

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2021

146th Year, No. 26

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021

\$1.50



COLD TEMPERATURES TURN EASTERN OREGON RAIN INTO SNOW

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Andrew Taylor-Beaver, 12, sleds down the hill in Aldrich Park on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021, as a fresh snow blanketed Pendleton.

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Just a day before the calendar recognizes the first day of winter, many communities in Eastern Oregon saw their first significant snowstorm of the cold weather season.

Cold temperatures turned rain into snow Sunday night, Dec. 20, and the snow continued into the morning of Dec. 21. The National Weather Service issued a winter weather advisory through 3 p.m. that day.

Every region of Umatilla County saw significant snowfall through the morning. Joe Solomon, a meteorologist with the weather service, said Pendleton received 1-3 inches of snow, Hermiston 2-5 inches and the Milton-Freewater and Walla Walla areas about 2 inches of snow.

Solomon explained what factors turned a standard rain storm into something much icier.

“There was a stalled cold front that runs across northern Oregon to southern Washington with a steady stream of moisture moving along that front,” he said. “Cold air north of that front has been slowly filtering in all the way down into north-central Oregon.”

Most area schools already started their winter break, giving students some snow to play with on their first official day off. The Pendleton School District wasn't set to break for the holiday season until Dec. 22, but the district canceled school the morning of Dec. 20. Blue Mountain Community College eventually joined its K-12 peers in canceling in-person classes on all of its campuses.

Snow and ice also can wreak havoc on local infrastructure, and it took a brief toll on Hermiston electric customers. In an email, Steve Meyers, the member services administrator for the Umatilla Electric Cooperative, wrote that accumulated snow caused a tree limb to fall into a power line, cutting off power to 987 UEC and Hermiston Energy Services customers for about an hour during the morning.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Vehicles on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021, navigate a snowy Main Street in Pendleton after the first significant snowfall of the season.

Snowstorms also mean road closures on Interstate 84 and other state roads, just as residents begin traveling to visit friends and family for the holiday season. The westbound lanes on Interstate 84 were briefly closed between mileposts 193 and 374, and Oregon Department of Transportation spokesperson Tom Strandberg said he expects more in the coming days.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Snow covers the Let 'Er Buck sign near the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021, in Pendleton. The National Weather Service in Pendleton forecasts another weather system coming this week that should bring snow and rain to lower elevations.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

2022 brings another pandemic New Year

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A rapidly spreading deadly virus. Record-breaking fires. Acrid smoke from the Pacific to Pendleton. A riot in the Capitol.

As 2020 came to a welcome close a year ago, an exhausted Oregon public had hope for the New Year.

The worst of the COVID-19 pandemic seemed over with the arrival of vaccines. The Labor Day fires were gone, and the smoke that gave the state the worst air in the world some days was gone. Protestors who fought with police in the Capitol in Salem were gone with the end of the special session.

Soon, 2020 would be in the rear view mirror. An optimistic joke that the worst had passed was that “Hindsight is 2020.”

But as 2021 in Oregon winds down, it feels like a sequel of the highly unpopular horror classic, 2020 in Oregon.

Dark humor dominates — the wordplay now is turned into rueful wordplay that 2021 is actually spelled as “2020 Won.”

Now the question is if we are going to have a trilogy.

In announcing a sixth wave in two years of COVID-19 would arrive around Jan. 1, Gov. Kate Brown noted another year of COVID-19 wasn't on anyone's wish list.

“I know that bracing for a new variant as we head into our second pandemic holiday season is not what we all hoped for,” Brown said.

Many of the catastrophes that marked 2020 as no one's favorite year were back in 2021.

COVID-19 deaths start to ebb

The vaccines set off a mass scramble for appointments, with most people told they might have to wait until mid-summer for inoculation. Then demand fell off a cliff. Bottles of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine with fewer and fewer arms to put them in. From a high of 50,000 shots in April, demand in Oregon shrank to less than a tenth of that on days in June. Vaccination became another political wedge issue. A riot at the U.S. Capitol showed the fragility of peaceful democracy.

The fires were back — earlier and more remote this year — but burning miles of scars in the land and costing millions of dollars to contain. The smoke choked not just Oregon but jet streams shared it with places as far as Boston. This year added a grim stretch of record-frying heat on June 28. It hit 116 degrees in Portland. Salem was 117. Temperatures more familiar to Death Valley than the Willamette Valley.

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Demand for holiday decorations increases at secondhand stores

By ALEX WITTWER AND ERICK PETERSON
EO Media Group

HERMISTON — Locals decorating for Christmas are finding more of what they need this year at of secondhand stores.

Local thrift stores are seeing an uptick in Christmas shoppers, especially new ones, as supply chain issues dim prospects for artificial trees, decorations and lighting at big box retail stores.

Over at the Hermiston Goodwill store on Monday, Dec. 20, there was a small inventory of Christmas decorations. Some of the goods were mixed in with other items — a wreath, for example, sat between a weed wacker and an empty golf club bag. Also, ornaments, stockings, plastic holly and more were orga-

nized on shelves and in bins. Seven artificial trees stood near the door.

Standing behind a register, a Goodwill employee said the store has been busy selling such items. Over at The Salvation Army Store & Donation Center, Pendleton, a volunteer picked up the phone to say the same thing. It is busy, she said, and the store seemed to have fewer Christmas decorations than in years past.

Open Dec. 18 and 19, the Outreach Thrift Store is closed throughout the remainder of the year. However, Carolyn Clemons, a store director, said she had been carrying Christmas decorations.

“We've had everything from trees to ornaments, Santas, snowmen and more,” she said.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Angi Train looks through Christmas decorations at the People Helping People secondhand store in La Grande on Friday, Dec. 17, 2021. Thrift stores have seen an increase in customers as supply chain issues hamper large chain retailers' stock of Christmas goods.

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