

East Oregonian wins 2022 General Excellence Award

EO also takes home 8 individual awards, including Story of the Year

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The East Oregonian returned to form in the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association's annual Better Newspapers Contest, winning the General Excellence award for 2022.

The EO won the award in 2020, then took third in 2021. Prior to 2021, the EO won first place in general excellence nine out of the previous 10 years.

"I couldn't be anymore prouder of the work our newsroom did during this past year," EO managing editor and publisher Andrew Cutler said. "I think this shows the commitment of everyone who steps foot in the EO newsroom to provide our readers with the absolute best journalism we can day in and day out. This is validation of that."

Kathryn Brown, EO Media Group vice president and EO owner, said she agreed with Cutler.

"Despite many challenges our editors and journalists faced in 2021, I am proud to say that we consistently published a news product we could all be proud of," she said. "I appreciate the recognition by ONPA, but it's our subscribers and readers who motivate us every day to report the news of this region accurately and fairly."

Fellow EO Media Group newspapers Blue Mountain Eagle in John Day and The Bulletin in Bend won General Excellence for their size categories.

EO news editor Phil Wright said he set a goal for the news-



The East Oregonian feature "I might not make it home" from Jan. 9, 2021, won the Story of the Year in the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association's 2022 Better Newspapers Contest on Thursday, July 28, and Friday, July 29, in Welches. ONPA also awarded the East Oregonian with the first place General Excellence award for its class.

Phil Wright/East Oregonian

room of reclaiming General Excellence after he stepped into the position in May 2021.

"I told Andrew when I came on we would get General Excellence back," Wright said. "That award is the standard we aim for in this newsroom. That's the bar we strive to clear."

The awards were for the 2021 calendar year, and the Maine Press Association judged the contest. ONPA announced the awards Thursday, July 28, and Friday, July 29, at Mount Hood Resort in Welches.

In addition to General Excellence, the East Oregonian won several individual awards in the contest.

Sports reporter Annie Fowler took first place for best sports story for the Dec. 11 story "Umatilla High launching esports program." Fowler also won the second-place award in sports reporting.

EO reporter Kathy Aney's Feb. 18 feature "Getting displaced families back home"

won first place for best writing.

Former East Oregonian reporter Bryce Dole's Jan. 9 article "I might not make it home," won Best Story of the Year. The feature shined a spotlight on COVID-19 in Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Umatilla.

Other East Oregonian ONPA awards

- Former EO reporters Antonio Sierra and Nick Rosenberger took second place for best coverage of business and economic issues.

- Cutler and Brown took third place for best editorial. Cutler also took third place for best editorial page and second place for best local column.

- Community editor Tammy Malgesini won a third-place award in best local column for the EO, and she took first place for best local column for the Hermiton Herald.

- Wright took third place in spot news coverage.

Merkley, Wyden, secure \$1.7M for Morrow County water crisis

East Oregonian

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced Friday, July 29, they secured \$1.7 million for Morrow County to address drinking water contamination in Boardman.

The money comes from the fiscal year 2023 Senate appropriations bill. Merkley, as chair of the Senate Interior Appropriations subcommittee, along with Wyden, identified the funding for this critical community-initiated project that will help residents of Morrow and Umatilla counties have greater access to clean drinking water.

Morrow County in a statement reported the funds will pay for the testing of wells and to study longer-term solutions and options for rural residents who rely on individual wells for their drinking water.

"This federal funding will help Morrow County move beyond the short-term nitrate emergency and help us work towards longer term solutions," Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said in a press release. "The senators' support during the nitrate emergency has been so valuable. This new source of significant funding will allow Morrow County to develop a standardized data and testing program to monitor rural wells and also study long term solutions to clean drinking water for rural residents."

She also said she appreciated the collaboration with the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners. She and Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorran worked with staff from both counties to make the request for federal dollars.

Morrow County Commission Chair Jim Doherty in the press release called the funding "welcome support."

Doherty and staff have

spent many hours the past few months directly involved in the emergency efforts to test water in households and provide them with clean drinking water. However, he said, "Morrow County will continue to vigilantly push the state of Oregon for long-term, permanent support to remedy the negative health effects of high nitrate levels in rural domestic wells."

Morrow County Board of Commissioners on June 9 declared an emergency over the contamination. The move

the declaration have we had support from the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality."

Morrow and Umatilla County have participated in the LUBGWMA volunteer committee since 1990 when the state declared the area due to high levels of nitrates. The LUBGWMA committee is in the process of implementing the Second Action Plan to reduce nitrate contamination from a number of sources, septic systems, fertilizer, land application of wastewater, washout from the Umatilla Army Depot and feedlots, according to the press release. Funding for the LUBGWMA has been almost nonexistent, primarily in the form of a part-time employee to test a small sample of wells.

In addition to the LUBGWMA committee, Umatilla and Morrow counties, together with help from stakeholders, were able to secure direct legislative funding to more scientifically study the source of nitrate contamination, the press release stated. Known as the LUBGWMA Subcommittee, the bi-county effort soon will have an Oregon State University scientist working on a study of historical data.

Doherty also credited Lindsay for advocating for the research and her involvement in the subcommittee efforts.

"We are getting closer to where we need to be to address the short-term and long-term groundwater problems," he stated. "Our immediate priority is public health and ensuring rural residents have clean, safe, potable water. We remain vigilant however, in our commitment to study the sources of pollution and to seek long term remedies. We sincerely appreciate the support of Sen. Wyden and Sen. Merkley and their staff."

"SINCE THE EMERGENCY DECLARATION, WE ARE FINALLY RECEIVING ATTENTION AND RESOURCES FROM STATE AGENCIES."

— Jim Doherty, Morrow County commissioner

came in the wake of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in January issuing a \$1.3 million fine against the Port of Morrow in Boardman for years of violating its wastewater permit and allowing hundreds of tons of excess nitrogen onto area farmlands above the already contaminated basin. The DEQ on June 17 increased that fine to \$2.1 million.

"Since the emergency declaration, we are finally receiving attention and resources from state agencies," according to Doherty. "The Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area has been in place for almost 40 years and not until

PENDLETON

Psilocybin question will go to voters

City sets public hearing, council vote on ban and voter referral

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton City Council plans to let voters decide whether to permit psilocybin product manufacturers and service centers to operate within Pendleton's limits. Psilocybin is the active ingredient in hallucinogenic mushrooms.

"I think it is important to note that if the city council does nothing, psilocybin mushrooms will be sold in Pendleton," City Manager Robb Corbett said. "The question before the council is do they want to refer it to the voters or not?"

The city council has scheduled a public hearing during its meeting Aug. 2, then vote on Ordinance 3990, a local law declaring a

permanent ban on psilocybin services in Pendleton and referring the decision to the voters. If voters approve the ban on Nov. 8, the ordinance will take effect within the city 30 days after Election Day.

Oregon voters approved Ballot Measure 109, the Oregon Psilocybin Service Act, in November 2020. It allowed the manufacture, delivery and administration of psilocybin at licensed facilities. The measure provided for legal access to psilocybin in supervised settings by licensed facilitators. These are not doctors and need only complete a high school education requirement.

The law also grants the Oregon Health Authority two years to develop rules and regulations for psilocybin products and facilities. It set Jan. 2, 2023, as the date to begin issuing psilocybin-related licenses.

In the 2020 election, 64% of Umatilla County voters

opposed Ballot Measure 109, which also gives local governments three options regarding psilocybin.

They can do nothing and allow the OHA to regulate psilocybin sales starting in January. They can adopt a two-year ban on psilocybin to see how the industry progresses. Or they can adopt a permanent prohibition on the psychoactive drug. Both of the ban options require the governmental body to adopt a ban and then refer the issue to voters for the final decision.

"Local governments may adopt ordinances that prohibit issuing service center and manufacturer licenses," the OHA site reads. "Ordinances must be approved by voters at the next general election. When Oregon Psilocybin Services Section receives notice of local ordinance, we will cease issuing licenses within that jurisdiction. If the ordinance does not pass in the general election, OPS will continue to issue licenses."

LOCAL BRIEFING

Fire burns through Umatilla home

UMATILLA — Firefighters Sunday night, July 31, in Umatilla, put down a blazing house fire.

Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District responded to the fire at about 8 p.m. on Rio Senda Street, and at 8:42 p.m. the fire department called for help from other agencies.

Irrigon Fire Department, Boardman Fire Rescue District and Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 sent crews and equipment.



Irrigon Fire Department/Contributed Photo

Fire burns through a home Sunday night, July 31, 2022, on Rio Senda Street, Umatilla.

Firefighters were able to contain the blaze to one home, according to the Irrigon Fire Department, with no loss of life or injuries.

— EO Media Group

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