



Paul Wahl/Chieftain

Potholes like this one on First Street turn to lakes when snow melts and water ponds on warm days.

Bright future for road repairs in Joseph

Driving the residential streets of Joseph is a bit like navigating the craters of the moon. Potholes are everywhere, some of them deep enough to dislodge a hubcap.

The best chance the city will have to make a dent in its road maintenance is ahead. State funding for roads will increase dramatically 2021-24 when legislation approved last year kicks in.

EDITORIAL
Voice of the Chieftain

Oregon Department of Transportation's budget will nearly double from where it sits today. Wallowa County and its cities should be the beneficiaries.

According to numbers provided by ODOT, Joseph will receive \$64,300 from state highway trust fund in 2018.

That will jump to \$81,300 in coming years.

In addition, targeted revenues are being allocated for small cities where the state's funding matrix doesn't always fill the bill. That revenue will be guided by a panel of elected officials. In Region 5, that includes Dennis Sands, Mayor of Joseph.

Between the availability of more funds and a local voice in the discussion, Joseph is poised to begin pay catchup where its roads are concerned.

However, road repairs are expensive. The best way for a city or county to assure residents and visitors drive on smooth roads is to spend some each year on rotating stretches.

Joseph has not historically adhered to that sort of plan. As a result, it may take local effort — as in new taxes.

There are no shortage of opportunities. Joseph could levy its own gas tax as 30 cities in Oregon have done. Another option is utility fees, Joseph residents would pay a small amount each month on their water and sewer bills that would be dedicated to roads and streets.

It serves little purpose to discuss at length why Joseph is in the situation it is in when it comes to road repairs. That's water under the bridge, so to speak.

What's important now is that the city not squander the best opportunity it will have in decades to resolve the issue, get rid of the potholes and resolve to stay ahead of the issue in decades to come.

"If not now, when?" to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, who was paraphrasing the Jewish Elder Hillel.

Cooperation key to quality health care

The following submission was prepared by representatives of Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Mountain View Medical Clinic, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness and Winding Waters Community Health Center.



These are stormy times for health care. Costs are high, insurance is unpredictable and many things about how we provide care are changing.

Doctors, counselors and hospitals are asked to hit the "Triple Aim" — providing top quality convenient care at the lowest possible cost.

Clinics and hospitals are caring for their patients' immediate concerns, as well as their long-term health and wellness. They are being asked to help patients access all types of care, from traditional medical, dental and mental health care to therapies like acupuncture, massage and environmental medicine. Education about chronic conditions, healthy eating, exercise, and injury prevention is expected at every visit.

In Wallowa County, medical clinics, mental health agency and hospital have partnered to make this happen. Amazing things have been accomplished.

In 2017, the National Rural Health Association named Wallowa Memorial Hospital one of the Top 20 Critical Access Hospitals in the nation. Mountain View Medical Clinic joined the Wallowa County Health Care District in 2015 and was designated a Rural Health Clinic in 2016.

Also in 2016, the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness became a nationally-recognized Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic. In 2013, the Oregon Primary Care Association named Winding Waters the State Leader in Health Care Transformation.

Winding Waters earned Community Health Center status in 2015 and received quality awards from the Department of Health and Human Services in both 2016 and 2017.

Regionally, the organizations have powered Wallowa County to number two

of the 12 counties in the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization's 2017 quality rankings. Efforts are under way to do even better in 2018.

To survive and thrive, the health care community has learned to lean on each other's strengths and continue working together. Every week there are notices from across the country about hospitals closing and clinics being bought-up. There is a lot of pressure to merge and consolidate into larger health care systems.

In Wallowa County, we know that none of these big systems will care as much as we do about this place and the people who live here.

Everyone involved is working together to build what this community needs, guaranteeing that Wallowa County providers and agencies can meet that Triple Aim — the best care, at the lowest cost, when you need it.

For example, cooperative efforts have guaranteed the hospital is served by a team of excellent staff and physicians. Space has been shared in the medical office building. A yearly Health Fest event and the CHIP program have been created. Many of the same leadership and technology tools have been adopted to make care more consistent and connected.

Partnerships have reduced ER visits, saving people money and getting them into their clinics for appropriate care. A much better job of immunizing children and protecting their teeth from cavities has been accomplished. Home health services were retained in response to a risk of losing them entirely.

Through it all, the entities continue

to learn from each other and take care of patients — our families, friends and neighbors.

The next big step is to bring full-service medical, dental and mental health clinics to Enterprise and Joseph. These "one-stop shops" will make it possible to get the care you need, when you need it.

Why are new spaces so important? Mental health, dental and medical facilities in Enterprise are bursting at the seams — we are out of space. The two clinics in Joseph are in aging buildings not up to the demands and requirements of modern health care. Current offices are limiting the care provided, and they cannot be upgraded.

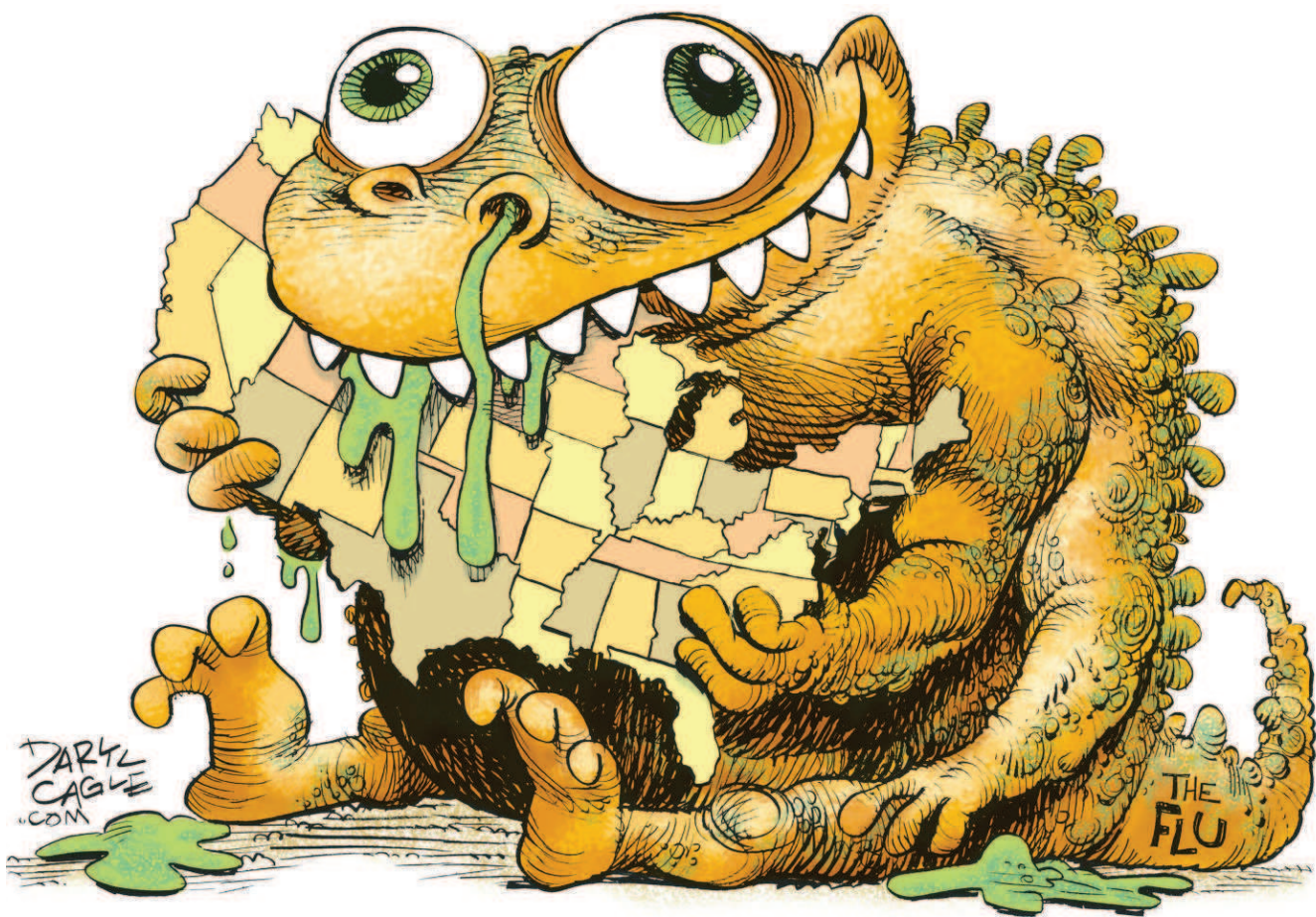
In Joseph, the Wallowa County Health Care District has purchased land, and, in partnership with Winding Waters, Wallowa Memorial Hospital has designed a building to bring medical, dental and mental health providers together under one roof.

Separately in Enterprise, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness and Winding Waters have purchased land (across from the hospital) and work has begun on a similar integrated services building that will also feature a teaching kitchen, a child care center and community meeting space. Reopening a clinic in the lower valley will come in time.

In these uncertain times, we cannot lose focus on the health of the community. The people of Wallowa County deserve the best care that can be provided.

That's exactly why Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Mountain View Medical Clinic, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness and Winding Waters Community Health Center are working together to maintain and build partnerships that will keep Wallowa County on the forefront of health care excellence for years to come.

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Ice skating casualty of warm weather

One of the casualties of our warmer-than-normal winter has been the Ferguson Ridge Ski Area and the Wallowa Valley Community Ice Rink. It's tough to have fun in the snow when there really isn't snow. And it's impossible to ice skate on water. You need ice.

Reports funneled back to us that some parents were critical of the team that produces the ice rink because "it's always closed." All you have to do is drive by and take a look and the reason it's closed becomes painfully obvious.

If you've been following the ice rink on Facebook, you understand quickly those who volunteer their efforts each year are as dismayed at Mother Nature's largess as anyone.

The ski area is operated by Eagle Cap Ski Club and Ferguson Ridge Ski Patrol, sponsored by Enterprise - Joseph Lions Club. It was open for the Eagle Cap Extreme Dog Race. Everyone who made it up there reported it was a ton of fun.

While no one wanted a repeat of last year's wintery horribilus, an overly warm and nearly snowless winter is not ideal either. Cutting out two major sources of pleasures for young and old makes the season seem abnormally long and boring.

Perhaps next year, we will strike a happy medium where winter weather is concerned. Meanwhile, get out and enjoy what there is of it, because spring is just around the corner.

And kudos to everyone who has a hand in providing both the ski area and the ice skating rink for our enjoyment. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed.



WAHL TO WALL
Paul Wahl

WE ARE in the midst of preparing the 2018 edition of the Wallowa County Visitor Guide, which is always a fun project for the Chieftain staff.

If you've ever said to yourself, "I wish the visitor guide contained ..." fill in the blank ... now is a good time to let us know.

There are several exciting new features we are incorporating into this year's edition, emphasizing the historical and cultural aspects of tourism in Wallowa County.

While not everyone is thrilled about tourism, it's tough to imagine Wallowa County without a thriving crop of visitors each year. Not only do they spur economic benefits, but tourists are also interesting folks who share world views that may be dramatically different from our own.

I find it interesting to see our lives through the eyes of people who don't live here. And I'll have to say, most of the ones I've had a chance to chat with are impressed.

I can't count the number of people living here who have responded to the question, "how did you discover Wallowa

County," with the answer, "we came here on vacation."

DON'T FORGET the Rotary Club of Wallowa County fundraiser Feb. 9 at the Joseph Community Center. Not only is this the perfect night out to celebrate Valentine's Day, it's an opportunity to learn more about the organization and its accomplishments in the community. Tickets are available at the Chieftain.

THE 2018 version of The Big Read kicks off in a couple weeks. This week, I had my first opportunity to crack open this year's featured novel, "Station Eleven."

It's probably one of the more unusual books you'll read in your lifetime. Without giving too much away, a flu epidemic decimates the world and survival is the order of the day. Yet "survival is insufficient."

It's essentially science fiction, but has also been described as post-apocalyptic fiction.

An entire month is being set aside by the folks at Fishtrap for Big Read this year, and for the first time, events will also be held in Union County.

We will publish a complete list of activities shortly. Meanwhile, don't wait for the movie, buy the book.

