

Skate:

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These kids truly want to see something in this community that would be a healthy activity and bring everybody together," Pickens said.

And while Pickens had invited skateboarder and motivational speaker Brandon Novak to speak at the opening event, it was a story from Joshua Bridgewater, who led the charge to get the first skate park built, that stole the show.

Bridgewater, 47, who now lives in Long Beach, California, made the 20-plus hour drive to Enterprise when learning that the skate park was being upgraded.

In the late 1990s, Bridgewater moved back to Enterprise after living and attending school there for a time as a teenager in the late '80s.

He said he was probably the only skateboarder in town, and maybe in the county.

"Back then, I believe I converted two kids. I use conversion lightly," he said. "Skateboarding isn't about converting



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain
Joshua Bridgewater, a former Enterprise resident, skates in the halfpipe at the new skate park Saturday, Aug. 7, 2021. Bridgewater, who now lives in Long Beach, California, helped lead the effort for the original skate park two decades ago, but never got to skate in the completed park. He made the trip from California to be at the opening event for the new park.

people, it's about stoking each other out. A really positive outlet."

Family circumstances led to Bridgewater moving from the area for about a decade. He returned in his early 20s, still as one of the few skateboarders in the community, he said, and decided there was a need for another outlet for youths.

"This community needs a skate park. Something for the kids that were like me, that didn't go the path of traditional sports, that were attracted to maybe some extreme sports, whether it be skateboarding, rollerblading," Bridgewater said. "I started hitting the pavement, did some research (and) went to City Hall."

Support for the skate park grew — not only among youths, but parents, too.

"I put all my heart and energy and whatever money we could raise into the park," he said. "There was no concrete here. This was the proposed spot."

The money raised — Bridgewater said it was about \$20,000 — funded the concrete pad.

Ramps were con-

structed shortly after through a donation.

Bridgewater, though, didn't get to see the project to fruition, moving before the ramps were completed.

"This is visually the first time I've seen new ramps on the block of concrete that has so much sweat, blood and tears (of ours)," he said. "My original had a mini halfpipe on it. That never came to fruition until today."

That Bridgewater could even dip into the halfpipe Saturday is a marvel in itself. He said he was recovering from the latest set of what is now 41 surgeries related to being born with spina bifida. He is partially paralyzed from the waist down.

Yet he has continued to be an advocate for the sport, and uses it in his work with special-needs youths.

"I can tell you this is an awesome outlet for the youths of all ages," he said. "You can skate despite limitations, physically, mentally, whatever. No matter what your home life is like ... you can ride a skateboard. It's for everybody, boys, girls, all ages."

Spike:

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patients in Region 9 — which includes Umatilla, Union, Baker Malheur, Morrow and Wallowa counties — at 25. That's higher than even the top total from the spike in November (18) or December (17). The number did drop slightly to 22 on Monday.

Regions 3 and 5 in Southwestern Oregon are also seeing unprecedented levels of hospitalizations due to COVID-19, with 99 COVID patients in hospitals in Region 3, and 119 in Region 5 on Monday. Region 6 also reached a record with seven hospitalizations on Sunday. On Monday, OHA reported there were 575 people in the hospital statewide due to COVID.

The increase in cases is part of a jump region and statewide, with 3,229 cases and 14 deaths from over the weekend reported on Monday.

Vaccination rates in the county have slowed to a trickle, as well, though they are still increasing.

Wallowa County's overall vaccination rate has ticked up to 49.1%, while the rate of those 18 and older is up to 58.9%, and 67.8% of those 60 and older — those more susceptible to the virus — have gotten a shot.

Masks:

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Disagreeing, but complying

But despite their disagreement with the rulings coming down from the governor's office and state health officials, the districts plan to obey them.

"We're not going to defy the mandate," Homan told the Chieftain on Thursday, Aug. 5.

"Our school year begins Aug. 30 — and our administration and staff will again strive to change directions to meet this recent order," the letter from the ESD board, which was read

at an Aug. 2 board meeting, said. "Enterprise District No. 21 is prepared to be a voice of advocacy for our students, parents and patrons. We will continue to seek additional local control, working in conjunction with our administration and local health authority to provide the quality in person-in class instruction our patrons expect."

Homan explained what the Joseph board is seeking.

"Local control is the ability for our school to work with our local health department, community and staff, and develop collaboratively what is best for our school," he said. "I

had a phone conversation with (state Rep.) Bobby Levy yesterday. Our big thing is pushing for local control, but doing it the right way through communication with our legislators, with (the Oregon Department of Education), with the governor, so that is what we're hoping people will do."

Homan, in a follow-up email to the Chieftain, said frustration comes from not having an opportunity to work with the state.

"(W)e are frustrated with the lack of collaboration with the state and frustrated that the state has put schools back in a situation that we have no control of," he said. "Unfortunately, I see schools in our county and around the state losing students at a very high rate, thus also affecting the financial stability of schools. I hope in the end we do not lose school dis-

tricts in small communities due to the exit of students. We want our community to know that we appreciate them and are working to do the best we can during these times and we realize the mandate can be very divisive, and we want to work together to gain our local control back."

Jones spoke highly of the way the last year was handled between the districts and local officials.

"We're not a fan of losing local decision making," she said. "Wallowa County is an amazing place and we've had a great relationship with Dr. (Elizabeth) Powers, who has really helped us maneuver through these uncharted waters, and it's (been) a collaborative relationship with all three districts, the ESD, and Dr. Powers."

Obey or pay

In a sense, though,

schools are really left without an option but to follow the rules after the Oregon Health Authority added clarified information on Aug. 2, which noted failure to comply could be costly.

According to the text of OAR 333-019-1015, adopted by the OHA on Aug. 2, "A school that violates this rule on or after Aug. 12, 2021 is subject to a civil penalty of \$500 per day per violation."

The risk of being fined is one that the schools had to take into consideration.

"The challenge is, and the board understands, we don't want to, but we will follow whatever the orders are," Jones said. "If you knowingly disobey the law there are consequences and penalties in place."

Beyond that, there is the possibility that the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission could levy punishments if teachers are not compliant with the rule, with those ranging from a disciplinary letter to suspending or even revoking a teacher's license, Jones said.

"We could technically lose our jobs (if we disobey)," Pinkerton said during an Aug. 2 Enterprise School Board meeting.

Pinkerton, in a follow-up with the Chieftain, added: "My knowledge is that because when we do accept our licensure, there is a code of ethics which if (we) break the law our license is revoked. That is something TSPC would be pursuing if (educators) did not comply."

She is opposed to TSPC taking that kind of position, saying that in doing so, they are questioning the integrity of teachers.

"I'm so against it. We are educated, licensed pro-

fessionals making decisions day in and day out to make sure we are ensuring the safety of our students," she said. "For them to hang this over our head, in my opinion, is an insult."

Trent Danowski, deputy director and director of professional practices for TSPC, wrote in an email to the Chieftain that TSPC is still working on what the proper approach would be.

"The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission is reviewing the Oregon Health Authority directives, and is working in collaboration with the OHA and other partner state agencies to determine how best to respond to reports of noncompliance by TSPC-licensed individuals," he said.

According to the latest OHA rules, masks are to be worn indoors at schools during regular school hours, during off-campus classes or field trips during school hours, or educational activities outside of school hours.

The exceptions are when an individual is eating, drinking or sleeping, playing an instrument that requires use of the mouth, in a private office with the door closed, if a person is under 2, or during a P.E. class that includes swimming or another water sport, or a sport where a mask could be a strangulation hazard, such as wrestling.

Social distancing of at least 3 feet is also strongly recommended.

Jones said the schools are aligned in their position and will continue working for the ability to have control.

"We will follow, because there isn't really a choice," she said, "but we are going to advocate like crazy to have our local control back."

Perseid Peaks
Thursday, August 12
7-8pm
DJ Lincoln
Wallowa Valley Astronomers

Do meteorites have peaks?
 Do meteors have peaks?
 What is a meteor shower's "peak"?
 Who sneaks peaks at asteroids?
 Who speaks if we take a peek at one?
 How big does one have to be to pique interest?

Come join us for an hour of asteroids and astronomy at the Lodge. We'll discuss the composition, geometry, viability, and ramifications of space dust.

Wallowa Lake Lodge Thursday Speaker Series

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 at Wallowa Lake Lodge

Natural History Discovery Center
 508 N. Main • Joseph • wallowology.org • info@wallowology.org

FREE!

CHIEF OF THE WEEK

JASON STEWART & JASON DUBY

Jason Stewart and Jason Duby were the overall champions of team roping during Chief Joseph Days. The duo didn't have the fastest total in either round, but had the fastest combined time of 12.2 seconds to take home almost \$2,500.

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August 13 & 14
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GRANDE RONDE RODEO
 AUG 13-14 7:00 PM
 6:00 PM PRE-RODEO
 MAVERICKS ARENA - LAGRANDE