

# Baker City Herald

August 31, 2021

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In SPORTS, A6

Baker falls to Vandals

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\$1.50

QUICK HITS

**Good Day Wish To A Subscriber**

A special good day to Herald subscriber Andrew Bryan of Baker City.

BRIEFING

**OTEC giving away energy-efficient light bulbs**

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative will give away a free five-pack of LED lightbulbs, valued at \$25, on Wednesday, Sept. 1 and Thursday, Sept. 2 at each of its offices.

The cooperative's headquarters are at 4005 23rd St., just south of Pocatowas Road.

The free bulbs use at least 75% less energy and can last 25 times longer than incandescent bulbs, according to a press release from OTEC.

"As a member-owned cooperative, we work hard to teach our member-owners the value of energy efficiency," said Joe Hathaway, OTEC's communications manager.

**Baker City seeks candidates for Council vacancy**

The Baker City Council is seeking candidates to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Councilor Lynette Perry. To be eligible, candidates must be registered Oregon voters who have lived within the Baker City limits for at least a year.

More information is available at [www.bakercity.com](http://www.bakercity.com) or by calling 541-524-2033.

WEATHER

Today

73 / 33  
Sunny



Wednesday

76 / 36  
Sunny



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



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Sunny skies welcomed students to Brooklyn Primary School for the first day of classes on Monday, Aug. 30.

## Ready for class

### Baker students return to their classrooms

By SAMANTHA O'CONNER  
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A bright sunny Monday morning greeted students on the first day of classes for Baker schools.

Parents and grandparents escorted students to Brooklyn Primary, which has classrooms for first, second and third graders.

The adults said they were excited to see students start the 2021-22 year with in-person classes.

A year ago, Baker students were still learning by computer from home due to the pandemic, which also prompted distance learning during the spring term 2020.

Elementary students, in grades K-6, returned to in-person classes for a full four-day weekly schedule on Oct. 14, 2020.

Middle school and high school students began attending classes one day per week on Nov. 9, 2020, moving to two days per week on

Jan. 25, 2021, and to a full four-day schedule on April 12, 2021.

On Monday morning, students arrived at Brooklyn with new backpacks and smiles, waving to classmates, friends and teachers.

"I think that they need it," said Tammy Mercado, grandmother of Brooklyn second grader Makaiah Gray.

As was the case during in-person classes last school year, students and staff will be required to wear masks indoors. Masks aren't required during recess, PE classes and other outdoors activities.

Some parents, though glad to have students in classrooms, don't like the mask requirement.

"I think it's great they're in school but they shouldn't have to wear masks. It's dumb," said Lane Gray, father of a second grader.

On Aug. 19, a group of protesters gathered in

downtown Baker City to express their opposition to the mask mandate for schools.

Julie Davis, mother of a third grader, said her son was excited for the first day of classes.

"I think it's very important they're in person, for sure," Davis said.

Jody Colton, grandmother of a second grader, agreed, saying, "It's perfect. In-school is very important. They want to be here, they need to be here, learning."

Mark Witty, Baker School District superintendent, said last week that he was "looking forward to a new school year starting with students in person."

Witty said the district will employ most of the same tactics to stem the spread of COVID-19, including masks, daily pre-class health checks for students, and frequent sanitation.

The district reported 36 staff or students testing positive during the 2020-21 school year.

Witty acknowledged that, at least at the start of the new school year,

combating COVID-19 could be challenge.

August has been the worst month of the pandemic in Baker County, in terms of total cases.

When classes started Monday, 23 Baker students were quarantining, as was one school employee, said Lindsey McDowell, the district's public information and communications coordinator.

"We are excited about the school year and grateful that we have been able to start in person," McDowell wrote in an email to the Herald. "There is so much good planned for the upcoming year!"

Phil Anderson, principal at South Baker Intermediate, which has fourth, fifth and sixth graders, said Monday afternoon that it had been "a pretty typical first day of school."

"I don't have the attendance numbers in front of me but the students who enrolled, I would say most of them arrived today and are in school," Anderson said.

See, **School** / Page A3

## Sheriff: Mandates not his job to enforce

By JAYSON JACOBY  
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Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash has joined the ranks of Oregon county sheriffs who have written letters addressing Gov. Kate Brown's recent mandates on face masks and vaccinations for some public workers.



Ash

But Ash's letter, which was posted on Sunday, Aug. 29 to the Baker County Sheriff's Office Facebook page, is different in content and in tone from the letters that some of his colleagues have written.

Ash, for instance, doesn't contend that Brown's executive orders are unconstitutional, as Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen claims in an Aug. 13 letter.

Although Ash doesn't address the constitutional issue, he writes in the first paragraph that his stance on state mandates on masks and vaccinations has not changed:

"The Baker County Sheriff's Office has not and will not be enforcing mask or vaccine mandates," Ash wrote. "We are not responsible for enforcement of Oregon Health Authority rules."

Ash, like Bowen and some of the other sheriffs who have written letters, writes that he "is in favor of local control."

See, **Sheriff** / Page A3

## Bacteria ravages bighorns

By JAYSON JACOBY  
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A bacterial infection continues to wreak havoc on lambs in Baker County's two bighorn sheep herds.

A state wildlife biologist said officials will continue to strive, through annual testing, to identify adult sheep that constantly shed the bacteria, and then euthanize those animals to try to protect the herds.

"They're not faring well at all," said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Baker City office. "But I think there's a very good possibility that with enough effort, and some luck, we will get through this."

The effort could take four to five years, Ratliff said on Monday morning, Aug. 30.

Biologists first became aware of the problem in February 2020, when dead bighorns were found near the Snake River Road at the

See, **Bighorns** / Page A3

## Baker man hurt in ATV rollover



Baker County Sheriff's Office/Contributed Photo

Volunteers from the Baker County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue Team set up a rope system to move Verle Cote up a steep slope.

**Baker City Herald**

A Baker City man was hurt Saturday afternoon, Aug. 28, when the ATV he was riding rolled down a steep slope in the Wallowa Mountains northeast of Baker City.

Verle Cote, 67, was taken by ambulance to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City, according to a press release from the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Cote was in fair condition on Monday morning, Aug. 30, according to a hospital spokesman.

The accident was reported at 2:34 p.m. on Saturday. It happened off Forest Service Road 67 near Boulder Park, along Eagle Creek.

The caller told the dispatcher that the terrain was steep and that recover-

ing the injured rider would likely require a technical rope rescue team.

The Baker County Sheriff's Office's Search and Rescue Team was activated at 2:44 p.m., and five volunteers traveled to the site along with sheriff's deputies.

Police learned that Cote was riding a 2021 Can Am ATV along Phillips Ditch when it rolled down a bank.

Search and Rescue volunteers set up a rope system and were able to pull Cote up the bank where he was treated and taken by side-by-side to the ambulance, about three miles from the accident site.

The Sheriff's Office was assisted by the U.S. Forest Service and Eagle Valley Ambulance, according to the press release.



TODAY  
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