

# Grant County domestic trauma center opens

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The community got an opportunity to see Grant County's newly built domestic trauma center last week during a weeklong open house.

Heart of Grant County, a nonprofit that provides confidential advocacy and protection to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, celebrated the completion of requirements for the federal grant that funded the new facility.

After Heart of Grant County provided a \$15,000 match, the county sponsored the nonprofit agency's application and received a \$1.5 million federal Community Development Block Grant.

Construction on the facility broke ground in 2020, and the organization has been in the building since June.

The new center features improved privacy to talk to victims, a conference room for more group activities in private settings and the ability to house between two and three families. The agency could only accommodate one person at its previous location.

Beth Simonsen, Heart of Grant County's director, said staff members at the domestic trauma center are not

professional counselors. However, they can coordinate with agencies around the county to meet clients' needs for mental health, medical care, financial help and housing assistance.

"Some of this stuff is new territory for whoever we're serving," Simonsen said.

## Communication programs

In January, Heart of Grant County will begin offering classes to build communication and conflict resolution skills, taught by the group's board chair, Nancy Nickel.

Nickel, who recently received training as a mediator to teach the classes, said during a county court session on Dec. 8., that the escalation of angry rhetoric in the public sector has been alarming, and Heart of Grant County staffers worry it might contribute to domestic abuse.

She said the group wants to help people learn how to talk to each other and resolve conflicts peacefully.

"People get frustrated, and they lash out," she said, "and they love each other a lot of the time."

She said the last couple of years of the pandemic had been a strain on everyone. But, having worked at the Grant County Courthouse



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

**Heart of Grant County Director Beth Simonsen on Dec. 8, 2021, addresses the Grant County Court. She said the domestic trauma center will begin offering communication and conflict resolution classes in January.**

for more than 25 years, she told the court she had never seen such a heightened level of hostility and anger.

Nickel said she felt

compelled to say something after hearing about the verbal abuse toward public health officials and contact tracers at the Grant County Health

Department. She said people owe Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay and Health Department clinic manager Jessica Winegar an apology for the verbal tirades they and their staff have had to endure when making contact tracing calls.

## Emergency housing

Rayme Lacey, an advocate at Heart of Grant County, said she is trying to find stable housing for people living in the shelter, but the county's housing shortage has made it difficult.

She said she is working with roughly 10 people in abusive situations. While those situations are not necessarily violent, they still are unhealthy living conditions.

"I'm extremely worried for their safety," Lacey said. "We don't have the room to house everybody, and they have no place to go, and we're juggling a lot to try and keep them safe."

As someone who experienced domestic violence for a large part of her life, Lacey said she can empathize with what her clients are going through.

Lacey came to Heart of Grant County as a client and lived in the shelter while getting back on her feet.

"When you're living

in abuse, you just get torn down," Lacey said, "and you don't think much of yourself, and you don't think that you can do anything."

Lacey said the staff at Heart of Grant County helped her believe in herself and change her mindset. She said it is important to her to make sense of her trauma and use that experience to help someone out of theirs.

"It's hard to see a way out when you're in it," Lacey said, "and I'm passionate about letting people know that their life can change."

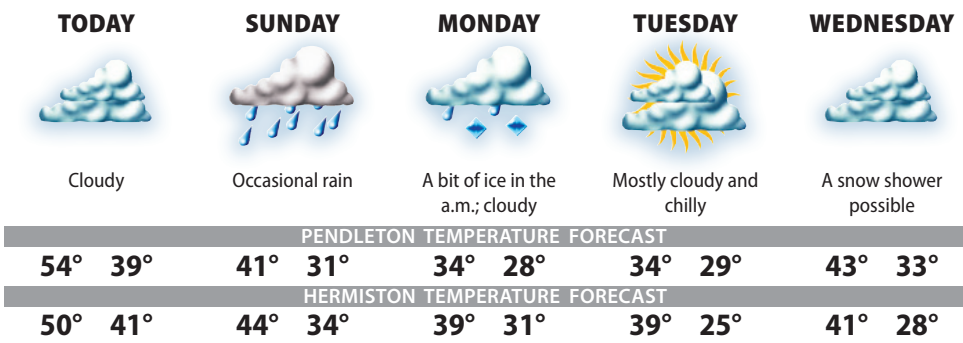
Lacey said her faith and a support network within the community helped keep her going.

Before that, Lacey said, she had given up all hope of having a happy life. However, she said her life turned around when she got to Heart of Grant County. She said the organization gave her time to heal and the resources to go to Community Counseling Solutions.

Coming back from addiction, she could get into drug and alcohol programs and work with mental health counselors, she said.

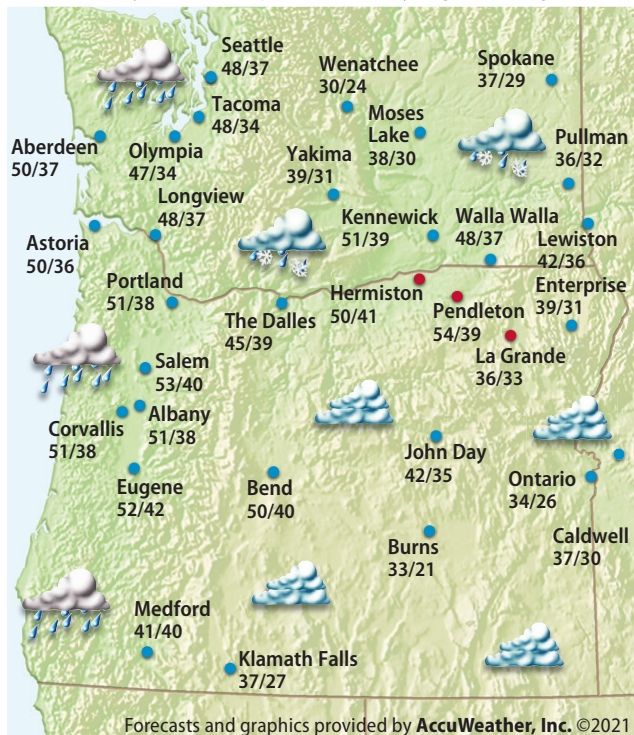
It took a whole community, she said: "All of the people that I have now to use as partners to help other people get out of it."

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## 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	41°	31°
Normals	40°	28°
Records	62° (1917)	-12° (1964)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.01"  
Month to date 0.42"  
Normal month to date 0.79"  
Year to date 7.80"  
Last year to date 12.42"  
Normal year to date 12.52"

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

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	41°	31°
Normals	42°	28°
Records	61° (1937)	-13° (2016)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"  
Month to date 0.18"  
Normal month to date 0.56"  
Year to date 5.25"  
Last year to date 4.05"  
Normal year to date 8.08"

**WINDS** (in mph)  
Today SSE 3-6 Sun. NNE 4-8  
Pendleton SSE 7-14 N 6-12

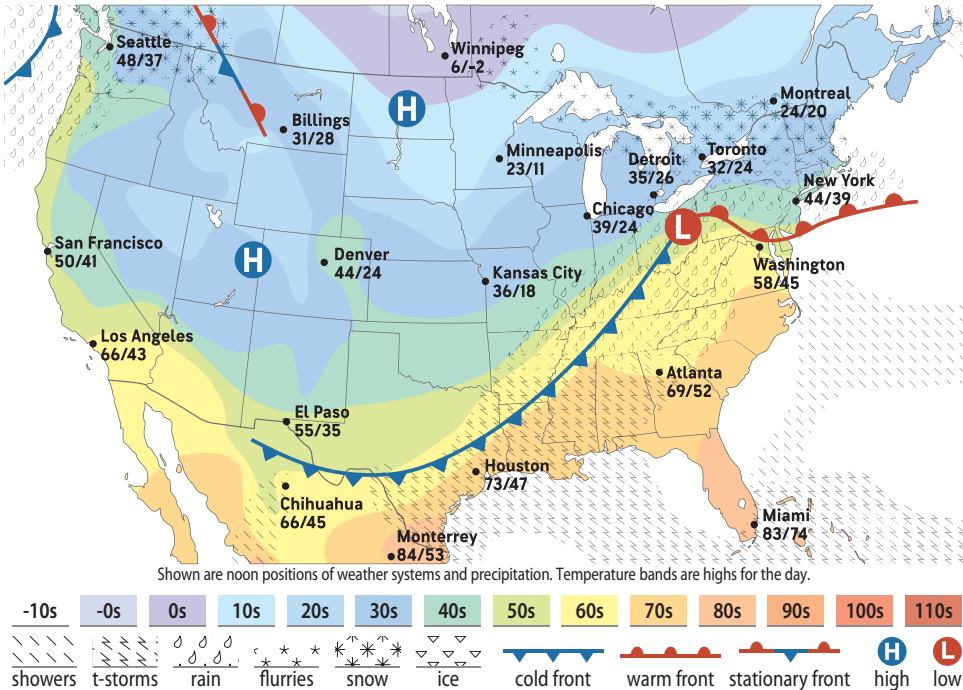
**SUN AND MOON**  
Sunrise today 7:31 a.m.  
Sunset tonight 4:13 p.m.  
Moonrise today 3:46 p.m.  
Moonset today 7:18 a.m.

Phase	Date
Full	Dec 18
Last	Dec 26
New	Jan 2
First	Jan 9

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 87° in Key West, Fla. Low -17° in Mammoth Lakes, Calif.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Driver dies in crash on I-84

By DICK MASON AND DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

NORTH POWDER — The driver of a full-sized Dodge 3500 pickup pulling a camper died in a single-vehicle crash on the south edge of North Powder early Wednesday, Dec. 15.

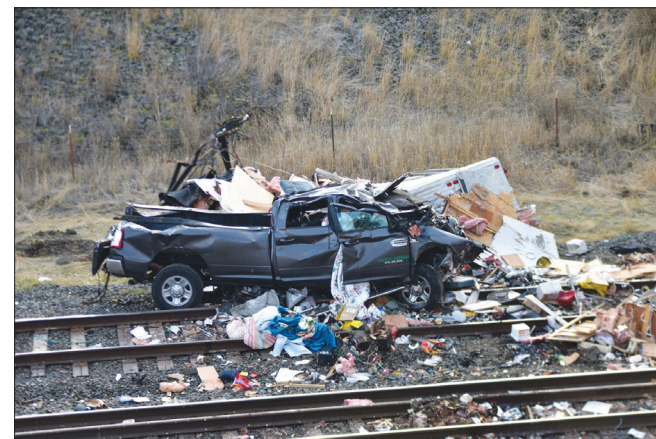
The driver died when the pickup went off the left west-bound lane of Interstate 84 and down an embankment. The pickup and the camper came to rest on Union Pacific railroad tracks. The crash was reported at 6:29 a.m. to the Baker County 911 dispatch center.

An update from Oregon State Police later that day identified the driver as Robert Miller, 54, of Shelton, Washington.

According to Oregon State Police Sgt. Dave Aydelotte, Miller was dead by the time first responders arrived. He was not ejected from his pickup, senior trooper Greg Retherford said.

The pickup was an Enterprise rental and there were no passengers. A Life Flight helicopter was dispatched to the scene but turned around immediately after reaching North Powder because Miller did not survive the crash.

"It flew in and circled the area but it did not set down," Retherford said.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

**A rental pickup bearing Washington plates sits on the railroad tracks near North Powder on Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021. The pickup crashed off Interstate 84 and the driver died at the scene. Oregon State Police reported the cause of the crash is unclear.**

In addition to OSP, those responding to the crash site included the La Grande Fire Department, the Union County Sheriff's Office and Union Pacific Railroad.

Retherford said a La Grande Fire Department vehicle got stuck on the railroad tracks while a train was coming toward it about a quarter mile west of the crash scene. Fortunately, the railroad was contacted and the train, which was moving slowly, was able to stop with plenty of distance to spare — but not before causing some concern.

"It was a little nerve-racking for a while," Retherford said.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation. According to Aydelotte, Oregon requires a local medical examiner to investigate the cause and manner of death when the death is unattended.

"At this point in time we just don't know," he said. Aydelotte said no estimate of the vehicle's speed has been determined.

The wreck blocked both active rail lines until approximately 8:45 a.m., when one of the lines was cleared. The afternoon update from OSP detailed that the rail lines have been fully cleared. The crash did not close I-84 and no other vehicles were involved.

## IN BRIEF

### Police arrest M-F man for damaging gravestones, more

COLLEGE PLACE — A suspected drunken driver was arrested after driving off road and hitting multiple gravestones at Mt. Hope Cemetery on Tuesday, Dec. 14, according to the College Place Police Department. Police responded to reports of a suspicious person staggering around the cemetery property Tuesday around 3 p.m. The man was identified as 67-year-old

Milton-Freewater resident Mark Medina. Based on observations of the vehicle and other evidence on scene, police said Medina may have struck additional objects.

Medina was booked into the Walla Walla County Jail for investigation of driving under the influence, reckless driving and hit-and-run.

Mt. Hope Cemetery management is assessing the damage and making the proper notifications to family members of the damaged headstones, according to the release.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

**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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