

Race:

Continued from Page A1

she will be going in March, and since Patagonia (located in South America) is in the Southern Hemisphere, its climate now will be close to Wallowa County's September or October.

"It could be 20 or 70 degrees," she said. She also had to commit at least \$1,000 to charity just to enter, but has raised and donated \$1,500 to date.

Her chosen charities were Safe Harbors in Enterprise and Shotzy Sanctuary, in Union County, an animal rescue and domestic violence organization. Donations are still being accepted, and Johnson asks anyone who wishes to support her challenge to please donate to these charities. She spent a year training and preparing for the event, and appreciates the support and donations of local businesses and individuals who contributed to her endeavor.

A rare race to ride in

This is only the second race of its kind. The first was held in 2020, and the world shut down during the race due to the pandemic. The second race, which would have happened in 2021, was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She said she was initially drawn to the race by the story of Bob Long, a 70-year-old Idaho man who won the Mongol Derby which is 1,000 kilometers, or 622 miles.

"I thought the story was inspirational," she said. And, she added, "I've always



Brenda Johnson/Contributed Photo

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

wanted to go to Patagonia."

In addition to specialized gear, there is a strict weight restriction. Riders can only weigh 187 pounds. Supplies and gear — food, first-aid kit, tent, saddle bags and sleeping bag — can-

not exceed 22 pounds for 10 days, with 4-pound food-supply bags strategically placed along the course.

"They are very strict about weight," she said. The body weight restriction also includes clothes and helmet.

The race has an extensive veterinary support system for the horses. Veterinarians are at horse stations every 40-60 kilometers to check the horses' heart rates, respiration rates and to make sure they are not being

pushed too hard. Each rider rides a total of seven different horses, said Johnson, but each horse is only ridden once.

The race supplies the horses. There are three types of horses used. A Criollo, "like our mustangs here," she said. Arabians and Percheron crosses are also part of the mix. The saddle is modified for the race to be light, "like a cross between a Western and English," Johnson said. Riding can only occur between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Riders who violate this rule run the risk of penalty and possibly disqualification.

The terrain is difficult. Johnson said riders "have to figure out on your own the terrain gates and fences," and how to contend with them. In places, riders may have to back track, since there are no trails. It's a point A to point B to point C type of race beginning to end. There is also "lots of water. Water could be my deterrent — bogs and swamps," she said.

It is also fire season there. "You can't have fires," she said. If a person must start a fire, "it better be to save your life," she said. There are medics available. "Horse and people are well taken care of," she said.

The lay of the land

The terrain in Patagonia is a desert and steppe-like (terraced grass plateaus). It is bound on the west by the Andes. The Andes are part of Patagonia, Johnson said. "We'll have various sections of the race in the mountains. They said our max elevation will be around 8,000 feet," she said. The Colo-

rado River is to the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Strait of Magellan to the South. The region south of the strait, the Tierra Del Fuego — which is divided between Argentina and Chile — is also often included.

It is desert and semi-desert terrain and treeless plains. The relatively flat tableland rises from an elevation near the coast of 300 feet to about 1,300 feet at the junction of two rivers, then to 3,000 feet at the base of the Andes. Another tableland region rises to an elevation of 5,000 feet and more. The area is also rich in volcanic activity.

Johnson is originally from Minnesota and had always wanted to live in the mountains. She's lived in and loved Wallowa County since 2012. She has a graduate degree from Clemson University in South Carolina in aquatic ecotoxicology. She works as a farrier and a veterinary assistant at the Enterprise Animal Hospital. She is also a caretaker for a local ranch.

For more information on the race go to www.equestrianists.com.

"I also have a website. www.brendasadventure.com," she said.

Johnson's progress will also be streamed in real time via her GPS. Riders will also give interviews along the way.

To donate to Johnson's charities, for Safe Harbors use the shelter's website at www.wcsafeharbors.com. For Shotzy Sanctuary, checks may be mailed to 75506 Robinson Road, Elgin, OR 97827, or by using PayPal at Shotzy08@live.com.

County:

Continued from Page A1

there wasn't the staff available from quarantining, we think that there's the potential that businesses have had impacts in the last year that we would be able to respond to."

State changes

Dawson said state changes also have affected what is considered a COVID-19 pandemic impact.

"One of the things they are now allowing as an impact is staff shortages," she said. "So if we have businesses that are not able to stay open the hours they want to be open because they don't have the staff to keep those businesses open for those hours, that is now an eligible impact from the pandemic. That opens up the opportunity for additional businesses to receive funding. So that's worth a little bit more thought to give us additional time to do outreach."

Chrystal Allen, the county's grants administrator,

also was present to explain the process for the county to submit paperwork to the state for a grant extension and getting it approved.

Nash asked Dawson if she is aware of anyone in the county currently desirous of the money, and Dawson said she wasn't. However, she said, "I'm thinking that restaurants are the most likely targets that would have the most visible impacts, in part because their employees are more likely to fit within the low-to-moderate income requirements in order for the business to receive a grant. The question, to me, will be do those restaurants want to go through the paperwork process? Is it worth it to them?"

Income limits

Employers of low-moderate income employees may qualify for grants of \$2,500 per qualifying employee, based on the number of employees being paid an annual wage paid of \$36,900 or less, Dawson said.

A low-to-moderate income business owner can apply for up to \$10,000, and income limits will vary based on



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

County Grants Administrator Chrystal Allen explains the process of obtaining federal COVID-19 pandemic funds to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners at its meeting Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Commissioner Todd Nash listens at left.

household size, from \$36,900 for a one-person household to \$69,500 for an eight-person household.

Commissioner John Hillcock asked if the grants are limited to businesses such as restaurants.

"We've got a few light industries, but I imagine their pay scales might be too high to qualify for some of this funding," he said. "Some of these places are always looking for new equipment, but I don't know what the income threshold is. ... What about the agri-

cultural sector? Have we exhausted the resources for that?"

Dawson said virtually any industry is eligible, subject to showing pandemic impacts and meeting income and other requirements.

She said that for businesses applying as employers, among the extensive paperwork required to obtain such a grant is verification from both an employer and an employee of how much the worker earns at that business.

"The employee has

to sign a paper that says what they earn from that employer," Dawson said. "It's based on what they get from that employer, not on household income or tax returns."

Roberts sought confirmation that for employers who are applying based on the number of low-moderate income employees, the income limit only pertains to what the employees are earning in that job.

"So it's just based on what I'm getting from this job, not my other seven jobs or whatever else I have for income," she asked Dawson.

"Correct," Dawson said. For employers who apply for funding based on the number of qualifying employees, the grant money goes to the business to use for business expenses, not to the employee.

Hillock asked, "I could use it to buy a new oven with, right?"

Dawson agreed that a business owner could do so, as well as purchasing other equipment and supplies.

Nash was eager to see area businesses and employers at least have the oppor-

tunity for the grants.

"I sure want people to have the opportunity to get this. I question whether there will be more grabbers, but maybe there are and I'd hate to keep somebody from having a chance at having \$2,500 or \$10,000 that would be irresponsible for us to not do that," he said. "At the same time, I hate to put a burden on the county here without the knowledge of whether we're going to get any more or not. It'd be easier to just say, 'Let's have the extension,' especially if we have people in the queue."

After agreeing to move forward with an extension request, the commissioners were eager to have the NEOEDD aggressively pursue any possible applicants, thus adding the 45-day limit on that group's assistance to applicants.

"That puts some fire under us," Dawson said.

Now that the county is pursuing an extension, NEOEDD will update the application materials and begin assisting businesses who wish to apply. For more information contact saramiller@neoedd.org.

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