

RECORD

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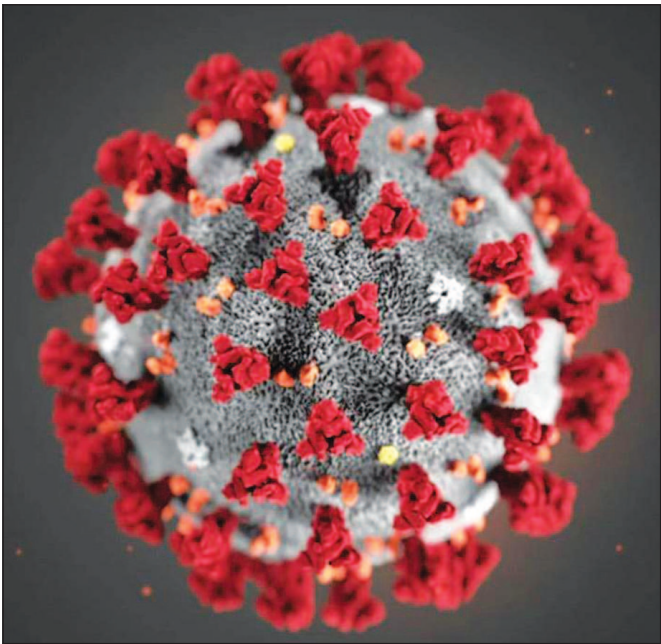
There were 12 new cases on both Nov. 13 and Nov. 20.

“This trend of more CO-VID-19 cases has placed a lot of work on our staff, and they have done a tremendous job stepping up to the challenge,” Staten said on Friday. “We’re working seven days a week to get those who have been affected the information and resources they need, and to keep the whole community safe by having those who have the virus isolate, and their close contacts quaran-tine.”

As of Thursday (Friday’s testing results were not available by press time), the county has had 318 positive tests and presumptive cases.

More than half of those cases — 174, or almost 55% — have been reported since Nov. 1.

Due to its recent trends both in the number of new cases and the percentage of tests that were positive,



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A COVID-19 virus particle.

Baker County is among 25 of Oregon’s 36 counties that Gov. Kate Brown has deemed at “extreme risk” for COVID-19 spread.

Those counties are subject to the most stringent restric-tions through at least Dec. 17, including a ban on indoor dining at restaurants, closure

of gyms and fitness centers, and restrictions on household social gatherings to six total people from no more than two households.

State officials will reassess case numbers and positivity rates next week to determine whether counties remain in the extreme risk category or,

potentially, drop to either the high, moderate or lower risk category starting Dec. 18.

Baker County would re-main in the extreme risk cat-egory if its two-week running total, from Nov. 29 through Dec. 12, was 60 or more, or it its test positivity rate for that period is 10% or higher.

The county has had 38 cases from Nov. 29 through Dec. 3.

“In order to move down from the governor’s ‘extreme risk’ category, we need to see a number of things happen, including an average of four or fewer cases per day,” Staten said on Friday. “That’s a far cry from yesterday’s 18 cases. Locally, we have to do more to slow the spread. Indoor social gatherings especially spread this virus very quickly.”

Staten said the county’s contact tracers, in talking with people who were infected recently, identified a few “clus-ters” of cases that have a com-mon origin, some involving family gatherings or groups of friends who got together

during Thanksgiving.

Some of the other new cases are sporadic, meaning they don’t have a definite origin, she said.

New case at Brooklyn

The Baker School District also reported on Thursday that a staff member at Brook-lyn Primary School had tested positive for the virus. The em-ployee was not infected while at the school, which houses students from grades 1-3, ac-cording to a press release from the District.

District Superintendent Mark Witty said the employee was sent home after Brooklyn officials learned the employee had been in contact with someone who tested positive.

The employee subsequently tested positive, Witty said. A total of 17 Brooklyn students who were in close contact with the employee have been quarantined, and will return to school on Dec. 15, according to the District.

Witty said that as of Friday, six students from the district

have tested positive for CO-VID-19 since daily in-person classes resumed for grades K-6 on Oct. 14.

None was infected at school, Witty said, something Staten has also said.

“It truly appears that by following the health proto-cols we are successfully miti-gating the spread within our schools,” Witty said.

Since Oct. 14, 146 elemen-tary students have been quarantined at some point, including classmates of stu-dents who tested positive.

Witty said 716 students from grades K-6 are at-tending school in person. Another 110 are attending the Baker Virtual Academy.

At Baker Middle School and Baker High School, 651 students are divided into four groups, with one group attending in person each day. Another 147 middle and high school students are enrolled at Eagle Cap

Since July 1, four district employees have tested posi-tive for COVID-19, Witty said.

RESPONDERS

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All three firefighters later were diagnosed with COVID-19, Lee said.

That meant those who remained well had to fill in, working 48-hour shifts, either pulling a shift before their regular schedule or after, to en-sure that the community was covered with fully-staffed fire and ambulance service when needed, Lee said. In some cases, employees were able to split the extra hours by juggling schedules.

Five people are on duty during each of the department’s three shifts. There are 16 full-time paid staff, including Lee.

Just as with the police department, the coronavirus has not spread to other staff members, Lee said.

But in both cases, each depart-ment’s overtime costs have increased.

In the meantime, both Lee and Duman said their departments will continue to do what they’ve been doing: providing extra cleaning and sanitation throughout their buildings and in their vehicles, wearing face masks, and social distancing when-ever possible.

“Hopefully everybody is cognizant

of the fact that it does have a huge im-pact on staffing levels and overtime,” Duman said.

The police chief himself was quaran-tined for two weeks this summer after he was exposed to a family member who contracted COVID-19.

In his case, many of his administra-tive duties can be handled from home. Duman said he had no symptoms, but he complied with the health depart-ment’s instructions to self-quarantine if you’ve been in close proximity to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

“Managerially it wasn’t that great of an impact,” Duman said of his ab-sence. “When you need bodies to be out on the street, that’s when it becomes difficult.”

So in order to cover shifts for the two patrol officers out on quarantine, supervisors and detectives have been called back to patrol and are working overtime to make up for the loss of the two officers, Duman said.

All supervisors also are monitoring their radios to ensure extra help is available on the streets if needed.

“Hopefully this is just a little wrinkle in the schedule,” Duman said. “If it continues it could have a major impact.”

Duman said if his staffing levels are

knocked down again, he has advised his staff that they might have to prioritize which calls to respond to in person and respond with phone calls to other cases.

And Duman said he is continually reminding his staff to be aware of the social circles they travel in.

“Be cognizant of where you go and how many people you are around,” Duman warns. “Protect yourself and your family.”

District Attorney Greg Baxter, who became ill in the second half of No- vember, had to seek a continuance of a hearing on motions regarding Shawn Greenwood, who is facing multiple charges including solicitation to com-mit murder and second-degree murder in Baker County Circuit Court.

“I went and got tested and I had the flu instead of COVID,” Baxter said Friday. “I was down for the count for about a week.”

The district attorney says he usually has one bout of the flu each winter.

“Hopefully this is my one time this year,” he said.

Baxter said he has allowed other members of his staff to work from home whenever possible, especially those who are at high-risk, during the pandemic.

Fire damages home

An older mobile home on property at 1015 Walnut St. caught fire about 10 p.m. Thursday.

“Crews arrived to a working structure fire,” Battalion Chief David Blair stated in a press release.

Blair said a space heater in use caused the fire, which was confined to the mobile home.

A house on the property valued at about \$60,000, and owned by Robert E. Humphrey, according to Baker County Assessor’s Office records, was not damaged.

Blair said all occupants were able to escape the structure safely. No one was hurt.

Fire crews from Baker City and Baker Rural Fire Protec-tion District, a total of 16 people, responded, Blair said. They spent about two hours at the scene.

The Salvation Army was contacted to help the displaced residents, Blair said.

Christmas lighting contest underway

The Baker County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau has announced its inaugural Light Up Baker County contest.

People can nominate themselves or a neighbor’s home anywhere in the county, and upload a photo of the decorated property. The deadline is 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 15. Catego-ries include: spirit of Christmas; Griswold award; Santa’s favor-ite, Frosty’s recognition; North Pole (decorated city entrance); people’s choice; best use of nonlighted decorations.

Details available at <https://www.facebook.com/Visitbaker>

10,000

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The figure of 9,140 for the 1990 Census was the city’s lowest since 1930 (7,858).

In the two ensuing head counts, however, Baker City again pushed close to the 10,000 ceiling — 9,860 in 2000 and 9,828 in 2010.

Although the national Cen-sus, which is an actual count of people, happens only every decade, in the years between both the Census Bureau and Portland State University’s Population Research Center issue annual estimates.

These figures aren’t based on residents’ responses, as in the case of the decennial Census.

Both agencies start with the population from the most recent Census and then use

various measurements to derive an estimate.

But here’s the thing: The Census Bureau and Portland State don’t employ the same methodology for estimating city populations.

A potentially significant difference is that Portland State’s demographers rely largely on a report that each city submits yearly showing changes in their number of housing units. Portland State assumes an average number of residents per unit based on Census Bureau data.

The Census Bureau, meanwhile, considers births and deaths in coming up with its population estimates for cities.

(Portland State also consid-ers births when calculating estimates for county popula-tions.)

The differing strategies can result in major differences between Portland State’s and the Census Bureau’s popula-tion estimates.

As of July 1, 2020, for instance, Portland State pegs Baker City’s population at 10,010.

The Census Bureau’s July 1, 2019, estimate (the 2020 version hasn’t been released) for the city was 9,809.

The difference is even greater when it comes to Baker County’s population.

Portland State puts that number at 16,910, while the Census Bureau’s figure is 16,134.

Births and deaths

These statistics from the Oregon Health Authority don’t perfectly correspond to Baker City’s population, since

death totals are only available for the county as a whole for 2018 and 2019. The reports for 2010-17 break down death tallies by ZIP code but not by city limits. Baker City is in the 97814 ZIP code area, which also includes parts of Baker, Sumpter and Keating valleys.

Births are also recorded by ZIP code, not by city.

For the period 2010-19, Baker County recorded 2,096 deaths and 1,625 births, a net loss of 471 residents.

About 80% of the county’s total births were to residents in the 97814 ZIP code.

The percentage of the county’s total deaths in the 97814 area is slightly lower, at about 77%.

Baker City water/sewer accounts

A measurement that is spe-

cific to the Baker City limits is the number of active utility accounts.

Jeanie Dexter, the city’s finance director, provided re-ports to the Herald showing that the number of accounts has risen by 128 over the past five years, from 4,151 in December 2015 to 4,279 in December 2020.

Housing construction

Dawn Kitzmiller, the Baker City/County building official, reports that dur-ing the past 12 months the building department has permitted 17 new single-family homes inside the Baker City limits, along with eight duplexes and three manufactured homes. That’s a total of 36 new dwelling spaces, Kitzmiller said.

In the previous 12 months,

there were 13 dwelling spaces permitted inside the Baker City limits — 11 single-family homes and two manufactured homes.

Elsewhere in Baker County, but outside Baker City, there have been 35 new dwelling spaces permitted in the past 12 months, includ-ing 30 single-family homes and five manufactured homes.

That compares with 25 total dwelling units in the county in the previous 12 months — 19 single-family homes and six manufac-tured homes, Kitzmiller said.

She said both the past two years were popular times for residential additions and remodels, and even more popular was adding de-tached accessory structures.

County buys air filters for Sheriff’s Office

■ Commissioners also approve temporary trailer to house dispatchers if needed

By Samantha O’Conner
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Baker County commissioners on Wednesday, Dec. 2, decided to buy air fil-tration units for the Sheriff’s Office and set up temporary housing for emergency dispatchers in case COVID-19 quaran-tining leads to a shortage of dispatchers.

Jason Yencopal, the county’s emer-gency manager, said the bipolar ioniza-tion units will help protect employees by killing airborne viruses, and bacteria, as well as mold.

Commissioners approved the purchase of nine units for \$9,984.

Yencopal also discussed temporary housing for dispatchers, who also work in the building that includes the Sheriff’s Office and the Baker County Jail.

“If a dispatcher is contact traced and is not able to go to work, we only have a finite amount of dispatchers,” Yencopal. “What we’re looking at is having a hous-ing option there at the site, so that if we

had to limit operations to one dispatcher, while one may be sleeping, that they would be able to get them from there into the center right as an emergency starts.”

Even dispatchers who live in Baker City, if they had to drive from their homes to the center in the case of an emergency, that delay could be a problem for police and fire responders, Yencopal said.

“It’s those first few minutes of an emergency that are usually really hectic and so having somebody there, not hav-ing to travel to get to the site and have them right on site is what we’re looking at trying to do,” he said.

Commissioners authorized spending up to \$15,000 from the county’s federal COVID-19 aid to set up temporary hous-ing at the Sheriff’s Office.

This will consist of a trailer that will include a shower, Yencopal said.

In other business Wednesday, commis-sioners:

- Approved the purchase of cabinets for the new Health Department building, the former New Directions Northwest office at 2200 Fourth St. The county will buy the cabinets from Home Depot for \$11,516.14.
- Approved the purchase of a tent for the drive-thru COVID-19 testing clinic the Health Department has set up in the student parking lot at Baker High School. The clinic is for Baker School District students and staff.
- The cost for the tent is \$18,248.40.
- Approved the first reading of a new fee schedule for a variety of county services.
- Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said commissioners will discuss the fee schedule at their next meeting, Dec. 16, and residents will be able to comment on the proposal.
- The proposed fee schedule is available on the county’s website, www.bakercounty.org

New At The Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. Drive-in hours at 2400 Resort St. are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m.

FICTION

- “DarkTides,” Philippa Gregory
- “Hot to Trot,” M.C. Beaton
- “How to Raise an Elephant,” Alexander McCall Smith
- “Tom Clancy’s Shadow of the Dragon,” Marc Cameron
- “All That Glitters,” Danielle Steel

NONFICTION

- “American Crisis” Andrew Cuomo
- “Eat a Peach,” David Chang
- “Slanted,” Sharyl Attkisson
- “Battle of Brothers,” Robert Lacey
- “The Anatomy of Fake News,” Nolan Higdón

DVDS

- “Gumby: the Best of” (Family)
- “Fatima” (Drama)
- “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” (Comedy, 1985)
- “Hard Kill” (Action)
- “Teen Spirit” (Drama)