

PANHANDLE

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“We were excited,” said Huff, who’s in her second year as president of the Pine Valley Fair Association.

But as the number of COVID-19 cases began to rise in Oregon, and Gov. Kate Brown set a limit of 10 people attending indoor social gatherings, Huff’s optimism confronted reality.

Last week the Fair Association’s board of directors and members, about 20 people in all, met in Halfway to discuss the situation.

Huff said the consensus was clear. The Association voted to cancel the fair and rodeo.

The youth livestock show and sale will happen on Sept. 6, probably as a virtual event in which kids will record videos of the animals they have raised, and bidding done online. Krischele Whitnah, the livestock superintendent, said she’s still working on the details of that event.

Huff said the impediments to putting on the fair and rodeo were insurmountable.

The main challenge with the rodeo is a lack of volunteers, she said.

Huff said she had talked with organizers of the Haines Stampede Rodeo, which took place July 3 and 4.

She said the changes made in Haines due to the pandemic, including sanitizing the bleachers, would not have been possible in Halfway.

“We were going to be short of volunteers anyway,” Huff said.

The reason, she said, is that many veteran volunteers are older than 60, in the higher-risk group for severe complications from the virus.

The obstacle for the fair is the limit on the number of people who can attend an indoor event, Huff said.

With just 10 people allowed in the exhibit hall — some of whom would be staff — the event just isn’t practical, she said.

“It’s just not going to work,” Huff said.

In addition to the specific challenges with the rodeo and fair, Huff said an overriding concern was the possibility that a child could become infected while participating in the fair.

“How would we feel if some kid got sick,” Huff said. “We own the grounds. There is a liability issue.”

Although the decision to cancel the fair and rodeo seemed unavoidable, that’s not to say it was an easy one to make, Huff said.

“It just breaks my heart,” she said. “I was holding on. I hated to think we wouldn’t have fair time. It was a big letdown, and we didn’t take it lightly. It wasn’t a snap decision. Nobody’s happy with it.”

The matter is intensely personal for Huff.

She grew up in the Pine Valley and has missed only one fair in her 58 years



Kathy Orr/Baker City Herald file photo, 2007

Michelle Williams won a blue ribbon in the market class for her sheep during the 2007 Baker County Fair in Halfway.

— when her daughter was seriously injured in a car crash.

“It’s an important thing to me,” Huff said. “I just love fair time.”

And she’s already preparing for the fair’s return in 2021.

“We’re looking forward to celebrating 100 years next year,” Huff said.

Youth livestock show and sale

For dozens of youngsters this is the culmination of many months of toil, and hundreds of dollars of investment, in raising a steer, hog, sheep or other animal.

Whitnah, who has been involved in planning the show and sale for several years, said that at a minimum there will be a virtual show and sale on Sept. 6, probably in the afternoon, with details to be announced.

“We promised that to the kids,” Whitnah said. “We’re not just going to leave them hanging.”

She expects the number of market animals to be similar to previous years, with about 150 for sale. That includes a few more goats than in the past few years, as well as one turkey, a first for the Halfway fair, she said.

Whitnah said most kids acquired their fair animal before the pandemic started — as far back as last fall in the case of some steers — so they had no reason to expect the 2020 show would

be any different.

Whitnah said she would still like to put on a limited version of a live event so kids could show their animals before judges, always a big part of the fair.

But it’s not clear whether that will be possible.

Judges, at least, should be available, Whitnah said, because the Oregon State Fair has been canceled.

As disappointing as the situation is, Whitnah said the changes also give youths a real-world example of the vagaries of the livestock industry.

“It’s a learning opportunity for kids, which is one of the underlying goals,” she said. “They’re definitely learning about market risk.”

Whitnah said the industry will set a floor price for animals by the Friday before the sale.

“Kids are going to get at least that base amount,” she said.

Whitnah said that although she understands the pandemic has had a major financial toll on many people, both locally and across the state and nation, she also has seen Baker County residents show their generosity when the recipients are kids.

“Baker County as a whole steps up to support kids and agriculture,” she said.

Besides which, the sale is a chance for residents to buy “good quality meat to fill their freezers,” Whitnah said.

COUNTY

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Commissioners on Wednesday morning approved making an offer of \$500,000 for the building at 2200 Fourth St. New Directions Northwest owns the building, constructed in 1970, and offers several services there, including substance abuse and mental health programs.

New Directions is moving all its operations into a new building on 13th Street near the Baker County Sheriff’s Office and the Powder River Correctional Facility.

The 5,000-square-foot building has a real market value of \$515,000, according to the Baker County Assessor’s Office.

The offer commissioners approved Wednesday call for a \$150,000 down payment and paying the balance over 10 years at 3% interest.

“This year is an opportune time for Baker County to do it,” Commissioner Mark Bennett said of the proposed purchase.

One reason, Bennett said, is that the county received money through the federal CARES act, which Congress approved in late March to assist with

COVID-19-related issues.

Bennett said the Health Department’s current location, in a leased 3,200-square-foot building on Pocahontas Road near Saint Alphonsus Hospital, isn’t large enough to accommodate the staff.

“New Directions was willing to help the Health Department out (by selling the building at a reasonable price), and I think it’s going to be a good thing for Baker County,” Commissioner Bruce Nichols said.

The larger space would allow the county to hire an additional registered nurse, Bennett said.

In other business Wednesday, commissioners approved a new, 2-year labor contract with Local 503 of the Service Employees International Union, which represents most county employees except those in the sheriff’s office and emergency dispatch center, elected officials and supervisors.

The contract is similar to the previous 3-year pact, which expired June 30.

The new contract includes 2% annual pay raises for employees. Employees who use their personal vehicles for work will receive 35 cents per mile, up from 30 cents.

LOCAL BRIEFING

BLM increasing fire restrictions on the Vale District starting Friday

VALE — The Bureau of Land Management’s Vale District Office announced that additional fire restrictions, including bans on campfires and cross-country vehicle travel, will take effect Friday, July 24.

These restrictions will apply to all public lands, campgrounds and recreation sites administered by the Vale District, including the Malheur Resource Area, Baker Resource Area, the 500-acre National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center site, and Bureau of Reclamation lands within Vale District boundaries.

Although campfires, woodstoves and barbecues using charcoal briquettes are prohibited, stoves and heaters that use liquified or bottled gas are allowed, provided they are in an area cleared of flammable material for at least 10 feet in diameter. Smoking outdoors is permitted only within areas barren of all flammable materials for at least a 6-foot diameter, aboard boats on rivers and lakes, or inside a motor vehicle.

JUDGE DENIES REQUEST TO WAIVE SIGNATURE REQUIREMENT FOR THE GROUP MOVE OREGON’S BORDERS

Group that wants to add 17 counties to Idaho still has to collect signatures

PORTLAND (AP) — A federal judge has denied a petition to bypass state-required signatures to qualify as a ballot measure its proposal for 17 counties, including Baker, to divorce from Oregon and become part of Idaho.

U.S. District Judge Michael J. McShane ruled Monday that the group Move Oregon’s Border was not “reasonably diligent” in attempting to collect signatures, even amid the unusual limitations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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Changes hard to recognize until later

One thing we seem to forget is that for each generation there is amazement at how folks got by with so little in the past. The truth is, each generation has the most recent ideas and technology in their time. Let’s look back for a moment ...

Transportation can advance in the ability to move people. Remember, the first big advance was finding a way to travel faster than walking — running. In some cultures the people are capable of running for long distances, the Tarahumara tribe of Mexico is one such example. Once you can reach outside your own physicality, say by climbing upon an animal such as a camel, horse, or perhaps an elephant, the concept of travel suddenly changes.

Once animals were a reliable source of energy for carrying one person it was not long before vehicles were attached to the beasts so more could ride at the same time. Think of the Egyptian chariot or later, the horse and buggy — which my grandmother and grandfather’s generation used until the automobile was developed. Trains did exist in their day but were still small potatoes compared to the advances just over the horizon.

So there we have a chance to contemplate the technological advances which probably started with the discovery of the use one could get from a sharp rock.

What about the philosophical and social advances? Ahh. Here we have an entirely different situation. The intellectual evolution of humanity is every bit as complex as the change from a sharp rock to a jet airplane. This makes for an involved subject, the discussion of which can go on for decades.

We find people live in the age they are in, not really able to imagine accurately what reality is in a different age. This is inescapable since each of us have a frame of reference defined by all we know of our time, our early years up to our

present moment.

To experience a change similar to my early years you might try this: Use your telephone only to make and receive calls, no texting or messaging or voice mail. Scary! Then leave it at home. That was how our phones worked. If someone called and we weren’t home — we didn’t answer so we didn’t talk. There were no answering machines so no left messages and definitely no such thing as cellular. The phone had a wire connected to it. It was a fairly short wire so the phone lived in one place, such as the living room.

Later, when a family could afford it, there might be an extension phone in the kitchen. If you wanted to call a friend for an after school get-together, you dialed and hoped their big sister wasn’t on the phone. If she was, you would get a busy signal. You had to wait awhile and try again. Or you might just get on your bicycle and ride to your friend’s house. Likely when you got there the sister would still be on the phone, gabbing away.

It is hard to imagine how much things change until the change is behind you.

Rick Rienks
Baker City

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