



Wallowa County Voices



Loni Benson
Enterprise

Westerner says be prepared for extreme weather

ENTERPRISE — Loni Benson has only lived in Enterprise for a couple of months, but she already feels at home here.

She moved here from Newport to be closer to family. She has a couple of sisters, a daughter and two grandchildren here. Two other children and their families live in western Oregon. In total, she has seven grandsons and two step-granddaughters.

One sister used to own a café in Joseph, another lives in Wallowa and her daughter moved here four years ago.

She recently landed a job as a receptionist for Alpine Chiropractic in Enterprise.

Benson recently shared her thoughts about living in Wallowa County.

What's your favorite thing about Wallowa County?

I'd have to say my family. I can get together with my sisters, my daughter and my grandsons on a regular basis.

Are you getting cabin fever yet?

No. I like the winter. I've spent the last two winters here, visiting from Newport — on the beach — where it's 40-50 degrees in the winter.

What are you looking forward to once the weather warms?

Mostly walking with my dog. I have a 7-year-old male pit bull.

What's your advice for people who are thinking about moving here?

It's a great place; I like it. But be prepared for the extreme weather.

— Bill Bradshaw
Wallowa County Chieftain

Racing in Patagonia

Local equestrian to participate in endurance race in South America

By ANN BLOOM
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

If enthusiasm had a scale from 1-10, then Brenda Johnson would be at about a 12. Johnson is preparing for a 10-day endurance horse race, called the Gaucho Derby, that takes place in Argentinian Patagonia, March 3-13. Riders ride for 311 miles, using seven different horses, relying on a map and a GPS tracker, and must finish in 10 days. There are no trails.

The race is a test of horse and rider endurance, navigation and survival skills.

She is in an elite group. There were over 400 applicants and only

35 were chosen to compete.

So why is she doing it? She laughs at the question. "Cuz I'm crazy!" she said.

She explains, more seriously, that she has always wanted to do it and is, "just doing it to do it."

There are riders from around the globe including Europe, the United States, South Africa and Australia participating.

The experience is costing her a great deal of money — more than \$14,500, to be exact. In addition, there is air fare, gear, food, a tent and sleeping bag. Specialized gear for the weather she will encounter all had to be purchased new. Since

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Brenda Johnson/Contributed Photos
Brenda Johnson is set to compete in the endurance horse race called the Gaucho Derby in South America's Patagonia March 3-13, 2022.



County urges businesses, workers to apply for grants

Another extension on COVID aid approved

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Business owners are being urged to apply for the latest round of COVID-19 assistance from a Community Development Block Grant that Wallowa County received in July 2020, the Board of Commissioners said at its Wednesday, Feb. 16, meeting.

The commissioners met via Zoom with Lisa Dawson, executive director of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, who was asking the commissioners to apply to the state for a six-month extension on the grant. NEOEDD's role is to assist businesses to apply for the grants, determine if they qualify and assess how much funding they could be eligible to receive. Both low-moderate income business owners and employers of low-moderate income workers can apply.

The commissioners approved an extension until Aug. 15 but only



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Lisa Dawson, executive director of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, top, discusses via Zoom a Small Business of Commissioners at its meeting Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. The commissioners, shown below, are, from left, John Hillock, Susan Roberts and Todd Nash.

gave the NEOEDD until March 31 to recommend a final round of

businesses to receive grants and requested that NEOEDD make

aggressive efforts to get the word out in the next 45 days.

Commission Chairwoman Susan Roberts recalled that the original grant was for \$150,000 and the period for applying for aid under the grant expired Feb. 15.

"There's still \$107 and some-odd thousand in it," Roberts said. "We have extended it once. Lisa, would you explain why you're asking for another extension?"

"There are two reasons that we're asking for an extension. One is similar to what Commissioner (Todd) Nash just explained about ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds. There are many restrictions on federal funding that's coming through related to the coronavirus pandemic. ... One of the restrictions ... is that new grants to businesses cannot duplicate any other pandemic-related funding that a business has received. Since most of that other pandemic-related funding is long gone at this point and businesses are still experiencing things like staffing shortages and times when maybe they've had to close down because

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