

'JOE BELL' TELLS COMPELLING, TRAGIC TALE FROM 2013

Film featuring story of La Grande father, son set for release July 23

By Dick Mason

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — The compelling and tragic story of Jadin Bell and his father, Joe Bell, will soon hit the silver screen.

"Joe Bell" is set to open in theaters July 23. The announcement has been made on the Twitter site of Mark Wahlberg, an American actor, producer and songwriter, who plays Joe Bell in the film.

"This family and their story touched my heart in a big way," the social media post said.

The story of Joe and Jadin Bell made national headlines in 2013 after Jadin, a 15-year-old sophomore at La Grande High School, took his own life after being bullied because he was gay.

Joe Bell later started on a national walk in memory of his son to draw attention to bullying. He was killed on Oct. 9, 2013, while walking along a road when he was hit by a truck in Colorado.

The movie was originally scheduled to be released in theaters in February but the release was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Terry McQuisten, owner of the Eltrym Theater in Baker City, said she's requested the film, but hasn't confirmed the booking yet. For updates, check the Eltrym's Facebook



The (La Grande) Observer/File Photo, 2013

Before beginning his cross-country walk in 2013, Joe Bell embraces his wife, Lola, beside the tiled palmprint of their late son Jadin in a display made several years ago at Riverside Park.

page or www.eltrym.com.

Patty Johnson, manager of La Grande's Granada Theatre, said she is attempting to get the movie booked for showings at the theater.

The film is being released by Solstice Studios and was directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green and its screenplay was written by Diana Ossana and Larry McMurtry. Ossana and McMurtry also wrote the screenplay for the 2005 landmark film Brokeback Mountain. The stars of Joe

Bell, in addition to Wahlberg, include Connie Britton and Morgan Lily. The movie was filmed at sites around Utah, including Salt Lake City and Summit County.

Although the film was not shot in Union County, Wahlberg did visit La Grande in late January 2019 to do research for his part in the movie.

A portion of the movie focuses on Joe Bell's walk, when he gave a number of talks in churches, schools and other

places on behalf of his foundation. He talked of the evils of bullying and what can be done to prevent it.

Jadin Bell's family members and friends said bullying drove him to suicide, and they later launched an anti-bullying campaign called Faces for Change.

Joe Bell premiered at the 2020 Toronto International Film Festival. It was once titled Good Joe Bell, according to the website www.slashfilm.com.

RESTRICTIONS

Continued from A1

Users of BLM land can use stoves, heaters, portable grills and other equipment that runs on liquified gas, as well as gas-powered generators, so long as the device is in an area cleared of flammable debris for at least 10 feet around.

"It is uncommonly drier than normal in Eastern Oregon, which is why we are entering into fire restrictions earlier than we have the last few years," said

Tracy Skerjanec, fire management officer for the Vale District, which includes BLM land in Baker County, mainly south and east of Baker City. "Rising temperatures combined with minimal precipitation throughout June have now cured the annual grasses and other fine fuels that carry fire quickly."

Rainfall at the Baker City Airport through June 28 was about 20% of average for the months.

Chain saw use will be prohibited starting July 1, as well as the use of

steel core ammunition, metal targets and all explosives, including exploding targets.

"We still want people to enjoy their public lands, but we have to balance that with reasonable restrictions to prevent wildfires," said Al Crouch, the Vale District's fire mitigation and education specialist. "Statistically, fires caused by motorized vehicles and trailers are second only to lightning starts."

More information is available at www.blm.gov/orwafire.

Oregon Legislature wraps up turbulent 2021 session

By Sara Cline

Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Oregon Legislature adjourned Saturday afternoon, June 26, bringing to a close the 2021 session in which significant renewable energy, police reform, wildfire recovery and racial equity bills were passed.

The session was also marked by COVID-19 scares, tension between majority

Democrats and Republicans and the expulsion of a lawmaker who let rowdy protesters into the Capitol.

"This session has been unlike any other in Oregon history," said House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland.

On Saturday the Legislature passed House Bill 2021, which would require the state to transition 100% of its electricity generation to clean,

renewable sources by 2040. Advocates say that would be the fastest such transition in the country, but opponents worry the push will lead to higher energy prices.

This session was unlike those in the past as the Capitol in Salem was closed to the public for the entire session, which began in January, because of COVID-19 restrictions.

The session was also notable as it saw the state House expel a Republican member who let far-right protesters into the Capitol on Dec. 21. On June 11 Rep. Mike Nearman was removed by a 59-1 vote, marking the first time a member has been expelled by the House in its 160-year history. The only vote against the resolution for expulsion was Nearman's own.

Nearman has argued the Capitol should be open.

For the past two years, Republican state senators staged walkouts to deny the chamber a quorum. During the debate over measures that ban guns from the Capitol and mandate the safe storage of guns, five Republican senators did not attend. However, six did. The GOP senators that attended have since faced death threats

and recall petitions from their own party.

A package of police reform bills was passed that includes requirements that police officers assigned to crowd control during protests must be clearly identified by name or badge number; and another provision requires all new police officer background checks must include a scan for membership in hate groups.

Umatilla County at high risk in final COVID-19 weekly rating

By Bryce Dole

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County is one of six counties in Oregon that remained at high risk in Gov. Kate Brown's latest, and final, coronavirus risk level assessment.

Brown, who announced the risk levels Tuesday, June 22, said Oregonians no longer will hear about risk levels as the state inches closer to the 70% vaccine threshold and June 30, the date Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced she would end statewide restrictions, including county risk levels. Brown said she would lift the mandates on June 30 or whenever the state reached the 70% level, whichever arrived first. It appears likely that June 30 will arrive first.

Among counties in Northeastern Oregon, Umatilla County is an outlier when it comes to risk levels. Baker, Union, Wallowa and Morrow counties all remained at lower risk for weeks, and some for months.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said there could be a number of explanations for this, including the county's greater population density and its industrial facilities increasing the risk of infection, but it's difficult to pin exactly why the county continues to report relatively high case counts.

The data shows Umatilla County ultimately will be dragged across the finish line when the state reaches 70%. But county officials are worried that reopening may lead to case spikes in the county due to its low vaccination rate.

"Somehow, being over the line gives the impression that COVID is over," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said. "And that's a false assumption. It's not. It's not over, even if Oregon opens up, it's not over here. It's going to continue."

Last week, Umatilla County reported 76 cases, 35 more than the previous week, according to county health data. That's the steepest weekly case spike the county has reported since April, after reporting declining weekly cases for five straight weeks.

"We were trending downwards, and that (case spike) keeps us solidly in that high risk unfortunately," said Fiumara. "I wish it wasn't this way. But, we're waiting for the rest of the state to carry us across the goal line."

Fiumara said much of the county's cases are being traced back to small social gatherings but with no large outbreaks. However, he said people who have been exposed often are reluctant to cooperate with contact tracers, all but assuring cases are going unreported and making it difficult to track the spread of infection.

Fiumara and Murdock each said nearly all reported cases are coming from people who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19.

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- Babies First! and CaCoon Home Visiting Program
- Tuberculosis testing
- Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC)
- Birth and death certificates

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