

JANUARY

■ High Temperature: 50, on the 27th

• Low Temperature: 2, on the 1st

• Total Precipitation: .54 (avg.: .84)

Sunday Fire Severely Damages Inland Cafe In Baker City

Meals & Memories

■ Owner of the iconic 10th St. restaurant plans to rebuild, reopen



Photo courtesy of Kristi Hensley

Tufts of insulation and other debris covered the floor at the Inland Cafe Monday morning following a fire Sunday night at the restaurant on 10th Street.

By Jayson Jacoby
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JANUARY 16 — Kristi Hensley is sitting in a booth at one of the two restaurants she owns in Baker City, but at this moment on a cold, sunny Monday morning she is thinking only of the other restaurant.



Hensley

The one just two blocks south on 10th Street.

The one that's the source of the acrid aroma of smoke that still clings to Hensley's clothes on this, the day after.

Hensley and her husband, Chris, have for 11 years owned the Inland Cafe, a fixture in Baker City for more than half a century and one of those hometown diners that locals mention when visitors ask where they can get a hearty plateful of biscuits and gravy.

The Inland, at 2715 10th St.,

was severely damaged in a fire Sunday night.

A little more than half a day later, Hensley can scarcely comprehend what happened.

"I feel like I'm going to wake up," she says as sunshine streams in the window at her other restaurant, the Eagle Cap Grill. "It's so surreal, I didn't really believe it until I actually walked inside this morning."

What Hensley saw inside the Inland was a familiar setting, the place where generations of diners have buttered pancakes, sipped coffee and crunched bacon, rendered strange and ugly by flames and smoke and water.

Tufts of pink insulation litter the floor and dangle from the ceiling like macabre decorations.

Ash fouls the grill where, less than a day before, cooks cracked eggs and flipped crispy mounds of hashbrowns.

"I'm still shaking," Hensley

says of the experience of walking through what was left of the restaurant where she has invested so much time, money and effort.

But as much as she laments the damage to the building, Hensley says she is much more troubled by how the fire will affect her employees and her customers.

"I have the greatest employees in the world," she says of the two dozen or so people who work at the Inland, all of whom arrived Sunday night to try to console her as she shivered in the 26-degree weather and watched smoke billow from the building.

"They're like my family. That's the hardest part of this. And we treat our customers like family."

The damage was so extensive that on Monday Hensley wasn't sure it would be possible to rebuild the cafe that has been serving diners since about 1942.

Baker City Council appoints Bruland

By Casey Crowley
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JANUARY 9 — The Baker City Council is whole again for the first time in more than four months. The Council appointed Doni Bruland to fill the one vacancy on the seven-member board Tuesday night at City Hall.



Bruland

Bruland's appointment followed an oath of office in which Lynette Perry, Ken Gross and Randy Schiewe were sworn in. Perry and Gross were elected on Nov. 6 to four-year terms. Schiewe, who was appointed as a councilor in June, also was elected

Nov. 6. He will serve a two-year term, as will Bruland.

The agenda for Tuesday's meeting called for councilors to elect a mayor and acting mayor from among their ranks before appointing the new council member.

But they decided to change the agenda and appoint the new councilor first, so there would be seven councilors voting on the election of the mayor and acting mayor rather than six, which would make a tie vote possible.

With all seven councilors seated, they elected Joseph as mayor by a 4-3 vote. Mike Downing, who had served as mayor the previous two years, received the three other votes.

Man arrested after driving bus on runway

By Jayson Jacoby
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JANUARY 9 — Members of a regional SWAT team arrested a man at the Baker City Airport Tuesday afternoon after he drove a bus onto a runway and then refused to leave, forcing the city-owned airport to close for most of the day.

Scott William Chase, 46, was arrested about 4:50 p.m.

Chase, who is a transient, was evaluated by mental health professionals before being taken to the Baker

County Jail, according to the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Chase is charged with hit and run (property), first-degree criminal mischief, criminal trespassing while in possession of a firearm, first-degree disorderly conduct and improper use of 911.

According to court records, in 1997 Chase, then living in Baker City, was arrested in Union County on charges of first-degree aggravated animal abuse, possession of a controlled substance and second-degree criminal mischief.

He did not go to trial, however, after it was determined that he had a mental disease or defect.

Baker High School graduation rate rises

By Chris Collins
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JANUARY 30 — Baker High School has shown a 5-percent increase in the number of students who graduate on time in four years over last year's numbers, according to the latest Oregon Department of Education report issued last week.

About 84 percent of Baker High School seniors graduated on time in 2018. That included 112 students.

The number who dropped out before graduation day totaled 16, the report states.

The Baker statistics are 5 percentage points above the state average of about 79 percent of students graduating in four years.

The BHS on-time graduation rate has fluctuated over the past three school years — 84 percent last year, 79 percent in 2016-17 and 87 percent in 2015-16.

County gets \$1.7M to help sage grouse

By Jayson Jacoby
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JANUARY 21 — The campaign to aid Baker County's struggling sage grouse population has received a nearly \$2 million boost.

And that might just be the start of a multimillion-dollar effort to not only protect the chicken-size bird but also to improve the condition of rangeland, much of it privately owned, across the county.

The \$1.7 million award from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, approved last week, is the first installment in a planned \$6.2 million from the Board, which receives its money from the Oregon Lottery, over the next six years.

Local officials also hope to use the state money to leverage federal grants and other sources that could make available several million dollars more to combat invasive weeds.

Resident escapes burning home

By Jayson Jacoby
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JANUARY 14 — The lone occupant of a Baker City home fled safely from a fire that destroyed the structure early Sunday, and one person staying in a fifth-wheel trailer next to the house also escaped injury after the fire spread to the trailer.

The fire was ruled as accidental, not arson, although it wasn't possible to determine the precise cause, said Casey Kump, deputy state fire marshal.

Sara Waldrop, whose grandmother, Phyllis Medel, is renting the home, was alone when the fire started, Baker City Fire Chief John Clark said.

ODOT to add 3rd lane in Ladd Canyon

By Jayson Jacoby
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JANUARY 25 — Work started this week on a two-year, \$30 million project that will add a third lane to the notorious hill on Interstate 84 through Ladd Canyon near La Grande, where

slow-moving trucks sometimes occupy both lanes and cause eastbound traffic to back up on the 6-percent grade.

The contractor, Knife River, also will replace the bridge at the bottom of the grade with a box culvert that officials from

the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) say will be less prone to glazing with ice.

The lane construction and bridge replacement are scheduled for the 2019 construction season.

YMCA director hired

By Casey Crowley
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JANUARY 2 — Luke Gibson will start work Jan. 28 as executive director of the Baker County YMCA.

Gibson, 39, of Sheridan, Wyoming, has been the youth and adult sports

director for the YMCA in Sheridan for the past 14 years.

His experience and emphasis on fundraising were part of the reason he was chosen for the Baker County position, said Lindy Petrik, who has served as interim director for the Baker

County YMCA since early October.

Petrik replaced Heidi Dalton, who served as CEO for six years.

Petrik will return to her role on the YMCA board of directors when Gibson takes over.

Gibson, who earned a bachelor's

degree in business administration, also served as a city councilor in Sheridan, which has a population of about 17,000.

Prior to interviewing for the Baker County YMCA position, Gibson had never visited Baker City.