

Behavioral Health Court off to promising start

By DICK MASON The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County Circuit Court has a promising new program for veterans and community members — Behavioral Health Court.

The program aims to help people facing criminal charges due to actions triggered by conditions they suffer from, including post-traumatic stress disorder. The participants meet regularly at the courthouse to receive guidance from a 15-member team of counselors, attorneys, veterans service providers, judicial employees, law enforcement and probation officers. The team develops programs for the participants designed to help them overcome the issues they are facing.

Some of those who will be graduating from Behavioral Health Court will have the charges against them dismissed, and all should be emerging with more stability and improved coping skills, said Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel, the program's founder and a team member.

"We want to give them a new lease on life," McDaniel said.

Behavioral Health Court conducted its first graduation on Dec. 27, 2021. There were



Dick Mason/The Observer

Kelsie McDaniel, from left, Kara Rudd and Troy Davis, all members of the Behavioral Health Court team, talk during a meeting Jan. 10, 2022, at the Union County Courthouse in La Grande. McDaniel is Union County's district attorney, Rudd is with the Oregon Judicial Department and Davis works for the nonprofit Center for Human Development Inc. in La Grande.

two graduates, both of whom made tremendous progress since starting.

"We are so proud of them," McDaniel said.

'The team works together'

The graduates had each come to the courthouse at least twice a month and sometimes weekly for 12-18 months to meet with their Behavioral Health Court team.

They would meet with

their team after its members spent an hour reviewing their progress since the last meeting. Their probation officers would discuss whether they had kept appointments with counselors, for example, attended treatment sessions and taken their required drug tests.

"The team works together to do everything it can to help them," McDaniel said.

Participants in Behavioral Health Court meet

with their team in a courtroom in a formal setting, as if they are part of an actual court hearing. The meeting is conducted by Union County Circuit Court Judge Tom Powers, who wears his judicial robe. Powers reviews the participant's progress and any setbacks. At the end of the session Powers rules whether the week has been a successful one for the participant. A ruling of success means a reward awaits the individual.

The participant chooses an item from a basket of small rewards Powers has assembled. Other rewards Powers provides include reducing how often participants must check in with probation officers.

Powers enjoys having the opportunity to encourage participants and provide incentives. He noted that normally when people come before him in a courtroom it is because they are about to be sentenced or have been charged with a crime, all occasions calling for stern expressions.

"Now I get to be a smiling judge," Powers said.

On the down side, Powers does have to issue sanctions if the participant has had a bad week by missing counseling appointments, drug tests or other assigned tasks. The sanctions he may impose include adding drug tests and check-ins with the individual's probation officer.

A range of participants

Not all Behavioral Health Court participants have drug problems but each must be drug tested to confirm sobriety and to help with medication management, McDaniel said.

Some participants are new to the judicial system, but others are not. Some have extensive criminal records

and are in the program because the root cause of their problem is one the Behavioral Health Court team believes the right corrective action can solve. For example, an individual may have been committing crimes because of an addiction to alcohol, which the team believes can be successfully addressed with treatment the individual has not received, McDaniel said.

James Schaeffer, a La Grande defense attorney and a member of the team, credited the program with adding stability to the lives of participants.

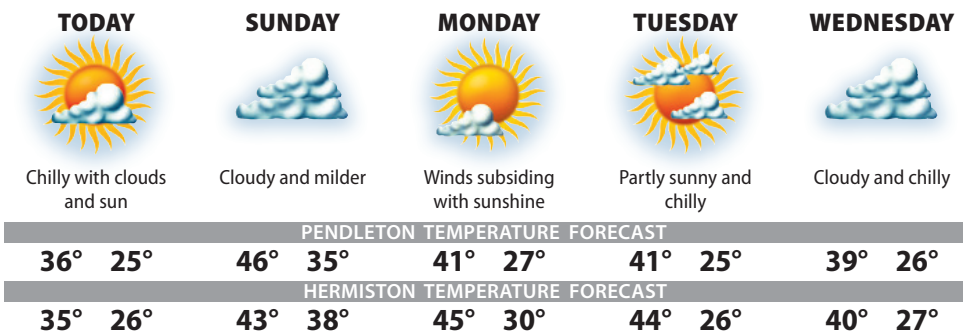
"It provides them with structure and the mental health services they need. It is a good alternative," Schaeffer said.

He added the program not only helps participants but also the community. When people have issues addressed, he explained, they are better able to become productive members of society.

Kara Rudd, the Behavioral Health Court's coordinator, is encouraged by how she has seen the program change people's lives for the better. She also said she is optimistic about the future of the program.

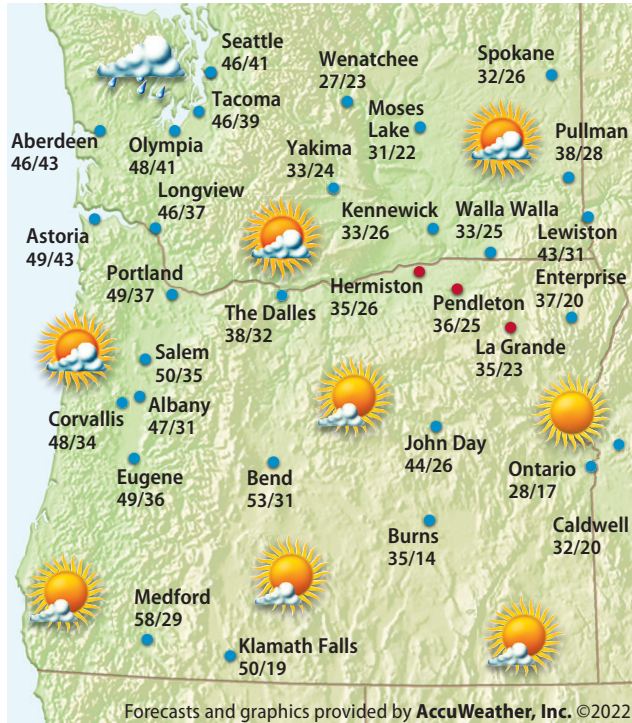
"It is a very exciting program," she said. "The participants are excited and it is gaining momentum."

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	30°	27°		
Normals	43°	29°		
Records	67° (1931)	-14° (1957)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"			
Month to date	1.47"			
Normal month to date	1.40"			
Year to date	1.47"			
Last year to date	0.78"			
Normal year to date	1.40"			
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	34°	31°		
Normals	45°	29°		
Records	61° (1984)	-21° (1957)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"			
Month to date	0.89"			
Normal month to date	1.04"			
Year to date	0.89"			
Last year to date	0.49"			
Normal year to date	1.04"			
WINDS (in mph)				
	Today	Sun.		
Boardman	NE 3-6	SW 6-12		
Pendleton	NW 6-12	SW 7-14		
SUN AND MOON				
Sunrise today	7:20 a.m.			
Sunset tonight	4:57 p.m.			
Moonrise today	5:35 a.m.			
Moonset today	1:51 p.m.			
	New	First	Full	Last
	Jan 31	Feb 8	Feb 16	Feb 23

Baker City to pursue quiet zone

By SAMANTHA O'CONNOR
Baker City Herald

Dixon and Johnny Waggoner Sr. voted against the proposal.

McQuisten and Dixon both talked about an initiative petition that would ask city voters to amend the city charter to prohibit the city from enacting a quiet zone unless voters approve such a plan.

Dixon, who is the chief petitioner, said if voters chose to add that clause to the charter, it would "halt any ongoing efforts to establish a railroad quiet zone effective immediately."

Dixon said she hopes to get the charter change measure on the May 22 ballot.

In a quiet zone, freight trains are not required to sound their whistles when approaching a street crossing. Train crews still would

trigger their warning whistles at their discretion — if, for instance, they saw a vehicle or pedestrian on or near the tracks.

There are 967 quiet zones across the nation, according to the FRA. There are 13 in Oregon, including Pendleton, which has had a quiet zone since the 1970s, and La Grande, where the quiet zone took effect in December 2019.

An October 2017 report from the Government Accountability Office — the official auditor of federal programs — concluded that analyses in 2011 and 2013 by the Federal Railroad Administration "showed that there was generally no statistically significant difference in the number of accidents that occurred before and after quiet zones were established." The FRA studied 359 quiet zones in 2011, and 203 more in 2013.



Guyer

BAKER CITY — The Baker City City Council on Tuesday evening, Jan. 25, voted 4-3 to apply for a railroad quiet zone in the city, a controversial idea that opposing councilors say should be decided by voters.

The council's newest member, Dean Guyer, who was appointed Dec. 14, 2021, submitted the proposal, which calls for the city to seek a quiet zone through the Federal Railroad Administration.

Guyer voted for the proposal to seek a quiet zone, joined by Councilors Shane Alderson, Heather Sells and Jason Sprit.

Mayor Kerry McQuisten and Councilors Joanna

IN BRIEF

Oregon bill could allow self-serve gas pumping

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature will again consider giving the state's drivers the option to pump their own gas.

House Bill 4151, filed ahead of the legislative session that begins Tuesday, would allow gas stations to offer self-service pumps alongside pumps staffed by a station attendant.

Oregon is one of only two states in the U.S. that don't allow self-service gas pumps, although the state relaxed those rules for some rural counties in 2015, allowing customers to pump their own gas at night. The state also allowed self-serve gas for a few months in 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, and briefly during a heat wave last summer.

The bill is sponsored by members of both

parties in both chambers of the Legislature, including Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany; Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene; Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville; Rep. Rick Lewis, R-Silverton; Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro; and Sen. Brian Boquist, I-Dallas.

Gas station owners and the legislators sponsoring the bill said the workforce shortage from the pandemic has led to long lines at the pump, overworked attendants and some stations struggling to remain open to comply with the attendant requirement.

According to proponents of the bill, it would preserve the availability of assistance for people with disabilities or others who need or want help from an attendant. The bill requires that prices would remain the same whether pumped by a customer or a station attendant.

— EO Media Group

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