

EAST OREGONIAN

DEC. 31, 2021- JAN. 1, 2022

146th Year, No. 30

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021

\$1.50



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Lightning cracks June 30, 2021, over the fields north of Pendleton as a summer storm rolls through the region on the heels of a record-breaking heat wave.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

National Park Service Director Chuck Sams addresses guests and participants Dec. 24, 2021, at the Annual Christmas Celebration Pow Wow at the longhouse in Mission. The tribes held a celebration to honor Sams at the event.



Antonio Sierra/East Oregonian, File

Bob Beltran checks into the Promise Inn, Pendleton, on its first night of operation on April 1, 2021. A grant funds the operations at the transitional housing facility, including paying for staff. Local volunteer organizations that provide warming stations are struggling this November to find enough volunteers to open on time.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

An electronic display registers 116 degrees on June 29, 2021, at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston as a record-breaking heat wave enveloped the region.

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

Bailey's Bill and Chuck Sams highlight non-COVID-19 list

East Oregonian

Pendleton— The creation of our top 10 lists for 2021 was a bit simpler than in past years.

When it came time for reporters to submit their suggestions for top stories of the year, the East Oregonian newsroom was different from when the year began. Some staff had moved on to other endeavors by then, and new members of the team were getting up to speed.

With fewer lists than usual, we looked back at EO front pages as well as what readers looked at online. Then like last year we hashed out top 10 news stories in two categories — COVID-19 and non-COVID-19.

Here, then, are the top 10 stories the East Oregonian reported on in 2021.

10) Local efforts take on homelessness

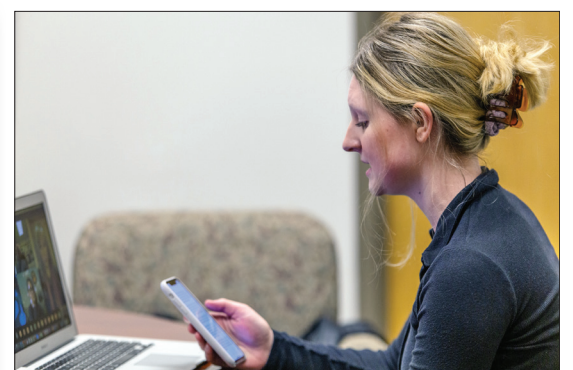
UMATILLA COUNTY — Two major local developments

occurred to improve the lives of people without a home.

The Community Action Program of East Central Oregon received a \$1.3 million grant from the Oregon Community Foundation to purchase the former motel The Whiskey Inn. But by the end of March, the 35-room hotel at 205 S.E. Dorion Ave. was reborn as a facility to serve the unhoused, a first of its kind in Eastern Oregon.

The organization intended to continue to run the Promise Inn like a motel, just with a shifting focus away from tourists and travelers and toward the unhoused. She called the new facility a good “first bite” at tackling the region’s homelessness issue, but leaders in the community will need to continue to address one of the issue’s main roots: a lack of affordable housing.

See Top 10, Page A7



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Seventeen-year-old Weston-McEwen senior Bailey Munck testifies remotely for Senate Bill 649, known as Bailey's Bill, which increases penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim when the defendant is the victim's teacher. Munck testified from Pendleton on March 25, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

The Hermiston Bi-Mart pharmacy closed Oct. 26, 2021, and began transferring files to the Hermiston Safeway pharmacy Oct. 27, according to Don Leber, Bi-Mart vice president of marketing and advertising.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton on May 10, 2021. The college has selected Mark Browning as its next president.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A group including local officials and stakeholders pose for a photo at a groundbreaking celebration Oct. 26, 2021, for the new Family Dollar location in Pilot Rock.

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

COVID-19 surges again, Round-Up spike

East Oregonian

10) Mandates and protests

PENDLETON — Gov. Kate Brown on Aug. 19 issued an executive order mandating COVID-19 vaccinations for state employees, health care workers and school staff. Locals made their ire and concerns about the mandate public at protests and walkouts.

More than 150 people attended an anti-mandate rally Aug. 26 at Pendleton’s Roy Raley Park. The protest drew a multitude of voices, ranging from those completely rejecting vaccines and masks to those

who were supportive of vaccines but felt the governor’s orders to either get the vaccine or lose their jobs violated their rights.

Jared Uselman, the president of the Pendleton Professional Firefighters IAAF Local 2296, said he was working on negotiations with the state over vaccination requirements when he was blindsided by the governor’s order.

“I don’t think that vaccination is wrong, I don’t oppose it by any means,” Uselman said. “But I do oppose people not having a choice.”

Workers had until Oct. 18 to get the shots or undergo frequent testing to keep their jobs.

The morning of Oct. 19, a group of health care workers at St. Anthony Hospital walked away from their jobs in protest of the testing requirement. St. Anthony reported placing 15 employees — or 4% of its more than 370 employees — on unpaid leave.

9) Schools reopen in the spring

UMATILLA COUNTY — While the surge of COVID-19 cases rose and fell throughout the pandemic, a major beam of hope was the reopening of public schools.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Students settle into Michael Bittorf’s Advanced Placement English class at Pendleton High School on March 31, 2021. Oregon lawmakers on June 3 signed off on a \$9.3 billion budget to fund K-12 schools for the next two years.

See Surge, Page A3

