

# 'I am certain she is my mother'

Woman believes Finley Creek Jane Doe is her mom, missing since 1976

By **DICK MASON**  
*The Observer*

WALLA WALLA — Suzanne Timms was looking at a Facebook page that lists missing persons when she thought she saw someone familiar — herself.

"I said, 'Why am I there? I'm not a missing person,'" the Walla Walla woman said.

A moment later Timms became convinced that the picture, which she first saw in July, was not of herself but of her mother, Patty Otto, who has been missing since Sept. 1, 1976. What Timms saw was not a photograph but an image created in May by a forensic artist in Massachusetts, Anthony Redgrave, the operator of Redgrave Research Forensic Services. Redgrave was assisting a local group trying to identify a woman found in a shallow grave 10 miles northwest of Elgin in August 1978.

The group is led by Melinda Jederberg of La Grande.

Timms' mother, a Lewiston, Idaho, resident whom Suzanne Timms last saw when she was 3 years old, may have been the person discovered in that shallow

grave, which was near Finley Creek.

She has since become known as the Finley Creek Jane Doe. Timms said the mystery involving the woman's identity is solved in her mind.

"I am certain she is my mother," she said.

Re-creating the face of what Timms believes is that of her mother took some creativity on Redgrave's part. Redgrave had no actual skull to work with, just the digital copies of the photos the Oregon State medical examiner took of the remains after hunters found her.

Timms is sure of Finley Creek Jane Doe's identity not only because of the forensic image but also the red pants and white blouse a medical examiner's report photo shows she was wearing.

"That was exactly what my mom had on the last time I saw her," Timms said.

A Sept. 8, 1976, story in the Lewiston-Morning Tribune also said that Otto was wearing red pants and a white blouse before she disappeared from Lewiston.

Other similarities include the light brown or blond hair the article described, the same color Timms' mom had. Size is another common characteristic. Finley Creek Jane Doe's estimated height was 5 feet, 2 inches to 5 feet, 4 inches, the same height as

Timms' mother.

Timms now wants to get DNA to verify that Finley Creek Jane Doe is her mother, which might prove challenging — Timms said Finley Creek Jane Doe was cremated in 1990 because her case had been closed by the state.

Still, Timms is not giving up hope. She knows precisely where Finley Creek Jane Doe was found because her father-in-law, then a child, was with the two hunters, including his father, when they found her in 1978. He has taken Timms to the precise site and they have searched the area for human bone fragments, but none have been found.

She hopes to return later with dogs trained to pick up the scent of human bones. Timms also hopes to be aided by someone trained in the science of scatter analysis who might be able to determine how the bones were spread out.

Another avenue that may be pursued involves attempting to get what are believed to be the ashes of Finley Creek Jane Doe.

It is not known for certain where the ashes of Finley Creek Jane Doe are because they were never returned to La Grande after being sent to Walla Walla to be cremated, Timms said. However, Timms believes her ashes may be those at a mortuary in Walla Walla in a box marked



Ben Lonergan, East Oregonian

**Suzanne Timms poses for a portrait Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2021, at her home in Walla Walla alongside a missing person poster of her mother, Patricia Otto, and a collection of documents pertaining to her disappearance.**

miscellaneous. She said that a Canadian company will be attempting to get DNA from the cremains in the box.

If the ashes are determined to be those of her mother, it would be an amazing irony for Timms, a registered nurse who has lived in Walla Walla since 1999.

"I have been searching for my mom for years and I may have been next to her all of this time," she said. "She may have been sitting right here waiting for me to pick her up."

Those who are assisting Timms in her effort to prove that Finley Creek Jane Doe is indeed her mother include Tom Saleen, a retired Lewis-

ton, Idaho, police officer. Saleen helped lead the effort to find Timms' mother after she was reported missing on Sept. 1, 1976.

"He has been amazing," Timms said.

Saleen said that he put more hours on the Patty Otto case than any other during his career.

"I never had a case that had so many leads that led nowhere," he said.

The retired law enforcement officer wants to help solve the case for the sake of Timms.

"The most important thing for me is to get resolution for Suzanne," Saleen said.



Ben Lonergan, East Oregonian

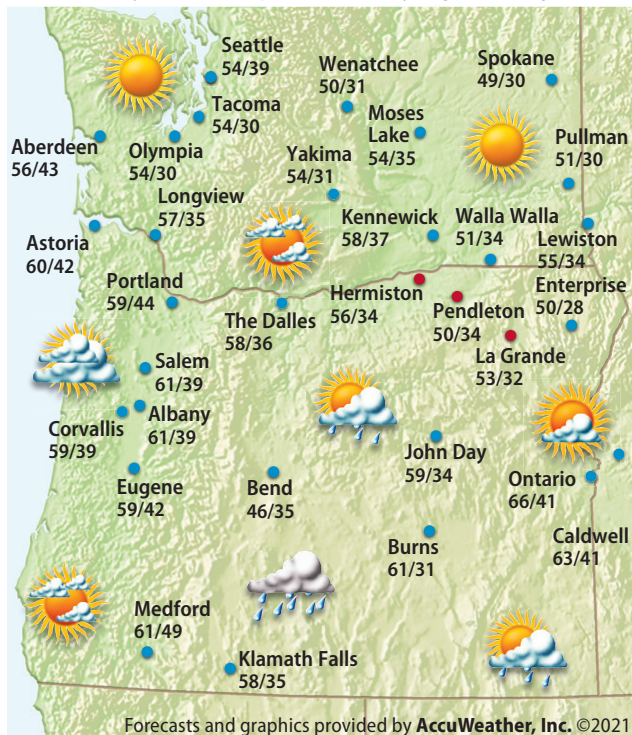
**A missing person poster for Patricia Otto sits on the coffee table of her daughter, Suzanne Timms, on Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2021, at Timms' home in Walla Walla.**

## Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Partly sunny	Chilly with abundant sunshine	Rain and drizzle in the p.m.	Sun through high clouds	Cloudy
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
50° 34°	48° 31°	51° 40°	53° 37°	53° 40°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
56° 34°	55° 33°	54° 41°	57° 36°	56° 41°

## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



### ALMANAC

**PENDLETON** through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	68°	53°
Normals	58°	37°
Records	74° (2020)	15° (2019)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.19"  
Month to date 1.03"  
Normal month to date 1.03"  
Year to date 6.03"  
Last year to date 9.83"  
Normal year to date 10.24"

**HERMISTON** through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	61°	55°
Normals	59°	36°
Records	73° (2020)	11° (1971)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.33"  
Month to date 1.25"  
Normal month to date 0.74"  
Year to date 3.92"  
Last year to date 2.29"  
Normal year to date 6.41"

**WINDS** (in mph)

Boardman	Today	Sun.
	NNE 6-12	NNE 4-8
Pendleton	NNW 4-8	WSW 4-8

**SUN AND MOON**

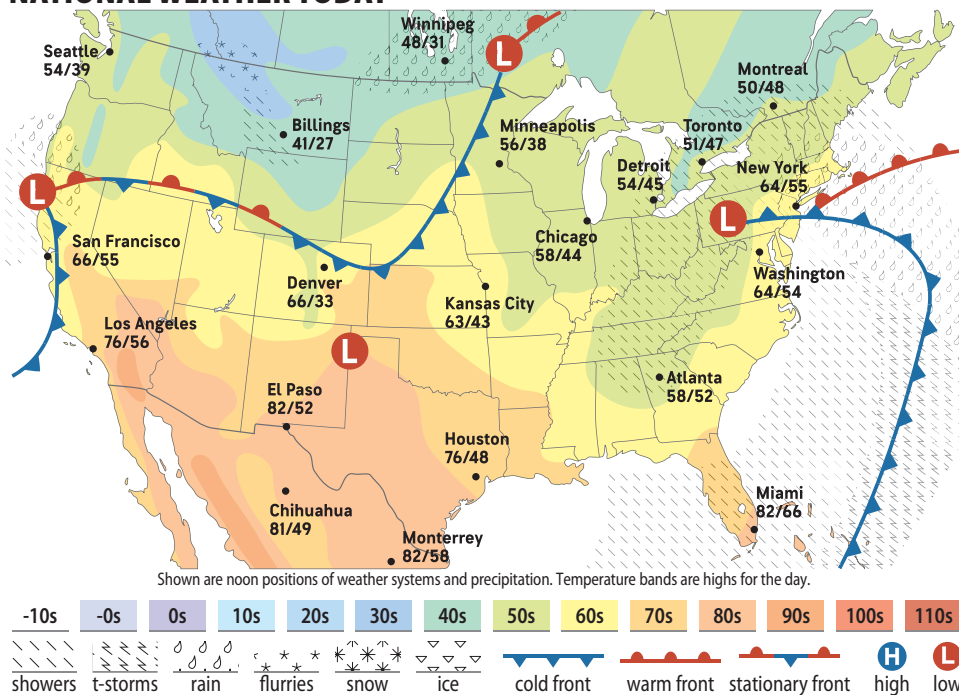
Sunrise today	7:32 a.m.
Sunset tonight	5:45 p.m.
Moonrise today	12:54 a.m.
Moonset today	3:48 p.m.

Nov 4 Nov 11 Nov 19 Nov 27

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 95° in San Bernardino, Calif. Low 11° in Angel Fire, N.M.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## Region returning to pre-pandemic job numbers

By **ALEX WITTEWER**  
*EO Media Group*

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon is back on track to recovering jobs lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to state economists.

Regional economists Christopher Rich and Dallas Fridley at the Oregon Employment Department reported unemployment rates have dipped to the lowest level since the pandemic began in the spring of 2020.

Union and Wallowa counties saw a 1.5% and 1.6% decrease in unemployment from September 2020 to September 2021, respectively, closing out with 5.3% and 5.4% total unemployment rates. Baker County saw a 2.2% drop during the same period, from 7.1% to 4.9%, the largest drop of the Northeastern Oregon counties. Grant County saw a 1.5% decrease, down to 6.6%.

Morrow County recorded one of the lowest year-end decreases with just 0.9%, down to a 4.4% unemployment rate since September 2021. Morrow County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate ranked sixth out of 36 Oregon counties, tied

with Clackamas and Yamhill counties.

Umatilla County with an unemployment rate of 5% placed 14th in September among Oregon's 36 counties, tied with Jackson County. During the year, the county's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell by 1.2 percentage points since September 2020. Umatilla County led job growth primarily through public sector jobs, adding 470 government jobs during the year.

Union County is largely back on track, according to economists, but not fully recovered from the 1,400 jobs lost at the start of the pandemic. Leisure and hospitality regained 87% of jobs lost, but remained roughly 60 shy of full recovery.

Evidence of those statistics can be found in persistent help wanted signs at fast food chains such as McDonald's and Dairy Queen, while job advertisements have largely disappeared from the windows of local restaurants downtown. Restaurants such as Mamacita's International Grill, La Grande, have had to close down temporarily due to staffing shortages, while others such as local bistro

and eatery Wine Down have closed permanently.

The total increase across Northeastern Oregon counties was approximately 1,450 jobs over the year ending in September. Of those jobs added, 700 were in the private sector.

Across the state, unemployment rates fell to 4.7%, down from its high of 13.2% in April 2020 when government-mandated shutdowns halted economies across the United States. The unemployment rate sits slightly higher than its pre-pandemic level of 3.5%, flirting with the idea of a full recovery as COVID-19 infections fall across the state, and vaccination rates rise to 80%, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Unemployment claims fell dramatically over the year, tumbling from 1,918 unemployment claims in September 2020, to just 794 in September 2021, a nearly 60% drop in claims numbers. Those numbers had been continually dropping since January 2021, and the last three months, starting in July, have had marginal decreases as federal unemployment benefits dry up.

## IN BRIEF

### 80% of Oregonians 18 and older have received at least one dose of COVID-19 shot

SALEM — State health officials said Thursday, Oct. 28, that 80% of Oregonians who are 18 or older have now had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

They said it's an important milestone. But health experts estimate it's still well below the level needed to reach "herd immunity" and stop viral transmission altogether.

Including those 12 and older, 63% of eligible Oregon residents have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. That puts Oregon in 12th place nationwide.

COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to go down in Oregon. But hospitalizations did go up last week, for the first time in about two months. Most hospitals throughout the state still are at or near full capacity.

The Oregon Health Authority said getting more people vaccinated is the state's best way out of this pandemic.

### Officers search ranch suspected of illegal horse racing operation

BURBANK — An investigation lasting more than two years on illegal horse racing in rural Walla Walla County resulted in the search of a suspected illegal operation early Tuesday, Oct. 26.

Detectives and deputies from the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office, special agents with the Washington State Gambling Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture agents and Walla Walla Police Department officers served a search warrant on the site this week, according to a press release.

— *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin and Oregon Public Broadcasting*

**CORRECTIONS:** The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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