

# SCHOOLS

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Since Oct. 14, Baker students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade have attended in-person classes four days per week.

Since Nov. 9, students at Baker Middle School and Baker High School have had in-person classes one day per week.

Eight students have tested positive for COVID-19, and there's no evidence that any of them was infected while at school, according to Witty and the Baker County Health Department. Witty said 161 students have been quarantined at some point, along with 53 employees.

Witty said distribution of COVID-19 vaccines later in 2021 will be the next step in returning to in-person classes for all district students.

He said he will take the vaccine when it's available.

# BROOKS

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The Arnold Palmer Cup wasn't supposed to interfere with Brooks' usual Christmas visit to Baker City, where his childhood home sits less than a block from Quail Ridge Golf Course.

His brother, Mike, helps manage the city-owned 18-hole course, and both Colleen and her late husband, Howard Brooks, were golfers.

The Arnold Palmer Cup, which started in 1997 with men's teams only and added women players three years ago, usually alternates each year between a course in the U.S. and one abroad.

The 2020 competition was originally scheduled for July 3-5 at Lahinch Golf Club in Ireland.

Brooks, who said he vacationed in Ireland many years ago, was looking forward to returning to the island, this time in his familiar role as golf coach.

But then COVID-19 arrived.

This spring, event organizers announced that the Arnold Palmer Cup wouldn't happen in Ireland. The event was instead rescheduled for Dec. 21-23 at Bay Hill Club & Lodge in Orlando, Florida. That's the venue that Palmer, the beloved professional golfer who died in 2016, founded, and it's where the inaugural Arnold Palmer Cup was played in 1997.

And so now, with Christmas approaching, Brooks is planning not to fly west to Oregon, but rather to drive 620 miles south from

# TESTING

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Davis and the other participants drove into a temporary open-sided shelter, and they were tested without having to leave their car.

Hobizal said the OHA has scheduled 19 testing events this week across Oregon, including ones in La Grande, Ontario and Pendleton.

Hobizal complimented the county officials who arranged for the event in the Nazarene Church's parking lot. Participants entered the lot at its northeast corner, off Cedar Street, and exited at the southwest corner, off Hughes Lane.

"They have done a great job of setting this up," he said.

Jason Yencopal, the county's emergency management director, said multiple agencies contributed to arranging the testing event.

"OHA provided testers, the county provided staff, the (Baker) City Public Works Department provided cones to flow traffic through the site and gravel for vehicle traction, the county Road Department provided signs, the Nazarene Church provided the site, and the Eastern Oregon Medical Reserve Corps provided the tent as

# TUBA

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But Titus, in his first year of teaching, wasn't strumming a guitar or drawing a bow across a violin or playing any other instrument commonly associated with these seasonal songs.

He performed the beloved melodies with the distinctive deep rumble of the tuba, which usually adds a bit of background to an orchestra but is not often employed as a solo instrument.

But even something as formidable as the tuba can be silenced by a Baker City winter.

"I'll play until the instrument freezes up," Titus said Wednesday morning as he lubricated the tuba's valves, gathered his book of Christmas carols arranged for solo tuba, and prepared to leave the warmth of the school for a seat outside the front door.

He acknowledged, though, that he might succumb to the weather before his tuba does.

Titus said he decided that despite the difficulties of performing outside when temperatures are below freezing, these brief concerts would brighten students' days before they begin the holiday break in this most unusual year.

"I figured I might as well give the kids some extra holiday spirit," said Titus, who also teaches music at Haines Elementary School.

# EXEMPTION

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Hibbert read a four-page report detailing her findings as to why the alternative to the competitive bidding process should be allowed.

She concluded by stating that the CM/CG method will:

- Result in substantial cost savings and reduce risk to the District.
- Allow the District to select a contractor with the specialized expertise required to make the seismic improvements on the building, which was constructed in 1934.
- Benefit the public by improving safety and coordination during construction
- Not encourage favoritism or diminish competition.

At its Nov. 19 meeting, the Board approved a District committee's recommendation to hire a Vancouver, Washington, company to perform the architectural and engineering services through the CM/CG method if approved through the contract review process.

Tuesday's meeting provided time for public comment on the issues. There was none.

In other business Tuesday, the Board reviewed a personnel report on these new hires:

- Amanda Dolby as a confidential employee who will work as a registrar/administrative assistant at Baker Technical Institute.
- Veronica Baxter, alternative position as a tutor in the special education department/Brooklyn Primary School.
- Addie Voss, classified special education paraprofessional at South Baker Intermediate School.
- Lisa Hiatt, temporary



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

South Baker students listen to their music teacher, Duncan Titus, play Christmas carols on his tuba as they wait to file into the school on Wednesday.

Titus moved to a different spot each morning. South Baker students, in deference to social distancing, are divided into three groups, mainly by grade level, and each group uses a different entrance and exit.

On Wednesday morning Titus sat near the front entrance, chatting with students as they waited to go inside.

"Any requests?" Titus said. Hearing none, he launched

into a jaunty version of "Jingle Bells."

(Well, as jaunty as a tuba can be.)

Titus thanked one student, who was wearing a colorful Christmas sweater festooned with bells, for "jingling along with me."

Titus, who grew up in Dayton, Ohio, said students seemed to enjoy the music.

"Some wave, some say, 'hi, Mr. Titus,'" he said.

paraprofessional at Brooklyn. Superintendent Mark Witty also broached the subject of hiring a person whose time would be dedicated to District communications. That would allow Jason Todd, who currently devotes part of his schedule to that work, more time to help teachers with computer issues, Witty said.

The Board also reviewed plans for a Zoom meeting of Eastern Oregon educational leaders and legislators, which

is scheduled via Zoom on Jan. 7. School board members and administrators from throughout the region, including those from the Baker School District, will discuss issues regarding the impact the coronavirus has had on education.

Members of a Baker family will speak about their school experience during the pandemic and a La Grande High School student will talk about his experience with comprehensive distance learning, limited in-person instruction

Titus said several students also thanked him later during class.

He said kindergartners at Haines, where he performed on Tuesday, seemed especially excited about the concert. He attributes this to the imposing size of the tuba.

"It's bigger than they are," Titus said. "I think it's a fun instrument."

The pandemic, as with so many other things, has made it more difficult to teach music, Titus said.

He can't use ukuleles, for instance, because it's not possible to properly sanitize the instruments without potentially damaging them.

Titus noted, though, that as a first-year teacher he doesn't have the perspective of his colleagues.

"I don't have any normal year to compare it to," he said. "You just have to be creative."

Boomwhackers, for instance.

That's the brand name for simple plastic tubes cut to lengths to create specific musical notes when they're smacked against a leg, desk or other object.

The tubes come in multiple colors as well as lengths, so students can follow along and whack their "instrument" when the song calls for their particular note.

And perhaps as important as any other attribute, Titus said, the Boomwhackers are easy to sanitize.

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