

Hunger:

Continued from Page A1

Community Connection has generous income guidelines each household must meet to qualify for a turkey box, Odegaard said. For a household of one, the limit is \$3,222 a month or \$38,640 a year. For larger households, the income guidelines are listed online at <https://ccno.org/food-bank/>.

"That is very generous," she said.

Odegaard said the food bank usually assists about 100 singles and families each year.

Bryce Leggett, the head cook at the senior meals site in Wallowa, said the same income guidelines apply in Wallowa.

Community Connection manager Connie Guentert said that on Saturday, a "Fill the Fire Truck" food drive put on Saturday by the Joseph Fire Department raised more than \$4,000 for the food bank. Also donated was 220 pounds of food and cash to purchase \$365 in food from Market Fresh Foods.

She said the Rooted Youth Group in Enterprise volunteered to sort and load the food at Community Connection.



Connie Guentert, manager of Community Connection of Wallowa County, shows where turkeys will go once they're donated for the "turkey boxes" Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021, that will be distributed ahead of Thanksgiving.

She also said the Safeway store is helping out.

"Our local Safeway raised over \$10,000 for Turkey Bucks-Thanksgiving meals this year," Guentert said.

"That is a feat."

For more information on

Community Connection, call 541-426-3840 or email Guentert at connie@ccno.org.

Churches help, too

Churches around the county also are helping make

sure no one goes hungry.

Some, like Enterprise Christian Church, have actual food banks.

ECC Pastor David Bruce said it's open Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. But as to what's avail-

able, that can be hit or miss.

"It all depends on who brings what," he said. "It's just a general-purpose food bank."

He called it a supplementary food bank.

"We encourage people to use the community food bank, but it runs short, as well," he said.

As for income restrictions, his church doesn't really have any.

"We just ask that people remember that other people use this as well," he said, calling it self-regulating.

Bruce couldn't say how many people or families his church's food bank helps, but it's not been as many as it could have.

"I have been stunned because it's had very little use in recent months," he said.

In Joseph, the Joseph United Methodist Church has a "blessing box" at the corner of Main and 3rd streets.

"It's available 24/7," Pastor Cherie Dearth said. "We ask people to just take three items a day. ... We fill it as we can. Sometimes people from the community fill it."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the church was a distribution site for the Fresh Alliance program of Community Connection. That program gathered fresh pro-

duce that was about to expire at local grocery stores to distribute. The distribution has not resumed, she said.

Other churches collect donations and contribute directly to Community Connection.

Pastor Tim Barton, of the Wallowa Assembly of God Church, said that's what his church does, as well as giving to the Wallowa Senior Center.

"We sponsor senior meals once a quarter," he said. "We have, in the past, given out food certificates at the grocery store here in Wallowa."

However, his church decided to shift its giving to the food bank in Wallowa, figuring that was a more effective way to help than directly to individuals.

The Community Congregational Church — the "Big Brown Church" — in Enterprise, also gives directly to the food bank, member Larry Wagner said. Once a month, he said, the church collects donations and takes them to the Enterprise Community Connection outlet.

But it's a community wide effort that ensures no one goes hungry.

"No one in this county wants anyone to go hungry," Guentert said. "The generosity of this community is just staggering."

Trail:

Continued from Page A1

will terminate 63 miles later in Joseph.

City officials at each end of the proposed trail are eager to see it accomplished, anticipating both economic and health benefits. Elgin, at 1,700 population, currently has no accessible trails from downtown, according to a press release announcing the grants. Joseph, with roughly 1,000 people, also will benefit from the trail, as will Wallowa, Lostine and Enterprise.

Interest at each end

As it turns out, Brock Eckstein has an official interest at each end. He's Elgin's city administrator and also is interim city administrator for Joseph.

"Our city staff, collaborating closely with the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium and WURA, are prepared to lead and assist as needed to ensure the project is a success, because the potential economic and health impacts from this trail for our city, community, and region will be momentous," said Eckstein of the benefits to Elgin.

"In the future, it'll be really great for Joseph," he added, lamenting the delays in the project over acquiring funding.

A board member of the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority, which owns the right-of-way alongside the tracks, Eckstein sees the grants as a step forward in solving the financial woes of the project.

"I'm really excited getting two grants," he said.

One grant, from Oregon State Parks' Recreational Trails Program, will fund construction of the trailhead, which will also serve as a pocket park for the city of Elgin. The trailhead/pocket park will be located on a



Joseph Branch Trail Consortium/Contributed Photo

Rails are seen near the site of the old Joseph mill. The Joseph Branch Trail Consortium is working to establish a 63-mile trail-with-rails section between Elgin and Joseph. On Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021, the nonprofit announced it has received two grants totaling more than \$272,000 that will fund construction of the first trailhead and inaugural trail segment, as well as final planning and design for another 13-mile segment.

parcel of city-owned land directly across from the train depot in downtown Elgin.

Eckstein said there is a "time cap" of December 2024 to get the Elgin trailhead/pocket park and the first short section of trail out of town constructed, as well as the planning for the next first 13 miles refined.

"We're just taking it piece by piece until we get the whole thing done," he said.

In addition to trail information, the trailhead/pocket park will include an electric vehicle and e-bike charging station (the only one between La Grande and Enterprise), an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant parking place, ADA-compliant picnic tables, interpretive signage about the area's earliest inhabitants and more-recent history, a bicycle maintenance stand, a water fountain and more, the press release stated.

The Oregon State Parks

grant also will fund construction of the inaugural 0.6 mile of the trail that will be an ADA-compliant path running out of Elgin along the railroad tracks.

A second grant, from the Oregon Department of Transportation's Transportation Growth Management program, will fund development of a detailed refinement plan for the 13-mile segment of the trail between Elgin and Lookingglass in rural Union County on the Grande Ronde River beyond Palmer Junction. This funding will also support local outreach and education about the trail.

Parts of the trail, near proposed trailheads located in towns, will mostly be ADA-compliant and made of hard-packed gravel, said Gregg Kleiner, project coordinator for the consortium.

"The ADA-compliant sections will accommodate electric wheelchairs, and E-bikes potentially be

allowed on some other parts of the trail," Kleiner said in an email. "Most parts sections of the trail will be a more basic gravel trail that can be used by hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. ... We also hope it the trail might be used by local school athletes, like cross-country teams."

Grants a perfect fit

Kleiner, who joined the consortium as its first project coordinator in March, finds the grants a perfect fit for the project.

"These two grants dovetail perfectly and will be a catalyst for the larger project, which has been in the planning stages for many years now," Kleiner said. "This funding will establish a wonderful, fully accessible

TRAIL-WITH-RAILS

What: Trail-with-rails

Where: Elgin to Joseph

Phone: 541-740-9654

Email: gregg@joseph-branchtrail.org

Websites: joseph-branchtrail.org <https://www.josephbranchtrail.org/membership>

community asset for residents of Elgin to enjoy while also generating an economic boost for the city from visitors stopping in town to hike or bike out of town along the Grande Ronde River on the initial trail segment ... or to charge their electric vehicles. And eventually, other towns along the trail will see the benefits, too."

He said students enrolled in Eastern Oregon University's Sustainable Rural Systems Program are helping research and develop con-

tent for the interpretive signage and other components of the project.

The project also will help draw people to the Eagle Cap Excursion Train, which runs from the train depot in Elgin up to Minam and back about twice a week from late spring through fall.

Previous small grants from the Schwemm Family Foundation and the Roundhouse Foundation also will support development of the trailhead/pocket park.

Kleiner was enthusiastic to get state support for the trail project.

"It's wonderful to see the state of Oregon so supportive of this trail, which will offer users of all abilities and ages a safe way to get out and experience nature," he said. "And the interpretive signage will help hikers, bikers and horseback riders learn about the local history and the indigenous people who lived — and still live — in this area."



Pet of the Week



KITTENS, KITTENS, KITTENS!

Wallowa County humane society is bursting at the seams with a fresh new batch of some of the cutest, softest, sweetest, fluffiest kitties ever!! If you've been dreaming of adopting a kitty, we've got kittens ranging from 6 weeks up. All kittens are vaccinated, dewormed and litter box trained. These babies are all scheduled to be spayed and neutered when they are of age.

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