



In NATION, 5A
Biden becomes president

Baker City Herald

January 21, 2021

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QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber

A special good day to Herald subscriber Larry Smith of Baker City.

Oregon, 3A

SALEM (AP) — Oregon is expecting to receive federal stimulus money this week to help pay for its COVID-19 vaccination program.

BRIEFING

Blood drive fully booked, but donors can get on waiting list

The American Red Cross is sponsoring a blood drive on Jan. 25 from noon to 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at the Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane in Baker City. Although all appointments are booked, donors can be placed on a waiting list, in case of cancellations, by calling Myrna Evans at 541-523-5368.

COVID-19 testing clinic Jan. 27 at Halfway

HALFWAY — Baker County is hosting a free drive-thru COVID-19 testing clinic on Wednesday, Jan. 27, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Halfway Lions Club. Pre-registration is encouraged but not required. To pre-register, which will shorten the wait time, go to www.doineedacovid19test.com

WEATHER

Today
38 / 26



Mostly cloudy

Friday
39 / 22



Partly cloudy

Full forecast on the back of the B section.

The space below is for a postage label for issues that are mailed.

Baker Middle School, Baker High School Students To Expand In-Person Class Schedule From 1 Day Per Week To 2 Days Starting Jan. 25

Students To Spend More Time In Class



Chris Collins/Baker City Herald

From left, Eowyn Smith, Tucker Magee and Hannah Lay wait patiently Wednesday morning for the doors to open to begin their one day of in-person instruction this week at Baker Middle School.

By Chris Collins
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As students waited for doors to Baker Middle School to open Wednesday morning to admit them to their one day a week of in-person instruction, a small sampling of them said they were eager for next week, when their classroom time will be doubled.

Baker School District Superintendent Mark Witty announced Tuesday that students at the middle school and at Baker High School will start attending in-person classes two days a week when the second semester begins on Monday, Jan. 25.

Those students have been taking in-person classes once a week since Nov. 9.

The district's elementary school students, from kindergarten through sixth grade, have been attending in-person classes each day in the district's four-day weekly schedule, since Oct. 14.

In a Tuesday press release, Witty said the District can expand in-person classes at the middle school and high school based on new guidelines the Oregon Department of Education released earlier in the day.

The revised guidelines increase the size of the cohort group that students can be in contact with weekly from the current 50 to 100, Witty said.

Hannah Lay, a BMS eighth-grader, said she's excited to have a second day of in-person classes in the next semester. "I like getting out of the house," she said.

Eowyn Smith, another eighth-grade student, said she welcomes the change as well.

"I'm excited because I'll be able to see people," she said.

Cierra VanDyke also was among those gathered Wednesday on the sidewalk outside the school with her eighth-grade friends Taleana Pugel and Katherine Macias waiting for the doors to open.

They agreed that more time in school will be a good thing.

Getting out among their friends was also a main attraction for the three girls, but they believe that the in-person



Chris Collins/Baker City Herald

Cierra VanDyke has her phone to keep her occupied while waiting for friends to join her at school.

instruction also will be a benefit for them.

"It gives me a better chance to learn because I'm a visual learner," Katherine said.

Cierra agreed.

"It's harder to learn online than it is in person," she said.

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County on pace to stay in extreme

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker County's rate of new COVID-19 cases over the past 10 days puts the county at risk of remaining in the extreme-risk category, and thus subject to the most stringent business restrictions, at least through Feb. 11.

The county, after being in the high-risk category from Jan. 1-14, returned

to extreme risk on Jan. 15.

The county will be at the extreme level at least through Jan. 28.

The county's category for the period Jan. 29-Feb. 11 will be based on its COVID-19 case counts and test positivity rate from Jan. 10-23.

As a county with a population between 15,000 and 30,000 (Baker County has about 16,800 residents),

Baker is in the extreme-risk category if it exceeds either of two measurements:

- a test positivity rate of 10% or higher during a two-week measuring period
- 60 or more new cases over the two-week measuring period

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Jobless rate drops steadily

County has regained many of the jobs lost last spring, but leisure and hospitality industry struggles with restrictions

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker County has recovered most of the jobs it lost early in the COVID-19 pandemic, but the county's unemployment rate, driven by continuing struggles in the restaurant and hospitality industry, remains higher than it was for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

That three-year period marked the lowest jobless rates for the county since the Oregon Employment Department started tracking that statistic in 1990.

The annual seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the county was 5.5% in 2017, 5.3% in 2018 and 4.6% — a record low annual rate — in 2019.

In December 2019 the monthly jobless rate reached an all-time low of 3.8%.

The rate rose slightly, to 4.1%, for the first three months of 2020.

Then the pandemic started.

Its effects were almost immediate.

In April the county's jobless rate more than tripled, to 13%. That was higher than in any month during the national recession that started in 2008 and persisted in Baker County for four years.

The county's annual jobless rate ranged from 10.3% to 10.9% for the period 2009-12.

Starting in 2013 the county's jobless rate declined for each of the next seven years, reaching the record-low of 4.6% in 2019.

As the spring of 2020 progressed, with many local businesses remaining closed or subject to state-mandated restrictions, Baker County's jobless rate peaked in May at 13.2%.

The county's number of private, nonfarm jobs followed a similar trajectory.

There were 4,210 private, nonfarm jobs in March 2020 — the most ever during that month, according to Oregon Employment Department records.

The pandemic's effect was most acute in April, when the number of private jobs plummeted to 3,910, a decline of 7.1%.

But private, nonfarm jobs rose to 4,050 in May — a 3.6% jump.

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SATURDAY — BLAZING THE 566-MILE BLUE MOUNTAINS TRAIL