

Local

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

50 YEARS AGO from the Democrat-Herald August 19, 1971

The sheriff's land sale yesterday netted the county about \$17,350, the tax office announced.

Of 58 pieces for sale the county sold 20 of them. The tax office was unable to determine the total acreage sold, but the larger parcels amounted to 160 and 120 acres in the Unity area. Three mines were sold averaging 12 to 20 acres in the Cracker Creek, Whitney and Washington Gulch areas.

25 YEARS AGO from the Baker City Herald August 19, 1996

Firefighters' focus has shifted from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, where the 10,400-acre Sloans Ridge fire continues to cool, west to the Umatilla National Forest, where several lightning-caused fires totaling 7,150 acres still are burning.

The largest of the Umatilla fires is the 2,995-acre Bull fire, which is burning about one mile north of Desolation Butte. That's about 12 air miles west of Granite.

10 YEARS AGO from the Baker City Herald August 19, 2011

The head of maintenance at the Baker County Courthouse is planning more improvements of the grounds around the building.

The idea is to "get back to the more historic beauty of the Courthouse," said Vince Woods during Wednesday's meeting of the Baker County Commission. Woods is the county's facility maintenance director.

Sidewalks around the Courthouse, specifically along Third Street and Court Avenue, are being rerouted to accommodate elm trees. The walkways will run five feet from the trees to allow them room to grow.

ONE YEAR AGO from the Baker City Herald August 20, 2020

A lightning-sparked blaze burning near the border between Baker and Malheur counties blew up Tuesday afternoon and evening, fanned by hot, dry and gusty south winds.

The Baldy fire grew from about 500 acres to an estimated 5,000 acres as of Wednesday morning.

On Tuesday the rapidly growing blaze spawned a towering smoke plume visible from Baker City, about 20 air miles to the north.

On Wednesday morning smoke settled into Baker Valley.

Fire managers were optimistic that a brief rain shower that quieted the fire overnight would help a growing cadre of firefighters start to corral the blaze Wednesday, which was forecast to be less blustery.

"A little rain is not going to put it out this time of year," Al Crouch, fire mitigation/education specialist for the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District, said Wednesday morning.

"We've got a ton of heavy iron in there to help us out, so things are looking better in those terms."

Crouch said the Oregon Department of Forestry dispatched multiple bulldozers to aid fire crews. A total of seven dozers were building fire lines on Wednesday.

OREGON LOTTERY

MEGABUCKS, Aug. 16

19 — 21 — 36 — 39 — 45 — 48

Next jackpot: \$1.9 million

POWERBALL, Aug. 14

6 — 21 — 49 — 65 — 67 PB 18

Next jackpot: \$274 million

MEGA MILLIONS, Aug. 17

3 — 6 — 16 — 38 — 56 Mega X

Next jackpot: \$256 million

WIN FOR LIFE, Aug. 16

3 — 16 — 44 — 74

PICK 4, Aug. 17

• 1 p.m.: 5 — 9 — 3 — 6

• 4 p.m.: 7 — 4 — 5 — 8

• 7 p.m.: 3 — 2 — 7 — 0

• 10 p.m.: 7 — 9 — 1 — 0

LUCKY LINES, Aug. 17

2-6-11-14-20-21-28-32

Next jackpot: \$62,000

SENIOR MENUS

- **FRIDAY:** Spaghetti, garlic rolls, zucchini pasta salad, bread pudding
- **MONDAY (Aug. 23):** Chicken-fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn biscuits, cottage cheese with fruit, cheesecake
- **TUESDAY (Aug. 24):** Meatloaf, baked beans, peas, coleslaw, tapioca
- **WEDNESDAY (Aug. 25):** Hot turkey sandwich, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, three-bean salad, birthday cake
- **THURSDAY (Aug. 26):** Pot roast with gravy, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, rolls, carrot-raisin salad, pudding

Public luncheon at the Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St., from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; \$5 donation (60 and older), \$7.50 for those under 60.

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FIRE CREWS

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"Catching these fires in the initial attack stage is critical for us this year," said Joel McCraw, fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Whitman Ranger District, which covers most of the southern half of the 2.4-million-acre forest. "If one got away it might take days to get significant help from outside our area."

The Wallowa-Whitman has not completely avoided the recent rapid rise in COVID-19 infections that has affected Baker County and adjoining counties.

During the first 17 days of August, Baker County recorded 169 cases — the second-highest total for any month during the pandemic, behind only December 2020, when there were 196 cases.

Peter Fargo, public information officer for the Wallowa-Whitman, said that of the approximately 140 firefighters on the forest who are tasked with "initial attack" — the first to arrive at a new blaze — four recently tested positive and six others have quarantined due to potential exposure.

"We currently have adequate resources for initial attack on the Forest, and we are ready to respond to new fire starts at the current pace," Fargo said.

McCraw said firefighters are required to wear face masks when they're inside buildings or in vehicles.

They don't wear masks while fighting fires. The nature of fighting relatively small fires means firefighters usually aren't too close to one another, so social distancing isn't much of an issue, McCraw said.

Tracy Skerjanec, fire management officer for the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District, which includes land the federal agency manages in Northeastern Oregon, said COVID-19 has not affected the district's initial attack crews at all.

That's also the case in Baker County for the Oregon Department of Forestry, said Steve Meyer, wildland fire supervisor at the state agency's Baker City office.

Having a full complement of initial attack crews has been crucial, the fire officials say, in keeping the fire season in this area tranquil compared with the conflagrations that have scorched hundreds of thousands of acres elsewhere.

"We've had good response from our fire folks," Skerjanec said.

The Wallowa-Whitman has handled 47 fires this year — 39 started by lightning, eight by people — that have burned a combined 1,831 acres.

More than a dozen individual fires have burned more acres in Oregon this summer.

The BLM has had four fires in and around Baker County, and a total of 5,754 acres burned, while the Oregon Department of Forestry has reported 10 fires and 28.5 acres burned.

(The BLM acreage figures are somewhat skewed as they include acres of BLM-managed land burned in two larger fires in Wallowa County, the 7,610-acre Joseph Canyon fire, which started June 11, and the 23,000-acre Elbow Creek fire, which started July 15.)

These comparatively modest figures are in spite of fire danger that has reached record levels at times during this unusually hot and dry summer.

Starting in late June with a record-setting heat wave, and continuing through most of July, the Energy Release Component (ERC) — a prediction of how much energy a fire would release based on the moisture level in various types of fuels, ranging from twigs to down logs — was at or near all-time highs.

Widespread rain on the first day of August pushed the ERC below average for several days. They jumped back to near or above record levels during the hot weather last week and are running at about average this week due to cooler temperatures.

But the fire danger remains high, with bans on campfires, chain saw use and other activities remaining in effect across the region.

No surplus of firefighting resources

Nathan Goodrich, deputy fire staff officer for operations on the Wallowa-

Whitman, said it was obvious as early as June that fires in 2021 would generally require more firefighters on initial attack to ensure the flames didn't get away.

Even a small blaze, which in a normal summer could be handled by a four-person crew, has this summer required about twice as many firefighters, he said.

That means any factor that would reduce initial attack resources — including, potentially, COVID-19 — poses a greater danger than usual.

Indeed, when a series of lightning storms ignited more than a dozen fires in Northeastern Oregon in early August, the Wallowa-Whitman's initial attack resources were completely engaged, McCraw said.

At that point, he said, if even one additional fire had started, there might not have been any crews available to fight it immediately.

And when the fire danger is as severe as it has been for much of this summer, just a few hours can be enough time for a smoldering fire to erupt into an inferno, Goodrich said.

"If you don't get to them, they're gone, essentially, especially down in the canyons," he said.

Less lightning, more rain

Skerjanec said a combination of factors — including, he concedes, elements of luck — have contributed to the success that initial attack crews have had in keeping the vast majority of fires from burning more than a few acres.

"Most fires we've been able to catch fast without needing outside resources," he said.

With the exception of the early August storms, lightning has been relatively scarce, Skerjanec said.

"Dry" lightning — thunderstorms that have lightning bolts but no rain to quell any fires ignited — have been even more rare.

"Most of the storms that have come through our area have had some moisture with them," Skerjanec said.

"That rain has either put the fires out or slowed them down and let us catch them."

BREAK

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The previous record for days reaching or exceeding 90 degrees at the airport was 42, set in 2017.

The average is 26 days.

But the persistent heat was paused this week when a pair of cold fronts passed through

Baker City, the first on Monday evening, Aug. 16, the second arriving the next afternoon with gusty northwest winds.

The fronts ushered in much cooler air that originated over the chilly waters of the North Pacific.

The high temperature at the airport on Tuesday was 72 degrees. That's the coolest day

in more than two months, since June 10, when the high was 65. The average high for Aug. 17 is 85 degrees.

The National Weather Service predicted that Wednesday would be cooler still, with a high of 67 at the airport.

That's likely to be the coolest day for at least the next week, but the warming trend that's

forecast is decidedly modest compared with what we've endured most of this summer.

The Weather Service is predicting highs ranging from the mid 70s to the low 80s through early next week. A third cold front, slated to arrive Saturday, Aug. 21, could touch off a few rain showers or thunderstorms.

WATER

Continued from Page A1

The city used 3.7 million gallons on Tuesday, after daily use ranged from 4 to

4.4 million the previous week.

The city has been under phase 2 of its water curtailment ordinance since July 12. That includes the outdoor watering time restriction.

Owen said in early July that she was concerned the city's water supply, which includes mountain streams, Goodrich Lake and a well, couldn't satisfy demand averaging around 5 million gallons.

OBITUARY

'Mike' Blount

Baker City, 1973-2021

Michael "Mike" Blount, 48, of Baker City died Aug. 6, 2021, at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise.

A memorial service and celebration of Mike's life will take place Saturday, Aug. 21 at 2 p.m. at the Harvest Christian Church, 3720 Birch St. in Baker City.

Michael Stephen Blount was born on May 17, 1973, at Ridgecrest, California. He was raised in California until 2001. He married Victoria Thompson in 2005.

Most of Michael's life was pursuing his passion for cooking. The last several years he developed a barbecue smoker business, Innovation BBQ. He catered events, weddings, grand openings, church events and more. Michael developed five signature

sauces and two custom rubs, marketed through Elkhorn Custom Meats & Deli. His smoker set is still at the deli and continues to be used for many events.

His biggest passion of all was in his relationship with Jesus! Michael had the ability to reach out and love others who were hurting. He especially loved children, from newborns to full grown kids, he loved them all. Michael played the drums on the worship team at Agape Church and blessed many with his love of music.

Michael enjoyed motorcycles. He had two beautiful rides during his lifetime. He liked going on road trips and pairing up with others.

His special pet was Chewy. He taught Chewy how to high five, shake and sit down pretty. Chewy continues to look for Michael.

Michael would want to be remembered for the journey he was on. He had a drive that helped him touch so

many people. Michael wanted every part of his life to be a walk with the Lord. Everything from his barbecue business to his relationships with family, friends and loved ones was done to the glory of God. He had a huge heart and a huge personality to go with it. Michael's family wasn't always blood to him, but the people that were loyal to him, God being his most loyal family of all.

Michael is survived by his mother, Kathy Hickman; his children, Christopher and Kylee Blount, Kileeken Kucher and Mikayla Passer; his sisters, Bonnie Barthel, Sherry Tanis and Diane Elledge; his uncles, Vito DeBartolo and Roy Mushrush; his cousins, Anthony

and Daniel DeBartolo, Cari Edgerton, and Hal and Greg Russie; and many brothers, sisters and kids in the Lord.

He was preceded in death by his grandparents, Joe and Wilma Hickman; his father, Stephen Blount; his daughter, Brittney Blount; his brother, Don Huff; his sister, Stephanie Neilson; and his aunts, Carol DeBartolo and Midge Mushrush.

Those who would like to make a donation in memory of Michael may do so to the Christian Motorcycle Association through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences may be shared at www.tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.



Mike Blount

NEWS OF RECORD

FUNERALS PENDING

Stan Grove: Memorial service, Friday, Aug. 20, 3 p.m. at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St. (location changed from the golf course).

Retha Allensworth: Memorial service, Saturday, Aug. 21 at 11 a.m. at the Richland Christian Church. Interment will follow at Eagle Valley Cemetery. Friends are invited to join the family for a reception at the church, immediately following the service. Online condolences can be made at tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

POLICE LOG

Baker City Police Arrests, citations
RECKLESS DRIVING: William Joseph La Rocque, 28, La Grande, 9:10 a.m. Monday, Aug. 16 on Highway 7 near the Baker City limits; cited and released.

THANK YOU! The many expressions of love and support, given to us during this time of great loss, were an immeasurable comfort. The help from Gray's West & Co. Pioneer Chapel with planning the service. All the cards, flowers, food, phone calls, and memorial contributions were very much appreciated.

The family of Elvin Eugene Carter

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