

# Local & State

## CHURCHILL

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But now, having received a grant, the Vegters plan to use the money to help repair roofing and windows, several of which have cracks in the glass panes. It is important that the windows are exact replicas of what they were in 1926 when Churchill opened.

The window sills need paint, and some require wood filler. Many windows either don't open or are hard to open after nearly a century of use. Fixing the windows will also make Churchill more energy efficient — the majority of the building rarely dips below 80 degrees on hot days.

"For preservation standards, in order to maintain your status on the historic register, everything on the exterior of the building needs to basically remain the same as it was when it was built," Vegter said.

Churchill was registered on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008. One of the criteria for getting on the register is that the building must have some historical significance, and Churchill is one of two remaining buildings designed by Charles Lee Miller, who built over 400 projects throughout his career. It's the only building he designed that is still standing in Baker City.

The building, on Broadway Street between 16th and 17th streets, operated as a school from 1926 until 2002, when the Baker School District closed Churchill. The district sold the building to Jim and Pam Van Duyn in 2006.

Vegter said the school didn't have electricity for much of the next dozen years, during which it was vandalized multiple times.

"We had a dollar and we had a dream, and this was a project that we thought we could undertake."

— Brian Vegter, who with his wife, Corine, owns the former Churchill School

When the Vegters bought Churchill in 2018 they needed three months to get basic amenities installed, including electricity, a working toilet and running water in one sink.

The couple sold their Baker City home and liquidated their savings to pay for renovations at Churchill. They lived in a trailer until they got electricity in the school and moved in immediately after they had enough utilities to do so. They worked from dawn till dusk so they could open as soon as possible, as their cash was disappearing fast.

"We had a dollar and we had a dream, and this was a project that we thought we could undertake," Vegter said. "There's lots of things that, if we had that to do again, we would totally do differently. But at the same time, we never regretted doing this."

Many volunteers, including local and out-of-state residents, have helped the Vegters with every project for the building. However, Vegter said that the more volunteer hours Churchill has, the less funding they get from the state, so it was a hard balancing act to decide which projects need state funding and which ones they can accomplish with volunteer work.

Churchill serves as an integrative space for artists to create and sell their



Joanna Mann/Baker City Herald

Owner Brian Vegter said renovations to windows at Churchill School will make the historic building, which opened in 1926, more energy efficient.

pieces, musicians to perform and bikers and skiers to rest while they're in town. The Airbnb space stands in stark contrast to the rest of the building with its modern interior and remote control-operated blinds, which cost \$1,000 each.

While fixing the roofing and windows with the state grant is a one-time project, there are other grants the Vegters plan to apply for in the future. There's a lot of tuckpointing that needs to be done, which has to do with color matching the mortar in brickwork, that Vegter plans to do when he has the money for it. He hopes to be able to hire somebody to do this kind of work some day, but at the same time, he really enjoys doing these projects himself.

Fortunately, the Vegters have made connections with people who care about the building as much as they do and have helped fund various projects out of pocket. Charlie Ernst, who the Vegters met at a Cycle Oregon event, learned about the project and gave them the money to fix part of the roof, turning an \$80,000 project into a \$12,000 one.

"Communities rally around preservation in general," Vegter said. "Through all the other stuff that we do in the community, we eventually developed relationships with people who are like, 'Oh, yeah, if the Vegters say they're gonna do something, they're gonna do it. And we want to be part of that.'"

## Firsthand view gives reporter fresh appreciation for top-notch bicyclists

By Joanna Mann

jmanna@bakercityherald.com

I have never seen the limits of human endurance pushed so far as I did at the Baker City Cycling Classic June 25-27.

Every year hundreds of bicyclists flock to Baker City to battle it out in the three-day bicycling event, riding for three to five hours each day through nearby towns, forests and fields in the athletic experience of a lifetime.

I had a front row seat for the show, although fortunately not in the bike saddle itself. I rode alongside the Men's Cat 4/5 division race as a radio operator,

communicating with other race officials about traffic and tending to the needs of the riders. Mostly I just sat in awe at the unflinching determination in front of me.

Starting at Baker High School on Friday, June 25, the riders peddled through North Powder, Union, Catherine Creek State Park and Medical Springs. Potato sheds, cows, horses and the wonders of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest whizzed by as the cyclists pushed through over 70 miles at an average of 20 miles per hour. Their close formations made me nervous that they would crash into one another at any moment, but

they moved as one cohesive unit in a way that resembled unique choreography and well practiced teamwork.

The races were divided into 10 categories that grouped together riders of similar levels, and while men and women raced separately, their payout was the same for the first time in the history of the race.

On Saturday, June 26, the cyclists rode laps through downtown Baker City as spectators cheered and rang cowbells on the sidelines behind yellow tape.

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Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

An illegal firework over Baker City on Sunday night, July 4.

## FIREWORKS

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Regan said there were no reports of fireworks starting fires in Baker City.

"We know we've had a dry summer," he said.

Baker City didn't ban fireworks, as was the case in some Oregon cities.

The Dispatch Center's log showed that the Haines Fire Department extinguished a fire about 10:05 p.m. at the Haines Stampede Rodeo grounds. The log entry listed the incident as "fireworks offense." No other information was available.

Al Crouch, fire mitigation specialist for the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District, said Monday morning, July 5, that no human-caused fires had been reported during the holiday weekend on the district.

According to the Dispatch Center log, police didn't issue citations on any of the fireworks calls.

That's typical for Baker City Police, Regan said.

"The general approach the city police has taken, although we let individual officers use their discretion, is to take an education approach," he said.

There were a few fireworks complaint reports on Saturday, July 3, and in the afternoon and early evening on Sunday, but the majority happened after 8:30 p.m.

Regan said Baker City Police don't patrol specifically for fireworks violations.

"It's complaint-driven," he said.

Between 8:47 p.m. and midnight there were 16 calls for potential fireworks offenses, at locations including: 2600 block of Grove Street; 1000 block of Resort Street; Colorado Avenue and Fourth Street; McCarty Bridge Road northeast of Haines; Broadway and Plum streets; Fourth Street between A and B streets; the Dewey Avenue railroad underpass; Carter Street between 12th and 13th Streets; Highway 7 and Indiana Avenue; Clark Street and Washington Avenue; the 3400 block of Eighth Drive.

Although Baker City Police didn't cite anyone specifically for fireworks offenses, police did cite a Baker City man on a charge of manufacturing a destructive device.

Robert Steven Merritt, 47, of Baker City, was cited at 9:14 a.m. Sunday in the 400 block of Spring Garden Ave., Regan said. He said the device, which apparently utilized gunpowder rather than disassembled fireworks, allegedly damaged a vehicle in the area.

## NEWS OF RECORD

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### POLICE LOG

#### Baker City Police

#### Arrests, citations

FAILURE TO APPEAR (Umatilla County warrant), POSSESSION OF METHAMPHETAMINE AND HYDROCODONE: Paul Adam Heller, 50, 1:20 p.m. Saturday, July 3 in the 2300 block of Resort Street; cited and released.

#### Baker County Sheriff's Office

#### Arrests, citations

SECOND-DEGREE CRIMINAL TRESPASSING: Jay Byron Bishop, 41, Sumpter, 2:50 p.m. Sunday, July 4 in the 100 block of Mill Street in Sumpter; cited and released.

HARASSMENT: Casey Lynn Lick, 47, Baker City, 9:26 a.m. Sunday, July 4 at 22097 Sumpter Stage Highway; cited and released.

# Oregon's unusually hot summer political season

By Gary A. Warner

Oregon Capital Bureau

Summer is normally a relatively quiet time in Oregon politics.

But 2021 has been about as abnormal as a year can be. The Legislature adjourned June 26, a day before Salem recorded a record-shattering high temperature of 117 degrees.

Politics remains broiling as well, with a special session in September to decide Oregon's political map for the next decade, electioneering for 2022 gearing up, and the reopening of the Oregon Capitol to the public.

Some of the front-burner issues in the weeks ahead:

• Clock running on gun initiative: A gun control bill approved by the

Legislature this year becomes law 91 days after the adjournment — Sept. 25. A proposed ballot measure to overturn the restrictions needs to gather 74,680 signatures by Sept. 24 to put the law on hold until a vote in the November 2022 general election.

• Veto deadline: The adjournment of the House and Senate also started the countdown on how long Gov. Kate Brown has to veto bills or line-item veto specific appropriations in fiscal legislation. Under the Oregon Constitution, the governor has 30 weekdays to act. Brown's office confirmed Friday that the deadline is Aug. 6.

• Capitol re-opening: The Oregon State Capitol in Salem will reopen

to the public on July 12, though it may look more like a massive home improvement project than a magnificent statehouse.

The Capitol won't be very user friendly for a while, with major renovations going on through December 2022.

The public has been kept out of the Capitol since March 2020, when Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, ordered the shutdown at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Legislature has control over the statehouse and for the past 16 months, access has been limited to lawmakers, staff, journalists and a skeleton crew of building workers.

The main entrance is fenced off, the House and Senate wings will be closed until winter, the back entrance will be torn up for another 15 months, and parking will be harder to find with the underground garage shut for an overhaul through the end of next year.

• Redistricting road show: Legislative hearings have been limited to virtual testimony during the pandemic, but a pair of key committees will be traveling the state in a "road show" in September.

The House and Senate redistricting committees are expected to receive long-delayed 2020 U.S. Census data in mid-August. The block-by-block numbers will allow the Legislature to re-draw the state's political

maps with enough precision to stand up to court challenges.

Lines will shift for the 60 House and 30 Senate seats. New congressional district boundaries will also be up for revision, including where to place Oregon's new Sixth Congressional District, added to Oregon's delegation because of the state's rapid population growth since 2010.

The committees plan on traveling the state for public hearings prior to taking their plans to the Legislature during a special session scheduled to begin Sept. 20. The maps have to go to the Oregon Supreme Court by Sept. 27.

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