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# WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



137th Year, No. 5

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

## Wallowa County Voices



**John Howard**  
Wallowa

### He always wanted to live here

WALLOWA — John Howard moved here just four years ago, but already he's found it just like home.

"I like the country here and I always wanted to live here," he said. "I finally got the chance to do so."

Originally from St. Helens, prior to coming to Wallowa County he lived on Washington state's Long Beach Peninsula. He worked as a railroad brakeman/conductor for 31½ years. He and his late wife have one son in Wallowa and two others in Rogue River and Wilsonville. The three sons provide Howard with "about eight" grandchildren, he said.

He recently shared his thoughts about living in Wallowa County.

#### What's your favorite thing about Wallowa County?

The climate, I think, and it's still a little remote compared to the rest of the world. The beautiful scenery, of course, and the wildlife. I hunt and I fish.

#### What challenges do you feel the county faces?

None that I can think of. They seem to be doing alright.

#### How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you?

Not so far. I've had my shots. I've tried to keep up on it and it hasn't bothered me yet.

#### What have you learned from living in Wallowa County?

I've lived on the farm most of my life and done most of the same things before I moved here as I do now.

#### What's your advice for people who are thinking about moving here?

It's a little slower-paced life. We don't have to put up with the traffic. Some people live in the big city and can't get along without it. But I get along without it fine. I think there's something here for everybody if you can figure out what you like to do.

— Bill Bradshaw,  
Wallowa County Chieftain

## Wallowa Memorial earns top-20 position

Fourth time in the past five years WMH has earned a top-20 distinction

By RONALD BOND  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa Memorial Hospital has again been ranked among the top Critical Access Hospitals in the nation.

And with that, it received the distinction of the highest-ranked one on the West Coast.

The Chartis Center for Rural Health announced its top-20 list of CAHs on Monday, May 3, and WMH was in the top 20 for the fourth time in the past five years, according to a press release from the National Rural Health Association.

"Obviously, it's gratifying to know that your efforts are achieving results," WMH CEO Larry Davy said. "Our goal is always to aim for perfection, which is impossible. But if you aim for perfection, you achieve excellence. It's encouraging that all the hard work everyone is doing does have a very positive result for our community.

It keeps you trying hard."

The hospital learned in March it was a top-100 hospital for the eighth time in the past 11 years. Only three other hospitals in Oregon made the top-100 list, Brooke Pace, WMH communications director said at the time, and none of them were in the top 20. In fact, there were no other West Coast states that had a hospital in the top 20. Dillon, Montana, and Beaver, Utah, were the next farthest west. Most of the top 20 hospitals were located in the Midwest, including five in the Dakotas, five in Kansas, three in Iowa and two in Nebraska.

A series of factors are looked at by the Chartis Center when determining the top hospitals.

"The determining factors for the top-20 CAHs were based on the results of the Hospital Strength Index and its eight indices of performance: inpatient market share, outpatient market share, quality, outcomes, patient perspective, cost, charge and financial efficiency," the NRHA press release stated. "This elite group of hospitals was selected from the Chartis Center for Rural Health's 2021 top-100 CAH

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Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Clouds remain over Joseph on Friday, May 7, 2021, after the City Council received a scathing rebuke from the Joseph Chamber of Commerce over the council's dysfunctional performance and another employee complaint of harassment surfaced at its meeting the previous evening.

## 'Cloud' remains over Joseph City Council

Chamber slams council; another harassment claim surfaces

By BILL BRADSHAW  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — A scathing rebuke by the Joseph Chamber of Commerce, a second employee complaint of harassment and resident comments on the "cloud" that remains over the Joseph City Council greeted the council during its Thursday, May 6, meeting.

All this came despite progress the council made by hiring Brock Eckstein, interim city administrator of Elgin, as interim administrator for Joseph. The move comes to replace Larry Braden, who resigned April 16 citing "harassment" by city council members.

Eckstein agreed to work one day a week for the city, but other obligations prevent him from doing the job full time. He agreed that, when the need arises, he can put in a few more hours and even work remotely.

"I'm available for emergency situations to come up here, so long as it's allowable under my schedule," he told the council.

But uncertainty remained over Joseph's city government, as noted by officials and some members of the public in attendance.

Business owner Michael Lockhart said he's been hearing complaints from around town since Braden's resignation. He emphasized he's not out to implicate anyone, just to have the council be more open about the situation.

"People are bringing these things



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Brock Eckstein answers questions and makes his pitch to become interim city administrator Thursday, May 6, 2021, before the Joseph City Council. Councilwomen Kirsten Rohla, center, and Tammy Jones listen. Eckstein was hired by the council during the meeting.

to your attention and it's throwing a cloud over all of you," he said. "It would be much better if you guys just cleared the air. The first one had you all 'indicted;' the second one's pretty clear. ... I don't want to see punishment or anything like that. I just want to see you clear this up and become a clean council and move forward."

#### Chamber rebukes council

Lockhart's comments came after a letter to the city from the Joseph Chamber of Commerce. Chamber President Dina McFetridge and Vice President Jude Graham were present to represent the chamber.

"The chamber has significant concerns on current decisions and actions taken by a council member that have directly resulted in a loss of staff and expertise at the city level that will have an impact on the citizens of Joseph and the business community. Dysfunction at the city

government results in the inability to efficiently process permits and other requests directly impacting business. This same dysfunction is also a deterrent in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel to staff city positions as the city's reputation is damaged through press reports in local and regional papers," the letter stated.

It urged "corrective actions" to be taken by the council such as:

- Allowing city staff "to perform their duties without interference from individual councilors."
- Councilors causing discord should resign. If they don't, they should be disciplined, such as by being stripped of committee assignments.
- The chamber supports the plan to replace Braden with interim administrator until a long-term administrator can be found.

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## JOSEPH

### Council hears public works updates

Also OKs liquor license, red for ADA ramps

By BILL BRADSHAW  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Drama over how city government functions notwithstanding, the Joseph City Council did make some progress at its meeting Thursday, May 6.

Chief among that progress was hearing an update from Brad Baird, of Anderson Perry Engineers, on the city's plans to revamp its sewage treatment plant and water system and some minor street paving work.

Baird explained requirements from the state Department of Environmental Quality. He said the DEQ rewrote the city's permit with a new list of deadlines in a memorandum of agreement. He said the city should be able to meet the deadlines.

"You are in a squeeze now to get it designed and built within two years," he said. "We can do it, but we've got to get started now."

Looking over the agreement with the DEQ, Brock Eckstein, the newly hired interim city administrator, urged the council to have city attorney Wyatt Baum examine it.

"It's a pretty basic contract, but I'd still have your attorney look it over," Eckstein said.

Since the MOA needed to be signed by Friday, May 7, the council authorized Mayor Belinda Buswell to sign it pending its approval by Baum.

Baird also told the council the city's water budget appeared to be operating in the red, which is a violation of state budget law.

"Please look at it," Baird said.

He also asked and received the council's approval to move ahead with planned paving projects, noting the city has unanticipated extra funds to accomplish it.

"It's a good position to be in with a couple hundred thousand dollars for paving," he said.

In another matter, the council voted 4-2 to change the color of ramps to be installed downtown from yellow to red on the recommendation of the Main Street Motif Committee. The ramps are being installed to comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

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