

Grocery stores in small towns stocked for Thanksgiving

By ALEX WITTWER
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Supply chain issues gripping the nation have led to shortages in everything from semiconductors to paper trays at school cafeterias, but Thanksgiving looks to be running smoothly and on time, according to grocery stores in rural Oregon cities.

At the Halfway Mercantile in east Baker County, owner Joshua Sevier said that although some items have been difficult to obtain, or late arriving, the makings for a traditional Thanksgiving feast are on hand, including turkeys, potatoes and rolls. "We have all that stuff in stock," Sevier said on Thursday morning, Nov. 18, from the market in downtown Halfway, population 350.

Sevier said it can be more difficult for small, independent grocery stores to get the supplies they need right now, as larger chains have more buying power.

In Prairie City, population 840, "turkeys on the table, we've got turkey already in our freezer," said Blaine Huffman, owner of Huffman's Market.

"I'm sure there's going to be items we're going to be short on but on the whole we're fine."

Grocery stores have had to adapt to a changing supply landscape that has seen shortages crop up in unexpected places.

"We don't know one load from the next what we're going to get — it changes every time," Huffman said. "The food supply chain is vulnerable, a lot of stuff is still sitting out in the ocean."

Huffman said he had some issues ordering pre-made pies for Thanksgiving, and the store was out of stock of those items. Supplies for homemade pies, however, were available.

Considering that smaller markets lack the same buying power as larger chains such as Safeway or Walmart, there was a cause for concern that residents in John Day, population 1,700, or Prairie City might have to travel farther to fill their shopping cart for the upcoming holiday. Grocery stores report that while ordering has been a challenge, the staples for a Thanksgiving feast have yet to cause any concerns.

"Before, I was able to buy pallets of certain things like

condensed milk — when it comes to those really big staples, a lot of it is on an allocation that you can't buy big amounts because they wouldn't be able to service everybody," said Mike Shaffer, operations manager for Chester's Market in John Day. "As far as staples go, we're sitting pretty good."

Shaffer said he has had to order months in advance for key items, especially during Thanksgiving and similar holidays where supplies go fast as the holiday approaches and the deadline for putting the turkey in the oven looms.

For now, the store is well stocked for the upcoming feast, according to Shaffer.

"It was really easy to get what you needed before all this stuff happened and before — I call it a logistical nightmare, but you know all the logistic issues that everyone is experiencing — before that we'd have pretty big item counts, big ads so people could come in and get a good deal on whatever they need for dinner and stuff like that, so it has changed," Shaffer said. "If you commit to something like we did this year — if you have to

reorder it, that's where you may run into an issue because everybody else is reordering, especially for the season."

Supply chain issues have cropped up from a myriad of pandemic-related minutiae, such as labor and raw material shortages — including dock workers and truck drivers — to low production yields and increased costs of goods as shipping costs skyrocket due to increases in fuel and container prices.

That means when orders finally arrive at grocery stores, the contents might be less than what was ordered, or the order itself would be delayed.

"It's hard to plan around, I'll put it to you that way," Shaffer said.

Those issues exacerbated an already vulnerable system. Still, the grocery stores remain optimistic about the upcoming holiday.

"It's not like it was last year," Huffman said. "I think it will be good, I think everything will be good."

Jayson Jacoby of the Baker City Herald contributed to this story.



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Vehicles lined up Friday morning, Nov. 19 for a drive-thru COVID-19 and flu vaccination clinic at the Baker County Events Center on East Street.

COVID

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It was the county's first COVID-related death since Oct. 28.

"Receiving the news of another COVID-19 related death in our tight-knit community is particularly difficult," Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett said. "We are saddened by this loss and will keep his family and friends in our thoughts and prayers."

Staten said she hopes the increase in cases this week will remind residents that it's beneficial to be vaccinated and to wear masks in situations, such as inside businesses, where the risk of transmission is higher.

She said she has noticed that mask wearing is far from universal in many places.

Staten urges residents to remember that people who are vaccinated and wear masks can protect not only themselves but also, potentially, others.

"This is one of the best defenses we have against this virus, being vaccinated," Staten said. "It's not 100 percent, we know that."

Breakthrough cases — infections in fully vaccinated people — will continue, she said.

But Staten pointed out that statewide statistics show that unvaccinated people who are infected with COVID-19 are much more likely to become seriously ill.

According to the OHA, breakthrough infections accounted for 24.4% of the COVID-19-related deaths in Oregon during October, 20.3% in September, 22.4% in August and 17.8% in July.

About 80% of the deaths in breakthrough infections were in people 70 and older. That's similar to the overall death toll in Oregon during the pandemic, with almost 67% of the approximately 4,900 deaths in residents 70 or older.

In Baker County, the percentage of breakthrough cases over the past six weeks has ranged from 10% to 25%.

Staten said recent trends in the age of people infected with COVID-19, with a larger percentage of cases in county residents 70 and older, who have the highest vaccination rates, suggest that protection from vaccines is waning.

She urged people to get a booster shot.

The Health Department had a drive-thru vaccination clinic, with COVID-19 and flu vaccines, on Friday. Staten said that as of 1:30 p.m., the clinic, which was scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., had administered about 200 inoculations, more than half of those COVID-19 vaccines.

Federal officials on Friday approved booster shots for all adults, expanding the eligibility from older residents and those with certain risk factors.

During October, there were no cases in the county in residents 70 and older during the first half of the month.

But during the second half of October, 21.3% of the county's cases were in residents 70 and older.

For the first half of November, that age group accounted for almost 24% of the county's cases.

About 64.5% of county residents 65 and older are fully vaccinated, according to the OHA, but just 22.6% have received a booster dose.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the number of cases in children ages 5 to 9 has also increased during November.

For the second half of October, that age group accounted for just 1.3% of the county's cases.

For the first half of November, 15.9% of cases were in ages 5 to 9.

Children from age 5 to 11 became eligible for the Pfizer vaccine in the first week of November, and the Health Department started inoculating kids in that range starting Nov. 5.

As of Friday, Nov. 19, a total of 57 children in the county in that age range had received the first of two doses — a rate of 4.7%, based on the population of about 1,200 in that age group in the county.

Baker County's overall vaccination rate — 53.6% of residents 18 and older — ranks fifth-lowest among Oregon's 36 counties.

Driven by booster shots, the county has been administering more doses over the past month or so that it did during August and September.

The running seven-day daily average has rose from 20 on Oct. 24 to a peak of 81 on Nov. 1, dipping to 36 on Nov. 17.

Since Oct. 25, at least 99 doses have been given in the county on seven different days, including 138 doses on Oct. 26.

TREE

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Allies, who donated the tree, said he hopes everyone enjoys its presence downtown during the holiday season.

"The reason I'm getting rid of this is it's too close to the house and the roots are most likely going to start growing into the basement," Allies said.

The tree will be adorned as usual with lights, which will be illuminated on Saturday evening, Dec. 4, following the Chamber of Commerce's "Miracle on Main Street"



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Chuck Carey performed his customary role as the chain saw operator cutting down this year's community Christmas tree on Nov. 19.

Christmas parade. The parade starts at 5 p.m.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Free Thanksgiving dinner at Calvary Baptist

Everyone is invited to a free Thanksgiving dinner on Thanksgiving Day from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Calvary Baptist Church, Third and Broadway streets in Baker City.

Baker City has openings on several boards, commissions

Baker City is seeking volunteers to fill vacancies on the following boards and commissions:

- Public Arts
 - Public Works Advisory
 - Tree Board
 - Planning Commission
- To apply, go to www.bakercity.com/FormCenter/Boards-Commissions-2/Volunteer-Form-33, complete the form and click on "submit."

The city is also eligible for a free website redesign, and it has set up an online survey to get comments from residents about the website. To complete the survey, go to www.surveymonkey.com/r/6KQ7PBB.

RESCUE

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This is where Best Friends can keep cats — dry, warm and fed — awaiting adoption if no foster families are available.

Currently the group has 10 foster homes for dogs, and 10 for cats.

"We desperately need more," said Carmen Ott, a long-time volunteer with Best Friends.

Ott said few people realize the work of Best Friends — especially when it comes to rescuing animals from euthanization.

In the past, an impounded animal was euthanized after five days if not claimed, per city ordinance.

Best Friends helped get that ordinance changed.

"Best Friends takes out every adoptable dog," Ott said.



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

The Best Friends van was loaded with nearly 1,000 pounds of donated pet food and cat litter.

The organization also pays to have the animals spayed or neutered and vaccinated — an average cost of \$300 for dogs and \$150 for cats.

Help with food

On a recent trip to Boise, Ott and Barrett loaded the Best Friends van with bags of food for dogs, cats, puppies

and kittens, as well as kitty litter — all free of charge from the Idaho Humane Society.

"Maybe close to a thousand pounds," Ott said.

Those bags now fill shelves in the storage space of the store, and will be distributed to animal foster families, those who care for feral cats, and people who

need a little extra help feeding their pets.

"People who need pet food but have a limited income," Barrett said.

This back room is also filled with kennels and cat houses created from thick plastic foam boxes that can be loaned to local residents.

A stack of transport crates tell the other story of Best Friends, which is the many miles these volunteers log to take animals to specific breed rescues, or join a relay to move an animal across the country.

"It's nothing for us to use weekends to drive dogs and cats," Ott said.

All the work of Best Friends is done by volunteers, and Ott said they are always in need of more.

"Last but not least, we need helpers. We're not spring chickens," she said with a smile.

New At The Baker County Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. In the past two weeks, Baker County Library has added 40 new bestsellers, 11 audiobooks, 47 children's books, and 73 other books, including 21 that are available online. See everything new to Baker County Library District at wowbrary.org. Materials featured, and in library collection, does not indicate endorsement or approval of contents by the library. Selections are based on factors such as demand, public interest, diversity of viewpoint, community relevance, and others.

FICTION

- "The Christmas Promise," Richard Paul Evans
- "The Dark Hours (Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch, Book 4)," Michael Connelly
- "Mercy (Atlee Pine Thriller, Book 4)," David Baldacci
- "Never," Ken Follett
- "The Sentence," Louise Erdrich

NONFICTION

- "Best Wishes, Warmest Regards: The Story of Schitt's Creek," Daniel Levy and Eugene Levy
- "Immune: A Journey into the Mysterious System That Keeps You Alive," Philipp Dettmer
- "The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present (2 volumes)," Paul McCartney
- "The President and the Freedom Fighter: Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Their Battle to Save America's Soul," Brian Kilmeade
- "Will," Will Smith

CHILDREN'S

- "Channel Kindness: Stories of Kindness and Community," Born This Way Foundation Reporters and Lady Gaga
- "Dive Into the Waters of the World (Aristotle and Dante, Book 2)," Benjamin Alire Sáenz
- "Everything You Need to Ace Pre-Algebra and Algebra I in One Big Fat Notebook," Workman Publishing and Jason Wang
- "The Hawthorne Legacy (Inheritance Games, Book 2)," Jennifer Barnes
- "Kingdom of the Wicked," Kerri Maniscalco

Cutest Adopted or Rescue Pet photo contest

Submit your photos and be entered for your chance to win a \$30 gift certificate to a local restaurant of your choice

View Rules and Prize information at bakercityherald.com/pet_contest