



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald, File

A long train of Christmas presents entered by the Baker County Sheriff's Office helped brighten Main Street during the Twilight Christmas Parade in December 2019.

SPIRIT

Continued from A1

- Sumpter Valley Railroad Christmas trains will run Dec. 10-12. On Dec. 10, the train will leave the McEwen Depot at 7 p.m. On Dec. 11, the train will leave the Sumpter Depot at 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. On Dec. 12 the train will leave the McEwen Depot at noon.
- Sumpter holiday celebration, Saturday, Dec. 11 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Events include horse buggy rides, vendors, including food and drinks, ornament making, burn barrels, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, photos and a twilight parade at 5 p.m.

Lighting contest starts Dec. 1

The Chamber of Commerce is also sponsoring the Light Up Baker County Holiday Lighting Contest from Dec. 1-15.

Participants can enter their home or nominate a home they've seen. The contest is open to all residents with a Baker County address. Entrants should upload a photo of the home to the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau Facebook page by 10 a.m. on Dec. 15. The Chamber's board of directors will judge the entries. Each entry must be for one of the following categories:

- Spirit of Christmas
- Griswold award — you can never have too many lights
- Santa's favorite — best display with an organized appearance or theme

- Frosty's recognition — best use of holiday characters
 - North Pole award — best decorated city entrance
 - Best use of non-lighting decorations, such as wreaths, garlands and bows
 - People's choice — the entry that receives the most Facebook likes
- Winners will receive bragging rights and a keepsake yard sign. Winners will also receive Baker Bucks to be spent in Baker County and be featured on the Baker County Chamber of Commerce Facebook page and website.

Candy canes will wait for 2022

Baker City recently donated its decorative candy canes, which previously were displayed on power poles, to the Chamber of Commerce.

Due to time constraints, Cutler said the Chamber won't be able to display the lighted candy canes.

But she said the Chamber is "super excited" about using the decorations in 2022.

The candy canes will need to have their electrical wiring updated, and Cutler said Chamber officials are talking about where to display the items.

"They're so large that they can't free stand and they can't be just strapped to a stake. They'll tip over," Cutler said.

"We have had folks reach out to us, wanting to donate to that project," she said. "So that's exciting. I think people are just so happy that we were able to keep them and keep them local. And that our goal is to display them again locally as one big bunch."

BEAR

Continued from A1

The incident happened about 11 p.m. on Thanksgiving, and Beckner said a relative drove him to Saint Alphonus Medical Center in Baker City.

He was treated in the emergency room and released.

Beckner, who has lived in Sumpter for about a year and a half, said he's convinced the bear felt cornered when it initially tried to flee and ran into a shed near his front door.

"It didn't want to fight me — it just wanted to leave," Beckner said. "It tried to defend itself, and once it realized it could get away it did."

Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) office in Baker City, said he interviewed Beckner about the episode.

Based on Beckner's description, and in particular that the bear fled as soon as it no longer was confined by the shed, Ratliff said he hasn't set up any traps in Sumpter to try to capture the bear.

Ratliff said he would have taken a different approach if it looked as though the bear had intentionally attacked Beckner.

"It's unfortunate that it happened but the bear didn't seek (Beckner) out and attack him, and it didn't come back," Ratliff said. "It was trying to get away."

Ratliff said the Sumpter incident is the first case of a bear injuring a person that he's been aware of during his 16½ years working for ODFW in Baker County.

Ratliff said he planned to notify the Sumpter City Council about the incident, and to remind city officials about the need to urge residents to not keep



Noah Beckner/Contributed Photo

Noah Beckner sustained wounds to his face when he was attacked by a black bear outside his Sumpter home on Thanksgiving night.

food sources, including coolers or refrigerators, as well as trash, outdoors in places easily accessible to bears.

Ratliff said he will continue to monitor the situation in Sumpter.

"My biggest concern is that this bear is going to choose not to den up," he said.

Ratliff said Beckner described the bear as very skinny — Becker said in the phone interview that he could see the animal's ribs — which suggests that the bear isn't in condition to hibernate.

Bears aren't uncommon in Sumpter.

The historic gold mining town, population 200, is in the midst of a ponderosa pine forest about 27 miles west of Baker City.

During the late summer and fall of 2017, ODFW officials trapped and killed three bears in or near Sumpter.

During that period, a

Sumpter resident shot and injured a bear on his front porch. The same bear later entered a home in Sawmill Gulch near Sumpter through an unlatched door.

That bear was one of the three that ODFW employees trapped and killed.

Ratliff said he's had only a couple reports of bears in Sumpter this year.

"It's nothing like the level that we had a few years back," he said.

A late-night surprise

Beckner said he's seen bears several times in Sumpter, including near his home on Ibe Street, up the hill and about three blocks east of Mill Street, the town's main thoroughfare.

"Bears are constantly walking through Sumpter, every night," he said.

But Beckner had no reason to think about bears when he walked out his front door in the

last hour of Thanksgiving.

He didn't hear anything — he was just going outside.

The bear was about five to six feet away.

"I've seen a fair amount of bears, and I recognized it immediately," Beckner said.

The bear turned and ran, but its route was blocked by a shed that's just outside the front door. Then it spun and ran toward Beckner.

"It slashed at my face but I moved out of the way and it just nicked me," he said.

The bear then stood on its hind legs.

Beckner, who is about 5-foot-9, said the bear was slightly taller than he is.

He said he "wrestled for a little bit" with the bear, during which the bear briefly bit his shoulder.

Beckner said he then punched the bear.

He said the bear backed up slightly and, once it realized its path was not blocked by the shed, it ran down the hill.

"I never saw it again after that," he said.

Beckner estimated the incident lasted 45 seconds or so.

Although the bear was emaciated, Beckner, who has competed in wrestling and grappled with opponents up to 250 pounds, said he's "never felt a human so strong as that."

He said he understands that leaving food or trash in accessible places can entice bears, and he strives to avoid such situations on his property.

Beckner said he thinks he was simply unlucky, and the incident didn't make him more fearful of bears.

"If it had not been for the fact that it got cornered it wouldn't have attacked me," he said.

VACCINE

Continued from A2

The numbers are less clear for health care workers and K-12 school employees because no state agency is tracking those rates.

Despite the lack of complete data, a spokesperson for Brown, Charles Boyle, said Brown's mandates had "largely accomplished what they were established to do" — and that was to increase the number of Oregonians who've gotten shots.

"There is no question that vaccination rates for state employees, K-12 educators, and health care workers increased over the last several months — with many employers now reporting vaccination rates well over 90%," Boyle said in an email.

But state officials haven't been able to home in on the number of employers granting blanket exceptions to any worker who asked for one.

In fact, Oregon officials

can't provide a tally of executive branch workers who requested exceptions, making it impossible to calculate the state's own approval rates.

The state's human resources arm, the Department of Administrative Services, hopes to compile figures for state employees next week. They won't have data on health care or school employees.

It's already clear some agencies have far higher shares of employees with exceptions. For example, just 2% of workers in the governor's office received exemptions, 17% at the Department of Transportation and 20% at the Department of Corrections.

Boyle didn't answer questions from The Oregonian about whether the governor believes employers who granted 100% of exception requests undermined the spirit of the mandate and whether Brown

is considering tightening the rules in the future by establishing a much higher bar for approving these requests.

Anticipating resistance

One thing, however, is clear: Tightening the rules would encounter further resistance from many parts of Oregon, where many say Brown's vaccination mandates were an attempt to rob them of their "freedom of choice" — and yet another reason they'd like giant swaths of Oregon to become part of more like-minded Idaho.

Irate county commissioners and school boards, including the Redmond School Board, have sent the governor letters and passed resolutions expressing their distaste for the mandates. Many of them asked the governor to rescind them. And when she didn't, many found a go-round.

Jared Cordon, superintendent of Roseburg Public Schools, which granted excep-

tions to 22% of its staff, said he has no issue with his district approving every exception

request submitted because every employee who applied qualified.



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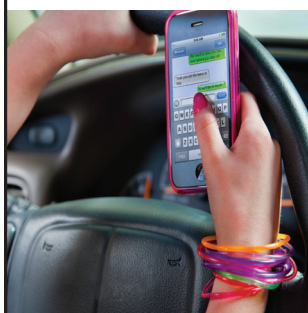
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