

# County joins suit against 'big pharma'

Relinquishes mental health authority to OHA

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County will join 10 other Oregon counties and the city of Portland in a lawsuit against major pharmaceutical companies over practices that lead to opioid addiction, the county commissioners agreed Wednesday, May 19.

The commissioners agreed to the move upon advice of county counsel Paige Sully.

"As I previously discussed with each of you independently, 10 Oregon counties and the city of Portland have hired counsel and engaged in a lawsuit against a number of major pharmaceutical companies in the United States," Sully said. "It's a lawsuit that's been tried in a number of different states having to do with inappropriate marketing and selling of pharmaceuticals leading to folks becoming addicted to opioids and the resulting negative consequences that have occurred. It's my understanding that the 10 litigants in the state of Oregon are in discussions with the defendants, who are anxious to settle, but only if the nonlitigant counties in the state of Oregon join in the settlement."

She said the defendants don't want to settle with one group and have additional groups bring suits at a later date.

"We've been contacted by Brad Anderson, a county counsel for Washington County, about participating in those settlement discussions," she told the commissioners. "What they're asking us to do is ... if we are a party to the settlement and we receive a benefit from the settlement — some funds — we will waive and release the defendants from any further litigation from Wallowa County."

Sully said any benefit received from the suit would come with strings.

The funds won't be available "for whatever purpose," she said, but they would be "designed to be used to mitigate, resolve and address the negative consequences of opioid addiction."

Such uses could include



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Chantay Jett, executive director of the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness, expresses her support to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners for their move to relinquish county authority for mental health and allow the center to contract directly with the Oregon Health Authority.**

addiction treatment, mental health resources, law enforcement, district attorney and perhaps probation and parole, though Sully said she hasn't yet seen any settlement documents outlining the required uses.

She also said the counties can avoid the trap funneling money through Salem often can be.

"We're getting something for nothing here," she said. "It will allow the counties to structure the settlement such that the funds will come to actual counties and not to the state of Oregon for the state of Oregon to determine how to release it to the counties."

Commissioner Todd Nash said he sees this as an opportunity for the county to gain in joining a suit against pharmaceutical companies and benefit from it, where it might not be able to do so independently.

"I saw no downside whatsoever and Wallowa County's ability to take on 'big pharma' on something like this is not really credible or legitimate to consider," he said.

Commissioner John Hillock agreed.

"I just it's appropriate to stand in solidarity with these other counties and do the right thing," he said.

**Mental health authority ends**

In another matter, the commissioners voted to

relinquish the county's mental health authority to the Oregon Health Authority. The move was the culmination of previous discussions of the issue.

Chantay Jett, executive director for the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness, which serves as the county's mental health department, was present at last week's meeting to support the commissioners' move.

"We've had this discussion about county government being involved in mental health, an area they're not very expert in — would that be a good word to use?" she said.

"... Saying we're not experts is a very polite way of saying we know absolutely nothing," Nash joked.

"We need the service occasionally," Commissioner Susan Roberts agreed.

After discussing this with the county for a couple years, Jett said, "We've come to the conclusion that it's probably time to let us go out on our own and contract directly with the Oregon Health Authority. So if we are to do that, that means the county will relinquish their local mental health authority because it sort of becomes a moot point at that time. ... (relinquishing) would sort of force us — in a good way — to contract directly with the Oregon Health Authority."

She expressed her appreciation for past county sup-

port and said the move would benefit both the center and the county.

"It's been an administrative burden on you to be the 'pass-through' for a lot of different funding streams," she said. "Mental health funding is very complicated. We have 15 different programs all under one roof and about 20 different funding streams for those programs. ... So it relieves a burden for your office, as well."

Hillock said the board's move is part of a larger issue.

"For those of you who aren't aware," he told the audience, "what brings this to a head is the state's requirement for the counties to have the liability for the services that they provide. All of the counties have voiced this opinion to the state that we don't want to have the liability. In some cases in the past, we didn't have liability, but they've brought it into all the contracts now. It's going to probably affect us in other areas ... it's something that's going to have to be worked on with the Department of Justice when they come down with these contracts. Some of the agencies are willing to scratch it, but then the DOJ puts it back in."

Nash agreed, saying, "There were 13 other counties that opted out and weren't willing to sign the intergovernmental agreements."

Jett noted that what Nash and Hillock were referring to was intergovernmental agreements with the state over who would handle contracts for developmental disabilities. Wallowa County rejected such an agreement April 7.

"So 13 counties, led by Lane County, rejected those contracts, so about a month ago," she said.

Nash noted that the rejection didn't come without consequences.

"Lane County actually got burned on that and they're in litigation right now," he said.

He also suggested waiting to make a decision on relinquishing county authority until the public could comment. But Jett said it was important to get it done soon so the center can obtain a new contract. As a result, the commissioners voted unanimously to relinquish authority.

# Orthopedic surgeon on staff at WMH starting in June

By **RONALD BOND**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — An orthopedic surgery option is coming back to Wallowa County.

Wallowa Memorial Hospital is bringing back an orthopedic surgeon on Tuesday, June 1, when Dr. Bradley Smith begins his first day on the job after being recently hired, according to a press release from the hospital.

"I am very excited to join the excellent team at Wallowa Memorial Hospital," Smith said in the release.

"The physical/occupational therapists, radiology department, surgical team and hospital staff have just what it takes to get injured folks back to their activities all without having to travel far away for orthopedic care."

It has been about a decade since WMH had an orthopedic surgeon on staff. Wallowa Memorial Hospital Communications Director Brooke Pace said Dr. Bradford Stephens, who retired in 2011, was the last one at the hospital.

"Previous volumes have not supported a full-time orthopedic surgeon, and we were able to partner with Grande Ronde Hospital to provide visiting specialist services for the last 10 years," Pace said of how the hospital handled cases during the last decade.

She said a visiting orthopedist came to the county between two and four times a month. Some procedures also happened away from the county.

"Even with the visiting services, some orthopedic surgeries were needed

to be conducted outside of Wallowa County," she said.

Both Wallowa and Union counties have seen an increase in demand for orthopedic care, Pace said. The press release stated the hire of Smith "feels incredibly important as the demand for regional orthopedic services is on the rise."

Smith has practiced orthopedic surgery for more than two decades, and has worked in northern California and Alaska, according to the release.

His orthopedic experience includes treating injuries and 'wear and tear' to ligaments, bones and tendons, and he has experience performing shoulder, hip and knee repair procedures.

He has treated individuals of all ages, from toddlers to seniors. The release states that his philosophy on treatment is "to do what needs to be done, but to do no more and to keep things as simple as possible."

"Dr. Smith has an incredible amount of experience in a rural setting," Pace said. "Pair that with the quality of work he has done and his desire to work part-time, he was the perfect fit."

Smith comes from a long line of care providers, as his grandfather was a physician and his father was an orthopedic surgeon. According to the press release, he started assisting his father in surgeries as young as age 12. He attended medical school and received orthopedic training from Loma Linda University Medical Center east of Los Angeles.



Smith

This week's featured book

## Zero Fail

The Rise and Fall of the Secret Service  
by Carol Lennig

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## WHAT'S HAPPENING

### FOUNDER'S DAY BARBECUE SATURDAY

The Founder's Day barbecue takes place Saturday, May 29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Creating Memories Camp at Wallowa Lake.

The day is an opportunity to tour camp property, hike to the waterfall and enjoy a free lunch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Door prizes, games, face painting, live music and karaoke are all part of the day, according to a release. Park at the Marina parking lot. Transportation to the property will be provided.

### WALLOWA COUNTY FARMERS MARKET

9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays from May 29 to Oct. 9. Main Street in Joseph near Stein's Distillery.

Crafts, produce and homemade goods, and some live music will be on tap for visitors.

www.wallowacountyfarmersmarket.com, call 541-426-0795, or search for "Wallowa County Farmers' Market" on Facebook.

### ONGOING

**A.A. online meetings** ore-gonaadistrict29.org.

**Building Healthy Families** 541-426-9411.

**Community Connection** 541-426-3840.

**Enterprise Public Library** 541-426-3906.

**Fishtrap** 541-426-3623.

**Hurricane Creek Grange** 541-605-8233.

**Joseph Center for Arts and Culture** 541-432-0505.

**Wallowa Public Library** 541-886-4265.

**Wallowology** 541-263-1663.

## IN BRIEF

### Sen. Merkley to hold remote town hall

PORTLAND — Oregon's U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley will hold a remote and telephone town hall for constituents in Wallowa County on Tuesday, June 1.

The town hall will take place at 11 a.m.

He will update constitu-

ents on his work in Washington, D.C., and answer their questions and invite their suggestions about how to tackle the challenges facing Oregon and America.

On a computer, smartphone or tablet, go to <https://tinyurl.com/senmerkleytownhall> to join the Zoom meeting.

On the phone, call 669-254-5252. Meeting ID: 161 588 7595# and Participant ID: #. The passcode is 74934212#.

— Chieftain staff

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May 27 from 7-9 p.m.

**Whittle a Spork class**  
June 5 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**Color Mixing with Landscape practice watercolor class**  
June 10 from 5-7:30 p.m.

**Wine Glass Painting class**  
Every Wednesday from 5-7 p.m.

josephy.org  
541.432.0505

## Births

A daughter, Kynlee Rose Matthews, was born May 11 at Wallowa Memorial Hospital to Elizabeth Rose Johnston and Ethan Milo Robert Matthews of Wallowa. Grandparents are Melissa Zollman, Greg Johnston, Stephanie Davis and James Matthews.

301 W. Main, Enterprise • 541.426.3177

## FOUNDER'S DAY BBQ

WHEN  
Saturday May 29th 2021  
10:00am - 4:00pm

WHERE  
Creating Memories Camp @ Wallowa Lake

WHAT  
Tour our camp property, hike to the waterfall, and enjoy a FREE lunch (11 am-1 pm). There will be door prizes, games, face painting, live music and Karaoke! PLEASE park at the Marina parking lot, we will provide shuttle service to the camp property!

Due to COVID-19 guidelines, proper physical distancing will be maintained.