

Coach: 'There's a lot of frustrated people in this community'

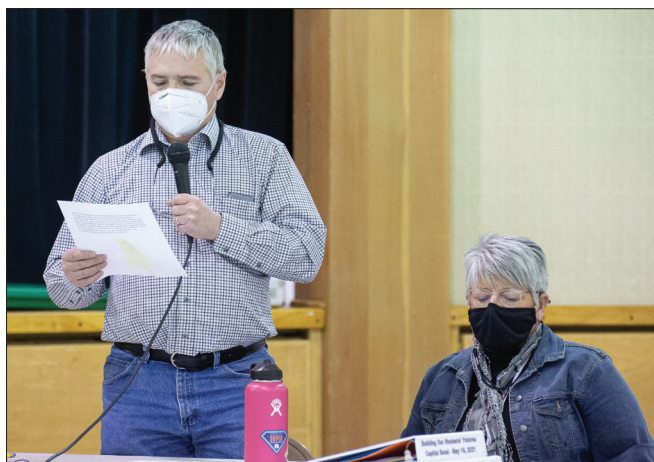
Continued from Page A1

High School.”
The concerns about Idaho basketball games are coupled with controversy over Wallowa High School's failure to schedule a replacement game for the canceled Elgin contest, which had been scheduled for March 6.

“I was instructed to tell my football team, which has worked hard preparing for a month outside in the snow, that WHS would not schedule them another home game with another team,” Brockamp said at the March 8 meeting.

Howe's resignation included an apology.

“I am deeply sorry for any hurt I have caused my students, coaches and commu-



Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain
Wallowa High School Principal and girls basketball coach David Howe reads his letter of resignation from his coaching post to the Wallowa School Board on Monday, March 15, 2021.

nity members, staff members or board members,” Howe said in his prepared remarks on March 15. “That was not

my intent. It was never my intent to undermine other sports programs or coaches. If that occurred, I apologize

for that.”
Six parents and Wallowa School District staff at the meeting spoke during the public comment period. Most expressed support for the school, and for Jones, who came under fire at the March 8 meeting, as a competent and caring administrator.

Wallowa first-grade teacher Kelsey Lathrop praised Jones for “inspiring encouraging and working alongside of us to build relationships with (teachers) and families during this unprecedented year.”

“Students are the No. 1 concern,” said Melissa Lowe, who teaches Title 1 classes. “We need to remember in our community that education safety and well-being of our students,

your children and education should be first and foremost, not sports.”

But parent Joe Miles criticized the school board for a lack of community and educational leadership.

“I support you guys, but at the same time I do have a higher expectation of anybody in a leadership position,” he said. “There's a lot of frustrated people in this community.”

Those thoughts echoed some of the comments made to the school board at the March 8 meeting. They included concerns about lack of respect for students, student-athletes and for Wallowa's rural culture.

At the well-attended March 8 meeting, the entire WHS senior class presented

a letter protesting parts of the schools mask policy as well concerns that this year's senior trip might be canceled due to the seniors' lack of enforcement of mask-wearing by all students in the high school.

But the trip is still on, Jones said. It is tentatively planned as a three-day jaunt either to the Oregon Coast or Triple Play Family Fun Park in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The final decision on destination and COVID protocols will be made as the date gets nearer, Jones said.

“I think COVID definitely has placed a lot of stress on families and the community,” Jones said. “The more we can have kids have more normality, the better off the kids are.”



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Police and other emergency personnel line the driveway of the Joseph home of David and Dolores Bridges after they followed Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish and Deputy Jeff Baty who escorted the ashes of David Bridges home from Portland to his parents' house Friday, March 12, 2021.

Honored: 'It was a huge blow and a disappointment. It's truly a terrible disease'

Continued from Page A1

in the county for the escort to the home of David and Dolores Bridges.

“He was awesome,” Fish told the Bridges as he and Baty handed over the ashes.

“Bret has been a dispatcher and reserve deputy for about three years,” Fish said later. “He was a very devoted third-shift dispatcher. He never missed a day until this past episode. He didn't want to take off. He didn't want to be gone. He was very devoted to his position.”

Bridges lived in Wallowa County since September 2017.

“We invited him,” his father said. “He was living in Colorado at the time and had no family close to him and he accepted our invitation. It brought our family closer together.”

Having previously worked a “help desk” assisting people with computer problems in Colorado, he fit right into the 911 job.

“He came here and trained for the position after he arrived,” David Bridges said.

A regular graveyard shift dispatcher, it seemed he was “always trying to catch up on his sleep,” Bridges said.

His knowledge of the county came largely from his work with the 911 system.

“He didn't get out into the community much,” Bridges said.

Bret was, however, a regular with a group of guys who played basketball at Joseph Charter School, Bridges said. He was also an online gamer.

“We got quite an outpouring of sympathy from the online community,” David said.

In addition to his parents, Bret is survived by a brother in Michigan and a sister in California, as well as several nieces and nephews.

“He was an uncle to four nieces and nephews and by reports, a very good one,” David Bridges said.

He said he expects that when their daughter and other son are able to join the parents, together they'll spread Bret's ashes somewhere.

“I presume there'll be a celebration of life, but that'll be decided in the future,”

David Bridges said. He said he has no idea how his son contracted the virus. He used to regularly do shopping for his parents, but was always careful.

“He was conscientious about wearing a mask when out,” his father said.

He said Bret was first hospitalized at Wallowa Memorial Hospital for a week before being transferred to Tri-Cities for a week and then to Portland. He said it both was and was not a surprise that his son fell ill.

Bridges said he never was told by a medical professional what the “underlying conditions” that contributed to his son's death were. To his knowledge, Bridges said, his son was healthy other than being overweight.

“Nothing surprises me in this pandemic,” David Bridges said. “It was a huge blow and a disappointment. It's truly a terrible disease.”

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