

# Western Oregon man dies at Anthony Lake

**Baker City Herald staff**  
A 71-year-old Western Oregon man died Sunday morning at Anthony Lake in an apparent drowning.

According to a press release from the Baker County Sheriff's Office, Robert James Akers, who is from Brownsville, in the southern Willamette Valley between Eugene and Albany, was on the lake in a kickboat, a type of inflatable watercraft.

Anthony Lake, at an elevation of 7,100 feet, is in the Elkhorn Mountains about 35 miles northwest of

Baker City. The lake covers about 18 acres.

According to the Sheriff's Office, Akers and his wife had been camping near Granite. They drove to Anthony Lake, about 25 miles from Granite, for a day trip.

Akers was out on the lake when bystanders on shore noticed that he was having some kind of trouble, according to the Sheriff's Office.

He then fell from the watercraft. Akers was not wearing a life jacket.

Baker County Dispatch received a report of the inci-

dent at about 11:30 a.m.

Two people in a canoe reached Akers after he had been lying face down in the water for three to five minutes, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the Sheriff's Office.

The pair in the canoe pulled Akers onto rocks in the lake and began performing CPR, according to the Sheriff's Office. Another person then arrived on a paddleboard and brought Akers to shore, where CPR continued. Medical personnel pronounced Akers

deceased at the scene.

McClay said a medical examiner will determine the cause of death, whether it was a drowning or whether Akers had a medical issue preceding his fall into the lake.

The Sheriff's Office urges people to wear a life jacket when recreating on or near water.

Three people drowned earlier this summer in Baker County, one at Brownlee Reservoir near Richland and two in Oxbow Reservoir.

# Police say 'incendiary device' started truck fire

**By Chris Collins**  
ccollins@bakercityherald.com

An Oregon State Police arson detective is investigating an incident that lit up a pickup truck in a northwest Baker City neighborhood last week.

Baker City Police and city and rural fire department crews responded to a report of a vehicle fire in the 3200 block of Campbell Street at 4:57 a.m. Aug. 18.

The vehicle, a 1972 Ford pickup truck, is owned by Brandon Davis, 33, of 3220 Campbell St. The vehicle was not destroyed in the fire, but the dashboard was melted before fire-fighters got the fire out, said Detective Zach Downing of the OSP Arson Division.

Baker City Police Chief Ray Duman said the investigation was turned

over to Downing because of the fire's suspicious nature.

Downing said an "incendiary device" designed to burn hot and fast was placed under the vehicle in the early morning hours of Aug. 18.

"Probably a person lit it, knowing that no one was in the pickup," he said.

Downing declined to make any other comment pending further investigation.

# BENNETT

*Continued from Page 1A*  
She is the daughter of Toni Bennett and the third of five children, including two older brothers, and a younger sister and younger brother.

The 2017 Baker High School graduate was student body president her senior year. At Eastern Oregon University, where she is in her fourth year and plans to complete a fifth before heading to medical school, she is active in the Pre-Professional Health Club. She will be the organization's volunteer coordinator in the coming year.

While Bennett says her family has been supportive of her desire to compete for the Miss Oregon USA crown, she's not sure they fully understand the impact contestants can make on the world around them.

"Everyone gets the perception that it's a beauty contest," she says.

While the competition does include evening gown and swimwear competition along with an interview, the women, ages 19 to 27, bring serious issues to the pageant through

*"I want to make my platform as successful as it can be and to impact the lives of as many children as I can."*

— **Kara Bennett, Baker County's competitor in the Miss Oregon USA pageant**



their platforms calling for social reforms.

"These are some of the most incredible women I've ever met in my life," Bennett says of her fellow competitors.

As a pageant contestant, Bennett, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of 6, hopes to use her platform to help children with disabilities.

Bennett said it was always difficult for her to talk about her diabetes and her need to take insulin shots at school. She was embarrassed by her disease, she says.

If crowned Miss Oregon USA, Bennett would like to travel around the state working to help make life easier for other elementary school children who might feel left out or bullied because of their disabilities by helping educate their friends and classmates while providing fun and inclusive activities that they can all take part in together.

Bennett would like to incorporate some of the ideas that she and her friend, Isabella Evans, worked together on at Baker Middle School through the Kids-Heal program brought to Baker City by founder and organizer Frank Etxaniz. The program was designed "to improve the emotional, physical and creative health of all children," according to the kids-heal.org website.

"I want to make my platform as successful as it can be and to impact the lives of as many children as I can," Bennett said.

And if she doesn't bring home the Miss Oregon USA crown, she says she would like to continue to promote her platform in Baker County through the Special Olympics program.

She will look to Paula Moe, her boss at Sam-O Swim Center, where Bennett is head lifeguard and water

safety instructor, to help in that endeavor. Moe is coordinator of the Baker County Special Olympics program.

In the months leading up to the pageant, Bennett will be busy preparing for interviews and finalizing her evening gown selection and choosing other clothing for the event.

She's also securing sponsors and conducting fundraisers. Those selected for the pageant pay an \$899 entrance fee.

The winner and top finalists will receive cash, prizes, awards and scholarships, according to the Miss Oregon USA website. The winner will advance to the Miss USA pageant. And the winner of that event will represent the U.S. at the Miss Universe pageant.

There have been some changes to this year's competition because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more could happen before November. But Bennett is looking forward to it nonetheless.

"I love to get out of my comfort zone," she said. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

# COVID-19

*Continued from Page 1A*  
Hers is the only COVID-19-related death in Baker County, according to OHA statistics.

Neither the state nor the county has released the name of the resident who died.

In an Aug. 14 press release announc-

ing the outbreak, the Health Department said no Meadowbrook residents were hospitalized, and that the majority of those who tested positive had not had symptoms of the virus.

Nancy Staten, administrator of the Baker County Health Department, said Monday that the agency continues to work with Meadowbrook staff to control the virus in the facility.

Staten commended the staff for its dedication to trying to protect residents.

Baker County reported one new case of COVID-19 on Monday. The county's total cases since the pandemic started is 65.

That includes 61 county residents who tested positive, and four "presumptive" cases. Those are people who have not tested positive but have had close contact with a person who did test positive.

# Two accused of theft at business

**By Chris Collins**  
ccollins@bakercityherald.com

Two Baker City men are being held in jail on charges of breaking into the High Mountain Smoke Shop on July 25 and taking more than \$10,000 worth of merchandise from the business.

Christopher Alan Griffith, 27, has been held at the Baker County Jail since Aug. 5 on charges of first-degree aggravated theft, a Class B felony; second-degree burglary, a Class C felony; and second-degree criminal mischief, a Class A misdemeanor.

Baker City Police arrested Craig Anthony Willey, 41, on the same charges Thursday afternoon in the 2100 block of Second Street.

Willey and Griffith are accused of entering the business at 1435 Campbell Street and taking an estimated \$15,656 worth of merchandise from the business between July 24 and July 25. The criminal mischief charge alleges that the two men damaged a door and casing when they entered the building.

Griffith is being held without bail at the Baker County Jail. Willey remains in custody in lieu of \$50,000, with release possible after posting 10%, or \$5,000.



Willey



Griffith

# LOCAL BRIEFING

## Baker County YMCA hires longtime organization administrator as CEO

Rob Wilkinson is the new CEO for the Baker County YMCA.

Wilkinson, who has worked for YMCAs for 20 years, will start his new job in Baker City on Aug. 31, according to a press release.

He will replace Luke Gibson, who resigned Jan. 15 of this year.

Wilkinson has worked since November 2018 as CEO of the Family YMCA in Los Alamos, New Mexico. His first job with the YMCA was youth sports director for the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Cities in Richland, Washington. After three years in that role he was promoted to senior program director and responsible for youth sports, child care, day camps, family programs and more.

Wilkinson and his wife, Melissa, have been married for 23 years. Melissa is a teacher with more than 15 years of experience. The couple have five children. Their eldest son, Drew, recently graduated from Texas Tech University, while Erin is in college and plans to study nursing. Tatiana will be a freshman this year, Zach will be a seventh-grader and Jordan a sixth-grader.



Wilkinson

## Baker City's coronavirus relief fund committee to meet Wednesday evening

A Baker City committee that will help decide how to award up to \$75,000 in federal COVID-19 aid will have its first meeting on Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Organizations applying for some of the money should be prepared to show how they would document that the dollars would go to people affected by the pandemic.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, attendance will be limited to five people at a time. Applicants that would like to make a presentation via Zoom should call Fred Warner Jr. at 541-524-2040 or Robin Nudd at 541-524-2036.

# HEART TO HEART

## North Powder FFA thankful for efforts to put on livestock show at Baker Fair

The North Powder FFA would like to publicly thank those involved in organizing and volunteering for the 2020 Baker Livestock Show. The fair board and livestock auction committee were able to find a safe way for us to have the fair and livestock auction within the confines of the current health restrictions.

During these difficult times, the community came out in force to support our local youth in the sale. This fair was like none other we have seen before and was a remarkable success. Thank you again for all your efforts, service, and donations.

**Kenzie Leggett, president**  
**Eric Newman, vice president**  
**Trinity Nesser, secretary**  
**Seth Bingham, advisor**  
*North Powder FFA*

MALHEUR COUNTY DISTRICT QUALIFIES FOR EXEMPTION TO COVID-19 GUIDELINES

# Jordan Valley students return to class

**By Nik Streng**  
The Argus Observer

JORDAN VALLEY — For the first time since mid-March, some students in Malheur County have returned to classrooms.

Upwards of 70 miles from any other Malheur County towns, students in Jordan Valley went back to school in full starting on Monday.

The latest guidance from the Oregon Department of Education on schools reopening allowed the smallest school districts in the state to bring students back into the classrooms, and Superintendent Rusty Bengoa said that's exactly what the district planned to do.

On Aug. 18, Jordan Valley School District posted its reopening plan for the 2020-2021 school year, and while the school has check-marked Hybrid Learning for reopening, all of Jordan Valley's 49 students were slated to be in the schools on Monday.

Bengoa said the school district selected Hybrid Learning because they are also ready to facilitate a move to distance

learning if they need to.

A senior at Jordan Valley High School, Kiana Quintero said she was "excited and relieved" to be returning to school this year.

Quintero said Jordan Valley's distance learning model in the spring was "very productive," adding that the high school was able to hold its annual science fair virtually, allowing students to present their projects that they had been working on since before schools closed in the spring.

A self-described visual learner, Quintero said she struggled with math when she wasn't able to work with a teacher and struggled to stay motivated.

"If we would've had to continue with distance learning this year, it definitely would have felt like a waste," Quintero said.

According to Bengoa, school in Jordan Valley will be largely business as usual, except with students following state regulations like wearing facial coverings, washing their hands more regularly and social distancing guidance in

effect.

With 49 students in the school district this year, Bengoa said the largest class would be seven students. This is far below the limits set by ODE earlier this summer (designating classroom size based on giving every student 35 square feet of open space).

Quintero said it should have been a no-brainer from the start that Jordan Valley School District be allowed to open.

"It only made sense for us to go back to school, knowing

we were a small school with less than 18 kids in the entire school and less than 10 kids in every class," Quintero added.

Despite not having any positive cases of COVID-19 in Jordan Valley, Quintero also said that many of her peers have been following state guidelines (like wearing masks) throughout the summer. She said she believes that students will continue to follow those guidelines to make sure school stays open.

*See Schools / Page 5A*

**Paradise Awaits**  
**2021**  
You travel with your mind every day.  
Wouldn't it be nice to take your body along?  
We can help make it happen.

Your paradise is waiting!  
Call us, we'll get you there!

**Baker Valley Travel**  
541-523-9353 1-877-550-9353

**With summer here, there is lots of traveling. Be safe & have fun!**

**Joe Scott's Premier Auto Body, Inc.**  
2390 Broadway, Baker City  
541-523-5223

**CASHWAY Lumber Co.**

- Lumber
- Plywood
- Building Materials
- Hardware
- Paint
- Plumbing
- Electrical

**And much more!**

**3205 10th Street Baker City**  
541-523-4422

Mon-Fri 7:30 am - 5:30 pm  
Saturday 8 am - 5 pm  
Closed Sun