla and Morrow counties into the foreseeable future.

But the Legislature ended its session in acrimony as Republicans alleged Democratic gerrymandering and a broken promise from House Speaker Tina Kotek. While most of the political battles were over how to divide the growing Willamette Valley and Central Oregon regions, state Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, became directly involved when he secured a last-minute appointment to the House redistricting committee.

Smith explained his role on the

committee and how he viewed the contentious end to the special session. A 20-year veteran of the House, Smith and the rest of the Legislature made significant changes to his district and opened up new questions about a potential conflict of interest.

What changed?

Starting in 2022, residents living on the south side of Milton-Freewater’s Southeast Eighth Street will have a different legislative representative in the Oregon House of Representatives than those who live on its north side.

It’s one of the more unusual changes to the state’s new legislative maps, which the Oregon Legislature approved and Gov. Kate Brown signed Sept. 27. The House map maintains the east-west split in Umatilla County that was introduced

in 2011, but moves around some of the lines.

House District 58, represented by state Rep. Bobby Levy of Echo, is largely unchanged. The new 58 swaps Helix for Stanfield with neighboring District 57 and gains a southern section of Milton-Freewater. But besides some of those minor alterations, District 58 retains the rest of eastern Umatilla County as well as the entirety of Union and Wallowa counties.

The changes to District 57 are more drastic.

Smith’s district retains the northern part of Milton-Freewater and gains Helix in Umatilla County while adding Wheeler County, almost all the land in Wasco County outside of The Dalles and Mosier and sections of Jefferson, Marion and Clackamas

counties that are largely aligned with the Warm Springs Reservation.

With House districts 57 and 58 combining to form Senate District 29, state Sen. Bill Hansell’s constituency now stretches from where the Oregon, Idaho and Washington borders meet to well into the Columbia River Gorge. An east-west trip from one side of Hansell’s district to the other would span more than 300 miles by road, a nearly seven-hour trip by car.

Congressionally, Umatilla and Morrow counties will remain in the conservative 2nd District. Legislators made the district even redder by moving Bend and Hood River to different districts while adding a section of Douglas County and the entirety of Josephine County.

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