

INSIDE

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KEEP FIGHTING, COWBOY

Saddlemaker Randy Severe makes slow recovery from COVID-19

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Mr. Round-Up is fighting for his life.

Normally Randy Severe spends his days at his saddle shop on Airport Hill crafting fine saddles for clients around the world. Occasionally, he relaxes by strumming an old guitar he keeps in the rustic, rawhide-scented workroom or kibitzing with people who drop by the shop, greeting each newcomer with easy banter and his trademark smile.

Severe Bros. Saddlery is unnaturally quiet these days.

The saddlemaker is 200 miles away in a Portland hospital. According to family, Severe started feeling ill just after the Pendleton Round-Up which ended on Sept. 18. One day, he came home with a bottle of cough syrup and said he was tired. He seemed to have a hard time catching his breath and he went outside every so often for fresh air.

“I think I caught something,” daughter Jodi Thackeray remembered him saying.

Seven days after symptoms began, Rosemary noticed her 69-year-old husband’s breathing seemed rough and ragged. Daughter Darla Phillips whisked him to the hospital where a doctor determined that Severe’s oxygen levels had plummeted to 44% and that he definitely had COVID-19. That was the last time his wife Rosemary and other family members saw him for a while because of hospital isolation protocols.

After two weeks at St. Anthony Hospital, it was time for a ventilator. Severe was loaded onto a helicopter for a trip to Providence Medical Center in Portland. On the way, high winds buffeted the aircraft and forced the pilot to land in The Dalles. The experience might be an apt metaphor for Severe’s life in the past month. By mid-afternoon, he lay sedated and intubated in the Providence Intensive Care Unit.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Randy Severe poses alongside a 2019 Pendleton Round-Up trophy saddle, Aug. 2, 2019, at Severe Bros. Saddlery in Pendleton. Severe, 69, a former Round-Up President, has COVID-19 and remains at a Portland hospital.



East Oregonian, File

Randy Severe, center, of Pendleton, discusses repairs to a saddle owned by Heith DeMoss of Heflin, Louisiana, on Sept. 9, 2014, at his saddle shop in Pendleton.

Pendleton mayor touts improving economy

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton is boasting about an improving economy, and the city has the data to back that up.

In his October newsletter, Mayor John Turner touted several statistics showing 2021 has been a year of economic progress for Pendleton.

- Home values rose by 17% last year compared to 4.5% in 2018-19. The city expects values to rise 25% in 2021-22.

- The city has recorded \$9.9 million in commercial-industrial permit values, already surpassing the \$8.9 million it garnered in 2020 and the \$5.7 million it calculated in 2019.

- The \$164,601 the city collected in business license revenue through Sept. 1, 2021, already is more than it collected in 2020 and approximately equal to what it got in 2019.

- A survey of the 12 largest employers in Pendleton showed there were 500 vacant jobs among them.

- The Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range is expected to bring in \$1.1 million in revenue by the end of the fiscal year and has grown its revenue year-over-year since generating \$372,000 in 2016.

“Why did we choose these five things to measure?” he wrote. “Mainly because we can get accurate numbers for them without tasking the city staff to spend hundreds of hours searching for information. We think we can get a decent snapshot of our local economy if we measure these five areas and combine them with the number of new housing units.”

In an interview, Turner provided context for the significant jump in commercial industrial permit values, attributing the rise to the Radisson Hotel project at the Pendleton airport.

And while the newsletter didn’t list housing permit numbers, he projected optimism on the future of new housing in the city. The city has a goal of issuing 50 new housing permits per year, but Turner said between the South Hill Commons and the Westgate Apartments projects, he could see the city issuing more than 200 permits in a year.

South Hill Commons is a 70-unit affordable housing project on the east side of South Hill backed by the nonprofit Horizon Project and funded by the state. Publicly announced in 2018, Westgate Apartments is a 200-unit apartment complex project from the Wilsonville-based I&E Construction on Westgate, near Blue Mountain Community College.

Business license growth was among the statistics the city listed, but what it will mean for the city’s economic development fund is unknown.

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Prison workers sue Brown over state vaccine mandate

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Five state employees, four of whom work at the Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City, have filed a lawsuit challenging Gov. Kate Brown’s COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

Attorney Jon Jacob Conde with the firm Stunz, Fonda, Kiyuna, & Horton, LLP, in Nyssa, filed the lawsuit Oct. 20 in Baker County Circuit Court on behalf of the correction workers.

In an Oct. 22 filing, Ellen

Rosenblum, Oregon attorney general, said the case is being transferred to U.S. District Court in Pendleton.

The plaintiffs are Yeni Arteaga, Shawn D. Delve, James A. Klusmier and Justin A. Phlaum, all of whom work at Powder River, and Kelcie Cathleen Wiley, who works at the Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario.

The plaintiffs contend the governor’s mandate, which she announced in August and which took effect for some public employees on Oct. 18, violates both the

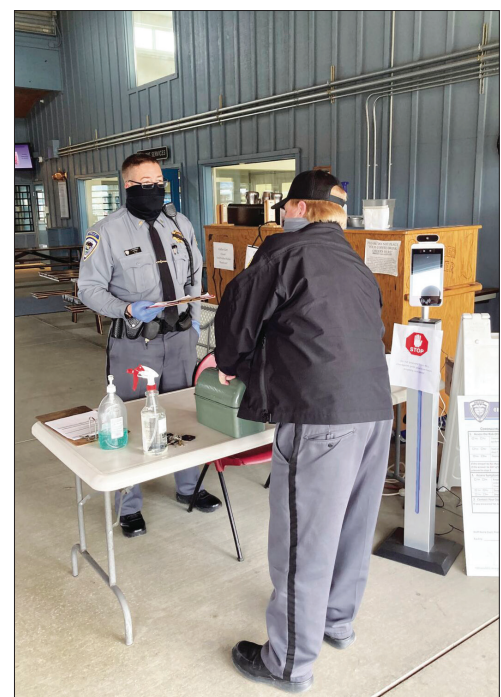
Oregon and U.S. constitutions.

The plaintiffs are asking a judge to issue an injunction barring the state from enforcing the governor’s mandate while the lawsuit is pending.

Three of the plaintiffs say they have previously been infected with COVID-19, and thus they have natural immunity even though they’re not vaccinated.

The lawsuit is the latest of several legal challenges to Brown’s vaccine mandate.

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Debi Geddes/Powder River Correctional Facility, File

Everyone entering the Powder River Correctional Facility, Baker City, in 2020 had to have a temperature check and answer question about recent contacts due to the coronavirus pandemic. Five employees at Oregon prisons, including four at Powder River, filed a lawsuit Oct. 20, 2021, seeking an injunction against Gov. Kate Brown’s vaccination mandate.

