

# Joseph High School gets new principal

## Longtime East Oregonian takes helm at school

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

**JOSEPH** — Joseph High School's new principal may be new on the job, but he's no newcomer to Wallowa County.

"I'm fairly comfortable with Wallowa County," Jason Gorham said in an interview Friday, Aug. 27. "Growing up, I spent a lot of time coming up here to the lake and camping. ... Because I was not working up here, there are a lot of people who don't know me."

Gorham was hired Aug. 1 to replace Sherri Kilgore, who has been JHS principal since 2006. She moved onto to take the principal's job at McKay Elementary School in Pendleton.

With wife, Angela — the school's librarian — Gorham has three children. Son, Brent, 22, just graduated from the University of Idaho in Moscow. Daughter, Natalie, 20, is a junior at Spokane's Gonzaga University. Their youngest, Owen, is a sophomore at JHS and, like his older siblings, is on track to graduate there.

Gorham grew up in Summerville, a small town in Union County, so he's not unfamiliar with the area. After high school, he got his degrees in history and geography and a master's degree in education at Southern Oregon University in Ashland. He spent 10 years teaching in Sweet Home near Albany and 14 years at Cove. He's always taught history and geography.

"That's been my love for a long time," he said.

### New to administration

Now, he's hung up his work as a teacher for his first time as an administrator.

"This'll be my first time as a principal," Gorham said. "It's been really good so far," even though he's only experienced a few



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Joseph High School's new Principal Jason Gorham got his start Aug. 1, 2021, and was there to welcome students when school opened Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021.**

days of classes.

Joseph Charter School Superintendent Lance Homan is already pleased with his new fellow administrator.

"I really enjoy working with Jason," Homan said. "He's very professional, very student oriented, a good communicator, good listener. I've really enjoyed our time together so far."

Gorham's still getting used to being an administrator.

"I'm still getting my feet on the ground, but it's been really good," he said. "We've got a great school community, great staff, really great students, so that makes it easier coming in as a new administrator."

Still, Gorham's anything but a stranger to Joseph and the county. He and his family have lived in the county six years. While working at Cove, he commuted from Enterprise for four years and from Joseph for the past two.

He's also had experience coaching at Joseph, even prior to his Aug. 1 hiring as principal here.

"I've got a lot of experience coaching through the years," he said.

He said he's also coached football, basketball and golf at Sweet

Home and Cove, as well as "a lot of middle school stuff; all three seasons."

For now, however, his duties don't include coaching.

"... It's the opportunity to support staff and students throughout the day," he said. "As a teacher, you're in the classroom working with students on a subject — and I loved doing that — but what I find most rewarding right now is being able to help others to do that. Being able to support the staff so that they can get their job done the best they can in the classroom by supporting them, taking care of the details for them so that they don't have to worry about and they can focus on kids."

### The pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic adds an extra challenge to all at schools.

"It's a difficult time for us in education," Gorham said. "Educators across the state are having to deal with that and it just makes running the schools a little bit harder because there are more decisions to be made and things to deal with to keep our staff and students healthy and safe."

He said no students or staff have had to be sent

home because they weren't vaccinated, wouldn't wear masks or were showing coronavirus symptoms. The work has mostly about educating students as to the necessity of masks and distancing.

"We've been working with our students to show them why they need to wear masks and what the (government) mandate means for us, so we've been doing a lot of educating this week," he said. "By and far, students and staff have been very receptive and great about it and we're working with those who we need to, but we haven't had anybody sent home yet."

Like with anything concerning kids, it requires a bit of patience to teach why face masks and adherence to the governor's other mandates are important.

"We've been educating on why it's important and why we need to do it," he said. "They're kids and they forget."

### Outside of class

In addition to his work, Gorham enjoys the outdoor life Wallowa County offers.

"We're enjoying our various outdoor activities," he said, "going up to the lake and enjoying time there with my family."

## IN BRIEF

### Mule Days pushed to 2022 due to COVID-19

**ENTERPRISE** — COVID-19 has taken out another major local event for the second year in a row.

Hells Canyon Mule Days, which was scheduled to take place the weekend after Labor Day, has been pushed back to 2022, President Sondra Lozier announced Wednesday, Aug. 25.

"This is incredibly disappointing, and I assure everyone that this decision was not made lightly. Our board was unanimous that this was the only option. As disappointing as this is, we look forward to welcoming everyone back to Enterprise in 2022 when we plan to celebrate the 41st (again) annual Hells Canyon Mule Days event," Lozier said.

The board made the decision to cancel Mule Days in light of safety concerns due to the most recent coronavirus outbreak statewide, which has seen Wallowa County hit as hard as it has been since the pandemic started in March 2020. The county sits at 405 cases of coronavirus and has one of the lowest infection rates in the state, but also has seen more than 165 of those cases reported in the month of August.

The 2022 event is scheduled for Sept. 9-11.

Despite the cancellation, the board still will award the three \$1,000 Max Walker Memorial Scholarships for three Wallowa County high school seniors, feeling it was "not fair to deny them the help they applied for."

### Joseph Center cancels donor appreciation event

**JOSEPH** — The donor-appreciation event planned at the Joseph Center for Arts and Culture has been postponed, according to a press release.

Given current restrictions on gatherings because of the coronavirus pandemic, organizers felt unable to hold the event indoors, where it seemed more appropriate.

The event was to be held in September to thank donors and other supporters for their help in the purchase of the center's building that was accomplished June 23.

Kellee Sheehy, development director, said in the release reminds those who appreciate art, culture and each other, that "This too shall pass."

The center will provide notice when the event can be rescheduled.

— The Chieftain

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His love of history and geography also have taken him in a different direction.

"I really enjoy traveling. I've been able to, in the past, take student groups to the East Coast of the United States and twice to Europe," he said. "I've done that and really enjoyed it."

As a teacher, he took students to the East Coast for to study early American history, visiting Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

"The American Revolution for the most part, but also U.S. government and the current day," he said. "I've taken several eighth-grade classes to those cities."

The European trips were to Italy and Greece while he taught at Cove.

"When we went to Europe, it was a little more culture, an introduction to get the kids out to see the world a bit," he said. "We saw some historical and

cultural stuff."

Those teaching trips took him even farther.

"Because I got into that, I got into tour guiding," he said. "I am a licensed tour guide and have done that in the summers for the past several years. I go back to the East Coast for the month of June and I would lead student travel groups up and down the East Coast for a month. It was a lot of fun. I really have enjoyed doing that."

But his current 11-month contract will put a hitch in that. He hopes to do a little in July, but he's still not sure.

In all, Gorham is settling in well to his new position.

"I just feel really fortunate to be here and have the opportunity to work in such a great community with the staff and students," he said. "I'm really happy to be here and excited to work with the people in the county."

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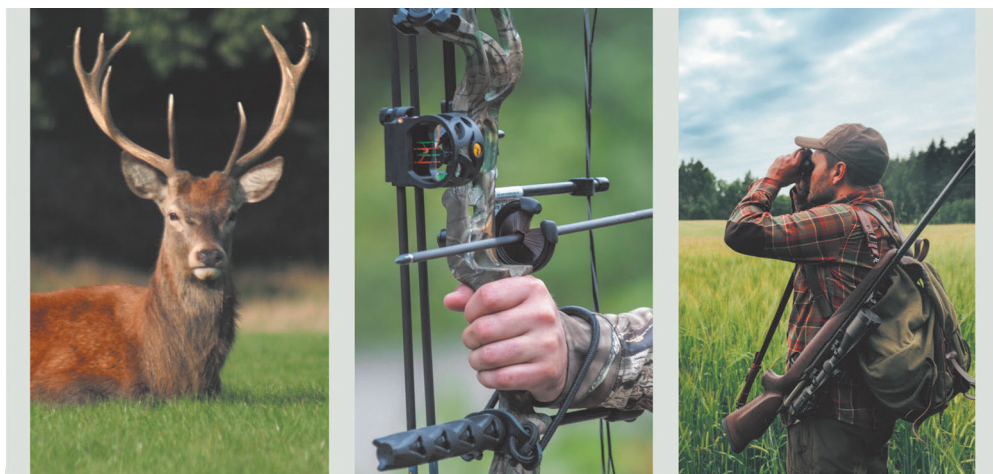
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