

# Plunge:

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Werdinger contrasted Gibans' willingness to brave the lake's icy waters with his own.

"I'm the complete opposite," he said. "I'm too much of a wimp when it comes to cold water."

Wandschneider said that at 79, he believes he was the oldest — or one of the oldest — to participate this year.

Both agreed it was fitting to remember Gibans by attaching her name to the plunge.

"She was a mover and a shaker in a lot of ways," Werdinger said. "She contributed a lot to the community."

"She's a heroic figure. She battled cancer many years," Wandschneider said. "She was very important to what we have in the county today."

## Chilling reaction

Most who participated wanted some form of cleansing off from 2021 and expressed hopes for a better 2022.

That was the attitude of Kayla Rynearson of Enterprise.

"I've been doing it for eight years," she said. "It's invigorating. You get to wash of the last year."

Her 12-year-old daughter, Savanna, has joined her for the past several years.

She said the air temperature makes a big difference in how the plunge feels.

"It depends on if it's warm or cold out. When it's negative (temperatures), it's not so bad," Savanna said. "Last year was warmer and the water was freezing."

After her dip, she had one word to describe the experience: "COLD!!!"

Kayla Rynearson said she works at Wallowa Memorial Hospital and often many



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

A chilling but refreshing start to 2022 is what participants in the Beth Gibans Memorial Wallowa Lake Polar Bear Plunge experienced Saturday, Jan. 1, 2022.

coworkers join her. She said she's been told it's not likely an ambulance would be needed at the plunge.

"They say that because we don't jump off a dock, there's less likelihood of anybody having any cardiac issues," she said.

Another long-time plunger, Randi Jandt, also liked memorializing Gibans with the event.

"I don't do it every year — but with the memorial to Beth, I wanted to this year," Jandt said. "It's for luck in the new year. ... It's misery that lasts for a short time."

One newcomer to the Enterprise area, Stefan Hasselblad, was simple with his reasons for taking the plunge.

"To cleanse," he said. "It's a good way to start the new year."

Coming down from Elgin, Tiffani Lamberts also had a simple reason.

"It's to wash off the old year and welcome the new," she said, adding that this year was her second time.

With her was Ariana Lesser of Enterprise.

"It's my first time doing it," Lesser said. "I wanted to see if I like it. If I do, maybe I'll do it again."



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

A quick dip was all anyone was up for Saturday, Jan. 1, 2022, during the Beth Gibans Memorial Wallowa Lake Polar Bear Plunge.

## Spectators

There were about as many spectators, photographers and self-described "towel-holders" at the plunge as there were participants.

Jess Bohnsack was on the fence about going in at first, but then decided against it.

"I've been in some pretty cold weather, but I'm not going in today," he said.

Two men with coat-wearing dogs said the plunge would've been too cold for the canines.

Denny Kolb said that while he'd taken such a plunge in Minnesota, he'd

never done it here.

"I'm just here to watch," he said.

Another spectator, sitting bundled up with his dog in his pickup, also passed on the experience.

"Are you kidding me?" he said. "We're not getting out of the truck."

Wandschneider tried to dispel notions some may have of what jumping in icy water would feel like. He said it's crucial to quickly warm the extremities after the plunge.

"Believe it or not, it's not immediately unpleasant," he said.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Rich Wandschneider of Joseph disrobes in preparation for the Beth Gibans Memorial Wallowa Lake Polar Bear Plunge on Saturday, Jan. 1, 2022. He is one of five founding members of the plunge.



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# COVID-19:

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cases over the total at the end of 2020. Two additional cases were reported Dec. 29, and there were five cases reported Dec. 30 and six reported Jan. 3. It brings the county putting the total at 793 for the pandemic and at least 710 for the year of 2021. The county's infection rate for the pandemic is about 11.0%, per OHA data. Given the most recent COVID report covers the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, it's unclear how many of the six cases are in the last year.

To review, Wallowa County had among one of the lowest case rates in Oregon at the end of 2020, with the county reporting 77 cases from the start of the pandemic through Dec. 31, 2020.

Cases trickled in over the next six months. The county reached 100 on Jan. 26, and 150 cases on April 2. It was another three-and-a-half months until the 200th case

was reported July 19. The rate for the year was higher than 2020, but the county remained on the lower end of the case spectrum until the delta variant spike hit the state.

It's unknown exactly how many cases were the delta variant. Regardless, the count shot through the roof. An additional 39 cases were reported during the final 12 days of July, putting the number at 239 by the end of the month. By early August, the number was past 250. In the same month, 300, 350 and 400 were reached, and by the end of August the total was 419.

There were 180 cases in August alone, matching the total the county had from when its first case was confirmed in April 2020 through May 6, 2021. Totals that were once coming in over several months were now coming in just days.

The case count ebbed from that peak, but slowly. September saw 163 cases, October had 123 and November had 55. The three highest months all had totals

that surpassed the case count of 2020.

December's total has been tame in comparison, with the average under a case a day, and a total of 27 reported during the month as of Dec. 30.

The number of deaths in the county has remained at 13, with nine of those coming during 2021, and five being reported during a one-week span in late August. There were three deaths reported in 2020, and a fourth reported later in 2021 that was from the previous year.

As of Dec. 29, the county is at a vaccination rate among adults of 70.7%, which ranks it 15th among the 36 counties in Oregon. The 70% threshold was actually broken through on Dec. 7. Currently, 66% of county adults have received a full set of shots, and 33.7% have received a booster shot. In this area, the county is actually ninth in the state, and is above the state rate of 32.4%, where it sits below the state rate in the other categories, which are 80.7% and 73.9%, respectively.

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