

Race:

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The experience is costing her a great deal of money — more than \$14,500, to be exact. In addition, there is air fare, gear, food, a tent and sleeping bag. Specialized gear for the weather she will encounter all had to be purchased new. Since she will be going in March, and since Patagonia (located in South America) is in the Southern Hemisphere, its climate now will be close to Wallowa County's September or October.

"It could be 20 or 70 degrees," she said. She also had to commit at least \$1,000 to charity just to enter, but has raised and donated \$1,500 to date.

Her chosen charities were Safe Harbors in Enterprise and Shotzy Sanctuary, in Union County, an animal rescue and domestic violence organization. Donations are still being accepted, and Johnson asks anyone who wishes to support her challenge to please donate to these charities. She spent a year training and preparing for the event, and appreciates the support and donations of local businesses and individuals who contributed to her endeavor.

A rare race to ride in

This is only the second race of its kind. The first was held in 2020, and the world shut down during the race due to the pandemic. The second race, which would have happened in 2021, was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She said she was initially drawn to the race by the story of Bob Long, a 70-year-old Idaho man who won the Mongol Derby which is 1,000 kilometers, or 622 miles.

"I thought the story was inspirational," she said. And, she added, "I've always wanted to go to Patagonia."

In addition to specialized gear, there is a strict weight restriction. Riders can only weigh 187 pounds. Supplies and gear — food, first-aid kit, tent, saddle bags and sleeping bag — cannot exceed 22 pounds for 10 days, with 4-pound food-resupply bags strategically placed along the course.

"They are very strict about weight," she said. The body weight restriction also includes clothes and helmet.

The race has an extensive veterinary support system for the horses. Veterinarians are at horse stations every 40-60 kilometers to check the horses' heart rates, respiration rates and to make sure they are not being pushed too hard. Each rider rides a total of seven different horses, said Johnson, but each horse is only ridden once.



Brenda Johnson, Wallowa County resident, is set to compete March 3-13, 2022, in the Gaucho Derby endurance horse race in South America's Patagonia.

Brenda Johnson/Contributed Photo

The race supplies the horses. There are three types of horses used. A Criollo, "like our mustangs here,"

she said. Arabians and Percheron crosses are also part of the mix. The saddle is modified for the race to be light, "like a cross between a Western and English," Johnson said. Riding can only occur between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Riders who violate this rule

run the risk of penalty and possibly disqualification.

The terrain is difficult. Johnson said riders "have to figure out on your own the terrain gates and fences," and how to contend with them. In places, riders may have to back track, since there are no trails. It's a point A to point B to point C type of race beginning to end. There is also "lots of water. Water could be my deterrent — bogs and swamps," she said.

It is also fire season there. "You can't have fires," she said. If a person must start a fire, "it better be to save your life," she said. There are medics available. "Horse and people are well taken care of," she said.

The lay of the land

The terrain in Patagonia is a desert and steppe-like (terraced grass plateaus). It is bound on the west by the Andes. The Andes are part of Patagonia, Johnson said. "We'll have various sections of the race in the mountains. They said our max elevation will be around 8,000 feet," she said. The Colorado River is to the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Strait of Magellan to the South. The region south of the strait, the Tierra Del Fuego — which is divided between Argentina and Chile — is also often included.

It is desert and semi-desert terrain and treeless plains. The relatively flat tableland rises from an elevation near the coast of 300 feet to about 1,300 feet at the junction of two rivers, then to 3,000 feet at the base of the Andes. Another tableland region rises to an elevation of 5,000 feet and more. The area is also rich in volcanic activity.

Johnson is originally from Minnesota and had always wanted to live in the mountains. She's lived in and loved Wallowa County since 2012. She has a graduate degree from Clemson University in South Carolina in aquatic ecotoxicology. She works as a farrier and a veterinary assistant at the Enterprise Animal Hospital. She is also a caretaker for a local ranch.

For more information on the race go to www.equestrianists.com.

"I also have a website — www.brendasadventure.com," she said.

Johnson's progress will also be streamed in real time via her GPS. Riders will also give interviews along the way.

To donate to Johnson's charities, for Safe Harbors use the shelter's website at www.wcsafeharbors.com. For Shotzy Sanctuary, checks may be mailed to 75506 Robinson Road, Elgin, OR 97827, or by using PayPal at Shotzy08@live.com.

Main:

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hardness of its downtown district.

"I read the Portland Business Journal every week," Chrisman said. "For the last two years, all I've been reading about is gloom and doom as business after business has closed. I'm not talking about Intel. I'm talking about little retail shops and restaurants. Lots of them failed because of COVID and we just haven't seen that."

Moe Pho Noodles & Cafe co-owner Whitney Minthorn said the city and chamber were helpful in checking in on the restaurant and introducing ideas that would help them stay viable during the pandemic. Minthorn said Moe Pho adapted by creating an online ordering system that now accounts for the majority of the business at its 370 S. Main St. location.

Moe Pho actually expanded during the pandemic when it opened in the new food court at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino. While it could only open a few days a week in its early months, Minthorn said it now operates seven days per week. In the future, Minthorn said he would like to expand his business' boba tea operations.

But not every business owner shares the city's sunny outlook.

Michael Swanson has run



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Sale banners hang Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, from the awning at Michael's Fine Jewelry in downtown Pendleton as the shop's owner, Michael Swanson, prepares to close the business and retire.

Michael's Fine Jewelry at 234 S. Main St. for 20 years. In March, Swanson plans to close Michael's for good.

Swanson said he's shuttering the business because he wants to retire rather than for economic reasons. But as he prepares to leave Main Street, he's not as optimistic about its status as some of his boosters.

He admitted most Main Street storefronts are full, but not all are as active as they were in the past. While the downtown area was once a shopping hub, Swanson said it's never fully recovered from losing former anchor businesses, including J.C. Penney Co. and Maurices.

Swanson added while restaurants seem to be doing well in the downtown area, downtown Pendleton's retail sector was seeing an influx

in antique and second-hand stores.

"That's really not a good place for a viable downtown," he said.

Denight said the city is aware of some of the downtown area's retail shortcomings, but it was a part of a larger trend for main streets across the country as they transition away from commerce to being dining and entertainment districts. He added that the urban renewal district is exploring adding more retail that could appeal to people already in the area for dining.

"I think this changes constantly," he said. "It moves more or less in one direction. It's not going to be the way it used to be. It's going to be good. It's going to be a strong downtown. That's the main thing."

limits on event sizes.

The three West Coast states have sought to coordinate on COVID-19 response throughout the pandemic, though they have gone their

"WE WILL BUILD RESILIENCY AND PREPARE FOR THE NEXT VARIANT AND THE NEXT PANDEMIC."

— Kate Brown, Oregon Governor

own way at times, such as the vaccine priority list in early 2021. Brown said the governors believed the mask mandate change was best done at the same time for the stretch from the Mexican border to the Canadian border.

"Our communities and

economies are linked," Brown said.

Brown underlined that the move did not mean the pandemic was burning out or nearly over.

"We will build resiliency and prepare for the next variant and the next pandemic," she said. "As we learn to live with this virus, we must remain vigilant to protect each other and prevent disruption to our schools, businesses, and communities — with a focus on protecting our most vulnerable and the people and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19."

Oregon officials say they are confident that the move will not replicate the premature lifting of safeguards in July 2021 that came almost simultaneously with the arrival of the virulent delta variant that caused a record 918 deaths in September. Critics said at that time that lifting the ban statewide did not take into effect the wide differences in vaccination rates and prior COVID-19 exposure.

Overtime:

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forward with tax credits the agriculture industry didn't ask for.

"We've been at the table in good faith since day one and have offered workable solutions," Cooper said. "Democrats refused to be part of that conversation."

Under the newest version of the bill, most farmers will fall under three tiers of tax credits intended to compensate them for a portion of the overtime payments:

- Farmers with fewer than 25 workers would receive a tax credit for 90% of overtime costs next year, with the rate incrementally dropping to 60% by the time it expires at the end of 2028.
- Those with fewer than 50 workers but more than 25 would qualify for tax credits that decline from 75% to 50% during that time period.
- Growers with more than 50 workers would get tax credits that begin at 60% and fall to 15% in that time period.

Due to the 24-hour nature of animal care, dairies would be subject to special rules under the amended bill:

- Dairies with fewer than 25 workers would receive a tax credit rate of 100%, of overtime payments with no limit.
- Those with more than 25 workers would qualify for tax credits that begin at 75% and drop to 50% in 2028, their final year.

The overtime thresholds would be phased in under the bill, starting at 55 hours per week in 2023 and incrementally decreasing to 40 hours per week in 2027.

The total amount avail-

able for tax credits would be \$55 million per year under the newly-amended bill, up from \$27 million under the previous version.

The Oregon Employment Department would study the economic impacts of the overtime requirements and periodically report to lawmakers, who'd then decide whether to revise the tax credit system.

Farmers would need to obtain wage records from labor contractors to benefit from the tax credits, which troubled some Republican members of the joint committee.

Labor contractors aren't legally required to provide that information, so farmers may not be able to convince them to do so, said Boshart-Davis.

Farmers already are competing for workers and may not be able to find labor contractors willing to do the added record-keeping, she said. "If the labor contractor doesn't provide it, the farmer doesn't have the information to apply for a tax credit."

Holvey said the free market would compel labor contractors to provide those records to farmers, while growers could also choose to hire workers directly instead of using contractors.

During the Feb. 24 hearing, the joint committee rejected another amendment Republican lawmakers favored.

Under that proposal, the state government would contribute some overtime wages directly to workers, instead of providing tax credits to farmers.

Because the state would pay some overtime wages, farmers would be able to stay in business without limiting the weekly sched-

ules of employees, according to the amendment's proponents.

"This provides resources directly into the hands of our workforce and also protects their jobs," said Boshart-Davis.

Under the proposal, the weekly overtime threshold for farm employers would be set at 48 hours except for a "peak labor period" of 15 weeks per year, during which the threshold would rise to 55 hours.

Farmers would pay time-and-a-half overtime wages beyond those weekly thresholds. Meanwhile, the state government would pay the added overtime amount after 40 hours per week.

In other words, take the example of a worker who's normally paid \$20 an hour and who works 60 hours a week during the peak labor period.

The farmer would pay the worker \$20 an hour for the first 55 hours, then 5 hours of overtime at the time-and-a-half rate of \$30.

Meanwhile, the state government would pay that employee \$10 per hour for the 15 hours worked after the 40-hour threshold but before the farmer's 55-hour threshold kicked in.

"I believe this is a unique solution to Oregon," Boshart-Davis said.

However, the Democratic members of the joint committee voted down the amendment after questioning its fairness to other workers and employers, as well as its labor law implications for the state government.

"A lot of laws touch this area," said Sen. Kate Lieber, D-Beaverton. "I'm trying to understand if any of these responsibilities would flow to the state."

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