



East Oregonian, File

Randy Severe, then president of the Pendleton Round-Up, rides around the arena Thursday, Sept. 16, 2010, during the opening ceremony of the Pendleton Round-Up. The Pendleton saddlemaker started feeling ill Sept. 18, 2021, and had to receive treatment at a Portland hospital, including being on a ventilator.

Severe:

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Severe's wife, Rosemary, and their five children finally got a look at Randy after a nurse initiated a video call with Jarad Severe, who connected his mom and four siblings. On their screens, they saw Randy, laying on his stomach in his hospital bed, tubes everywhere, with the side of his face visible to the camera. His back rose and fell with each breath.

They took turns talking to Randy, believing that down deep he could hear them.

"We just told him about our days and how his grandkids were doing," Jodi said. "We talked about how we were missing him and how he needed to hurry up and get better."

Finally they were allowed to see him in person. Rosemary stays close to Randy. Her five children trade off driving to Portland and spending time with their father. Ryan and Darci Burgener travel from their homes in Washington, and Ryan Severe comes from Utah. Darla and Jodi drive from Pendleton.

It is hard to see such a strong and active man in such a state, they said. For years, Severe has built trophy saddles for champions of the Pendleton Round-Up. He has volunteered at the rodeo since he was a boy, when his job was to remove rocks from the arena.

Severe, past president of the Round-Up Association, hosts numerous cowboys at the bunkhouse on the second floor of his saddle shop each Round-Up week. Photos of hundreds of

rodeo cowboy guests adorn the bunkhouse walls. The gallery includes a shot of Casey Tibbs, who is credited with christening the bunkhouse as Hotel de Cowpunch and hanging a sign with the moniker. This year was no different than the others. Severe interacted light-heartedly with this year's crop of cowboys and fixed their banged-up saddles. On Thursday of Round-Up, the Severe Family Band held a jam session in the saddle shop surrounded by enthusiastic rodeo cowboys. The band includes Randy on guitar, Jodi, Darla and Darci on fiddle, Jarad on bass guitar and grandson Ty Little on guitar and spoons. Ryan is sound man.

At the rodeo this year, he volunteered by serving as something of a utility player, filling in where necessary. Mostly, he sat in the stands and watching rodeo action and, on the last day, cowboys being awarded the four trophy saddles that Severe had created. Amazingly, one cowboy, Stetson Wright, won three of the four saddles after winning bull riding, bronc riding and all-around title.

In the wake of a wonderful Round-Up week, Randy tried to ignore an annoying cough and a sense of fatigue. He went to work Sept. 20, but came home early. On a Sept. 21, he did the same. The next five days, he didn't try to work. Finally, a trip to the hospital drove home the reality the delta variant can topple even someone with Severe's level of cowboy toughness.

Jarad, the family point man, has chronicled much of Randy's journey with updates to Facebook. Lately, the dispatches

include reason for optimism.

On Oct. 22: "Dad is making small improvements and staying stable. We have confidence in his strength and determination to heal."

Doctors, he said, had placed a tracheotomy and removed the ventilator tube, took him off paralytic drugs and started lowering his level of sedation.

On Oct. 23: "It was the coolest thing. He was on low sedation and the nurse asked him to open his eyes and HE DID!!"

Family members are encouraged, though they know Randy must overcome profound lung damage. His alveoli — the tiny air sacs that allow the lungs and blood to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide — are not exchanging as quickly as they should, so air builds up, putting pressure on his heart. Doctors inserted a tube to release the trapped air.

"It's been kind of a roller coaster with lots of ups and downs," Jodi said. "It's one step forward and two steps back. This is going to be a marathon."

"Dad just had one of those immune systems that overreacted to the virus," Jarad said. "It caused so much inflammation."

The family has learned some hard lessons from the ordeal. Go for medical help early rather than toughing it out, they advised. Randy figured he would beat it and waited too long, they said.

"Seven days — that's a long time to allow the virus to take over and do damage," Jarad said.

Rosemary, who also got the virus, said she got an injection of monoclonal antibodies and

bounced back without needing hospitalization.

She and her children expressed awe at those who have helped in a multitude of ways. Friends and family are working the Severe's farm and providing security at the saddle shop. They are helping with travel costs, buying airplane tickets and Uber vouchers, and doing countless other kindnesses. Jodi can imagine her dad's face when he learns of all the love coming his way.

"He would tear up and say how appreciative he is of friends who stepped in to help his family out while he's down," she said.

"He has a lot of cowboy friends out there," Rosemary said.

Non-cowboy friends, too. "Dad has no enemies," Darla said. "He is loved by all."

The family also thanked the medical team working with Randy.

"They are the soldiers on the front line," Darla said. "You can see the compassion they have."

Severe's supporters are fundraising to help with medical expenses. One option is a GoFundMe account called the Randy Severe Medical Fund. People also can donate to an account set up at Columbia River Bank. Those wishing to send a check can mail it to Columbia River Bank, c/o Randy Severe Donation Account, 2101 S.W. Court Place, Pendleton, OR 97801. A possible auction also is in the works.

On the GoFundMe site, Jodi posted an encouraging comment to her father:

"Keep fighting, cowboy."

Economy:

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In 2008, the city raised annual business license fees so that it could fund a newly created economic development director position. But when Steve Chrisman took on airport manager duties, his salary was transferred to the airport fund. Although the city recently hired a full-time airport manager so Chrisman could focus on economic development, City

Manager Robb Corbett said his salary has remained with the airport fund because Chrisman continues to work extensively with the Pendleton UAS Range.

Unlike the water or sewer fund, where revenue must pay for utility workers or utility infrastructure, the economic development fund is a part of the general fund, a pot of money that's also shared by public safety, parks and several other services. That means that although the city will generate more than \$160,000 in business license revenue this year,

the revenue can be used to cover other general fund services.

The city budgeted \$43,320 for the economic development fund in the 2021-22 fiscal year, more than half of which goes to a subsidy for the Pendleton Downtown Association.

Corbett said he didn't know how the increase in business license revenue would affect the economic development fund and the city would need to take a look at the fund during future budget cycles.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton is touting an improving economy with rising home values, increased business license revenue and hundreds of job openings as key markers of the economic progress, according to Mayor John Turner.



Lawsuit:

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State or federal judges have so far made six rulings rejecting requests for injunctions temporarily stopping the mandate from taking effect. None of the challenges has been upheld.

Most recently, U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken last week rejected a motion from seven state workers, all of whom have been infected with COVID-19, seeking a temporary restraining order from the mandate.

Aiken ruled the U.S. Constitution offers no fundamental right to refuse a vaccination and that the mandated shots are in the state's interest to stem the spread of disease and protect Oregon's citizens, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

The plaintiffs in that case also raised the issue of natural immunity due to their prior infection.

But Aiken ruled that unvaccinated workers should not be exempt from the mandate even if they have already been infected.

Dr. Melissa Sutton, medical director of respiratory viral pathogens for the Oregon Health Authority, wrote to the judge that immunity from natural infection is "not as durable or reliable as the protection" from vaccines.

The lawsuit filed in Baker County Circuit Court challenges that contention, noting the mandate "ignores cases of natural immunity in individuals."

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed in Baker County Circuit Court:

- Arteaga lives in Baker County and has worked as a food service coordinator at Powder River for six years.

According to the lawsuit, Arteaga is pregnant and has declined to be vaccinated "because she has a family history of circulation issues and feels the vaccine has not been sufficiently tested in laboratory or other settings to understand potential long-term side effects."

In an Oct. 18 declaration included with the lawsuit, Arteaga wrote: "Fear of losing my job has been taking its toll on my body, and has been mentally and emotionally taxing. I have been struggling to deal with stress, to eat, and adequate sleep. If I am fired for not having the vaccine, I will lose my medical benefits prior to the birth of my child."

In a message to the Baker City Herald on Wednesday, Oct. 27, Arteaga wrote she was tested for the first time a couple days ago when she was admitted to the hospital due to her pregnancy, and the test was negative.

"Even though I have my own beliefs to not take the vaccine I respect other people's beliefs to take it," Arteaga wrote. "I truly believe it affects people different but I'm currently pregnant and was sick to my stomach when I found out how they actually tested for safety on pregnancy."

- Delve, 28, lives in Baker County and is a correctional lieutenant at Powder River who has previously been infected with COVID-19.

"Lt. Delve objects to being forced to vaccinate as a condition of his employment as it violates his conscience and personal freedoms," according to the lawsuit.

In an Oct. 7 declaration included with the lawsuit, Delve wrote: "I contracted COVID-19 in January of 2021 while working as a Correctional Sergeant. I believe this mandate will cause harm first as the potential for bodily harm and damage to my person as a young and healthy 28 year old who experienced fewer symptoms than a regular cold during my infection period of having the virus."

- Klusmier lives in John Day and has worked for five years, part-time, as a dentist at Powder River. He has been infected with COVID-19 and "would likely have natural immunity," according to the lawsuit.

Klusmier, in an Oct. 7 declaration included with the lawsuit, wrote: "I have had COVID-19 previously. I have concerns about taking a vaccine for a disease I already had, including possible side effects such as Myocarditis etc. Loss of this job will mean a loss of 50 percent of my families income. Forcing me to choose between my conscience and my employment is wrong and I believe to be unethical."

- Phlaum lives in Baker County and has worked as a food service coordinator at Powder River for nine years.

"He is concerned that the new COVID vaccines have not been tested properly, and also objects to taking any vaccine that has been made or uses fetal tissue, of which the current COVID vaccines makes use," according to the lawsuit.

In an Oct. 7 declaration included with the lawsuit, Phlaum wrote: "I believe in bodily autonomy and I believe that I should get (have the right) to choose what is pushed into my body. I work in a facility where Hepatitis B, tuberculosis and even syphilis is around me, and I have never been mandated to get those vaccines. I provide for a family of six. If I lose my job, I do not know what I will do for employment in the future."

- Wiley lives in Payette County, Idaho, and has worked at the Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario for four years.

"She is a breastfeeding mother and chooses not to vaccinate due to concerns of passing the untested vaccine to her small child," according to the lawsuit.

Wiley has previously been infected with COVID-19 "and her body has already developed antibodies," according to the lawsuit.

In an Oct. 18 declaration included with the lawsuit, Wiley wrote: "I have contracted COVID when I was weeks pregnant with my son. There are more and more studies that have shown that natural immunity should be taken into consideration when it comes to choosing to be vaccinated or not. This situation has caused myself, my husband, and our family stress, physical, mental and emotional harm."