

# MIRACLE

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"It happened really fast," Kara said. "Crazy."

The Leggetts, who will celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary on Nov. 23, have five children — daughter McKenzie, 18; daughter Mady, 16; son Brigham, 15; daughter Annie, 13 (she turns 14 on Nov. 24); and baby son Bryson, who will celebrate his first birthday in December.

## Inside the ICU

Anthony was admitted to the intensive care unit at Saint Alphonsus in Boise.

Doctors put him in a medically induced coma.

Kara stayed in a hotel. She waited.

"We just waited every day to get updates," she said.

Eventually — she doesn't recall how many days passed — she was able to see Anthony.

Walking through the ICU was disturbing.

"ICU is different than you think, especially with COVID patients," Kara said. "It's a lot to take in, watching people try to live. They were the sickest patients."

And Anthony, she said, was the sickest of all.

He remained in the medically induced coma for more than two weeks.

When doctors decided that Anthony's condition had improved enough, they brought him out of the coma.

But Kara, and their children, couldn't see him due to COVID-19 restrictions.

And before those were lifted, Anthony's condition worsened. While doctors were weaning him from the ventilator that had kept him alive, he was "overbreathing," she said — breathing too rapidly.

Doctors again put Anthony into a coma.

"They take a step forward, then it's way far back," Kara said. "It's up and down. When they call it long haul COVID, they're not joking. You have to start thinking about planning a funeral, which is horrible."

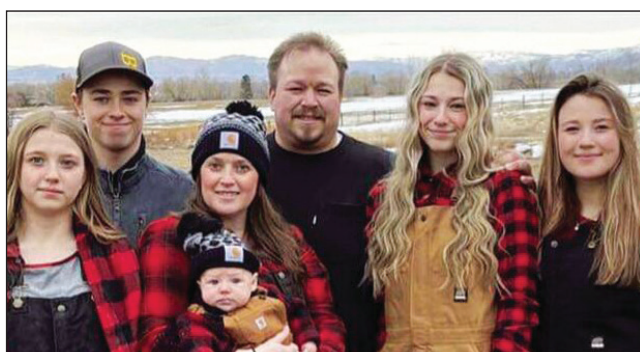
## The recovery begins

Anthony remained in a coma for another two weeks or so, well into September.

When doctors reawakened him for the second time, Anthony started "overbreathing" again, but doctors were able to improve his breathing and his oxygen level.

Into October, Kara said, her husband started to show more significant improvement.

She began to believe that Anthony would survive, would eventually return to their home and their children and the new business he recently



Kara Leggett/Contributed Photo

The Leggett family, from left: Annie, Brigham, Kara (holding Bryson), Anthony, Mady and McKenzie.

started after working for 15 years at Old West Federal Credit Union in Baker City.

Kara knows how fortunate her family is.

Anthony, she said, had all three of the risk factors that doctors told her make a COVID-19 patient especially vulnerable — diabetes, high blood pressure and excessive weight.

While Anthony was in the hospital, she said, COVID-19 patients as young as 37 died.

Others died who had only one risk factor.

"Anthony is blessed, I guess is the right word, to still be here," Kara said.

One of the moments she remembers most clearly is that day in October when hospital workers wheeled the ventilator out of Anthony's room.

"That was a huge victory — a miracle," Kara said.

She was finally able to see Anthony's face.

What she saw shocked her, despite her joy.

"When they took the mask off him, I stood back," Kara said. "He had lost so much weight, about 100 pounds."

Unfortunately, she said, that included a considerable amount of muscle mass.

With his muscles atrophied during his motionless weeks in a coma, including the muscles he needs to swallow and to talk, Anthony had a considerable amount of rehabilitation ahead of him.

"He tried to talk, but with a tube in his mouth I couldn't understand him," Kara said. "It was just hard."

## Rehabilitation, and looking forward to the holidays at home

Over the next few weeks, Anthony was moved eight times.

He went from one ICU to another, and then to a general unit at Saint Alphonsus, Kara said.

Once he was able to stand on his own and take two steps, Anthony transferred to the rehabilitation center in downtown Boise operated by St. Luke's and the Elks.

That milestone, after Anthony had been in the hospital for 72 days, happened on Nov. 3.

And it's a point at which Anthony himself can help to tell his own story.

Of course he doesn't remember the weeks when he was in a coma.

But Anthony said he also has no recollection of the four days before he collapsed in his kitchen on Aug. 22.

The last thing he remembers, before waking up in the hospital many weeks later, is going to Bi-Mart in Baker City to get his first vaccine dose.

A dose he knows now was too late. The virus had already begun its terrible work.

With Thanksgiving and Christmas coming soon, as well as his 20th wedding anniversary and his daughter Annie's 14th birthday, Anthony is thrilled with the prospect of being home for each of those events.

"I've got a lot of motivation to get home," he said. "I miss my own bed."

He's optimistic that he'll soon be sleeping there for the first time in almost three months.

Anthony said he's lengthened his walks — he uses a walker as an aid — from 15 steps when he arrived at the rehab center to 230 steps.

"Progress is good," he said. Particularly considering that when he was awakened from his second coma, Anthony was, he said, "basically a quadriplegic."

"I couldn't move a finger," he said. "Now, I can take a shower, I can brush my teeth. It's nice not to be utterly dependent on someone else."

Anthony said he continues to suffer from a general weakness.

But he has a full range of motion in his extremities.

And unlike many COVID-19 patients who had life-threatening symptoms, Anthony said the doctors have told him his lungs, kidneys and other internal organs, which can sustain permanent damage from the virus, seem to be healthy.

He still takes oxygen, but only at night.

"It's an understatement to say I'm considered lucky to be alive," Anthony said. "To be able to go from basically given zero chance to live to what I'm calling basically a full recovery is nothing short of a miracle."



Kara Leggett/Contributed Photo

Anthony Leggett begins to exercise his muscles, atrophied after being in a medically induced coma in late August and part of September due to COVID-19 infection.

## Regrets about waiting to be vaccinated

Both Anthony and Kara said they took COVID-19 seriously even before Anthony became ill.

Kara said several of their relatives had been vaccinated, and the couple had discussed doing so.

Kara said she wishes she had done more research and been more knowledgeable about how Anthony's health issues made him so much more susceptible to the virus.

"With COVID being so politicized, I didn't want to be afraid of it, but I didn't know what to trust or believe," Kara said. "I didn't think of Anthony being at such high risk."

Anthony said he was "taking a wait and see approach" about being vaccinated.

But he berates himself now for paying attention to claims about the dangers of vaccines from what he concedes are unreliable sources.

"Like an idiot I listened to a lot of what social media was saying," Anthony said.

Kara said she and Anthony initially believed COVID-19 arrived in their household after their daughter, Mady, attended a volleyball tournament in Idaho.

But they later determined that they were exposed during the week of the Baker County Fair in early August.

Although Anthony admits that his attitude has obviously been influenced by his own experience — "I wouldn't wish this on anybody," he said — he said he also understands better how doctors and other medical professionals, including those who helped save his life, have tried to convince people that COVID-19 is dangerous and that vaccination can significantly reduce the risk of serious illness or death.

"I would recommend going to talk to a competent, trusted medical professional," he said. "Start listening to medical professionals. I talked to a bunch of doctors and nurses and they're really trying to save people. It's your body — but you need to take care of it."

Kara said that although she opposes vaccine mandates, she recognizes the benefits of vaccination.

"A lot of people didn't see COVID for what it really is — it's a killer for some of the people who have these issues," she said. "People like my husband."

## Community support overwhelming

Kara and Anthony said they have been gratified by the support they've received from the community.

That support has been both financial — a fundraiser dinner took place Nov. 11 — but also in the form of phone messages asking how Anthony is doing.

"I've always known that this was a great area to live," Anthony said. "There's a high quality of people here. I've been truly humbled by how people genuinely care about each other. More than I understood. We're lucky to be where we are."

And now, with the prospect of seeing his home for the first time since the dog days of August, Anthony is eager. And he struggles to find the words to thank the doctors, nurses and others who have helped him through an ordeal he couldn't have conceived of.

"I'm super excited to get out of the hospital after so long," he said. "The people at Saint Al's, Saint Luke's, they are miracle workers."

"I have a lot of things I want to be home for."

# QUESTIONS

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Owens said the state does not have the data it needs in order to effectively manage watersheds, groundwater, or surface water for irrigation.

He said that in 2017, the Oregon Water Resource Department issued 159 groundwater rights. But in 79% of those, he said, it wasn't clear whether sufficient water was actually available.

"The biggest threat is over appropriation," Owens said. "We have to get that data to effectively manage water."

The legislators also took a question about their thoughts on livestock grazing on public land.

Findley said he believes in public land grazing and in making sure ranchers manage their animals to protect the land.

"If you have a healthy viable landscape — ecosystem and landscape — it includes both public and private land, and the best fire break is a grazed pasture," Findley said. "Not overgrazed but a properly used pasture and that's the key."

Bryan Tweit, the county's economic development director, attended the town hall and discussed the workforce and housing crisis in Baker County, calling it the triple storm.

Tweit said restrictions related to the pandemic prompted some people to move out of the county. In addition, the state ban on evictions, and higher rental payments, have affected the housing market.

"We physically lost the bodies for the workforce here," Tweit said.

He estimated that five restaurants in the county have closed since the pandemic started. Two have new owners that reopened, a third is slated to reopen, and a fourth is undergoing renovations, he said.

"Way better than any other county in the state," Tweit said. "But we don't have the physical bodies here. You can drive all over town and see signs where businesses are closed because they don't have the employees. Our employment numbers are record lows in Baker County."

Tweit asked Findley and Owens what solutions they see coming down the pipeline to help allow counties to incentivize builders or contractors.

"I don't have a magic button for that, I don't have a magic bill," Findley said. "I personally introduced two different pieces of legislation to help landlords and I could not get them out of committee. And I absolutely do not know why not."

"And so, the landlords only recourse is 'I'm getting out of the landlord business.' I don't blame them. But we have to work on housing," Findley said.

# COVID

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## Vaccination

Baker County's vaccination rate for residents 18 and older is 53.3%, the fifth-lowest rate among Oregon's

36 counties. The statewide average is 77.9%.

The Baker County Health Department has scheduled a drive-thru vaccination clinic — for COVID-19 and for the flu, ages 12 and older — on Friday, Nov. 19 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Baker County

Events Center, 2600 East St. Participants should enter from Campbell Street, to the south.

Those attending who need a flu shot should bring their insurance information.

Those who are seeking a booster dose for a COVID-19

vaccine should bring their vaccine card.

People who want to make an appointment for a child age 5 to 11 to have a COVID-19 vaccine can call the Health Department at 541-523-8211 to schedule an appointment.

## Breakthrough cases

The county's number of breakthrough cases — infections in people who are fully vaccinated — also dropped during the week of Oct. 31-Nov. 6. Two of the 20 cases that week were breakthrough — 10%.

# CREDIT

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For anyone who follows the challenges of media companies and the reality of growing news deserts around the country, this temporary tax credit known as the Local Journalism Sustainability Act is a welcome relief that will directly aid news-gathering organizations, including an estimated 113 newsrooms in Oregon. It's the only piece

— some would say the most important piece — left of an original three-part proposal intended to stabilize and reform an industry upended by the deadly trio of Google, Facebook and the pandemic.

The tax credit sunsets in five years, giving media companies a reasonable timeframe to build a sustainable business model that supports local journalism in the internet age. It also sends a message to young people that journalism is a

career worth pursuing where there will be jobs available with those companies that make the successful transition.

Numerous studies show what happens in communities where there's no professionally trained journalists asking questions and accurately reporting on what is happening at a local level: Government waste and potential for corruption by public officials increases, voter turnout drops and communities find

it harder to solve their own problems. News deserts create democracy deserts, especially in rural communities.

If you are reading this and want to help, email our Oregon congressional delegation and let them know you support keeping the Local Journalism Sustainability Act temporary tax credit in the budget reconciliation package.

## U.S. Senate

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: ron\_wyden@wyden.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: senator@merkley.senate.gov

## U.S. House of Representatives

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