



Sherrie Kvamme/Contributed Photo

Everyone in New Bridge decorated for Christmas last year — residents even put lights and decor on the row of mailboxes.

## LIGHTS

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Local residents Mib and Jacque Dailey were Santa and Mrs. Claus for the caroling event and handed out candy.

Although the caroling was fun, Cole wanted something more to brighten the dark December nights.

“We talked about decorating houses and lighting up the community,” she said.

She presented the idea to members of the New Bridge Grange, who decided to support it and sponsor the prizes for the Christmas lighting contest: \$100 for first place, then four \$25 awards for the runner up displays.

Cole put up posters about the contest, and articles ran in Halfway’s Hells Canyon Journal newspaper.

“And when I saw some-

### Other Richland events

Eagle Valley Grange’s holiday flea market and auction is Saturday, Dec. 4. The market starts at 9 a.m. and the auction begins at 2 p.m. There will also be food to purchase (soup, chili, pies and cinnamon rolls).

On the following weekend, the Richland Christmas tree lighting happens on Friday, Dec. 10, at 6 p.m. Santa will be in attendance, and warming fires to ward off the cold.

one, I asked if they would do lighting,” Cole said. “It was to get people out of their house and think of something other than COVID.”

She had 18 people enter the contest.

“But we had others who didn’t enter but still decorated,” she said. “One guy kept decorating until Valentine’s Day.”

She said Richland Feed & Seed couldn’t keep lights in stock.

“He had to keep ordering,” Cole said.

She brought in anonymous judges from out of town, and said people came from around Eastern Oregon and Boise to see the light displays in Eagle Valley.

“The whole town of New Bridge was full of lights. It was wonderful,” she said.

(New Bridge is an unincorporated community about three miles north of Richland.)

Cole is already spreading the word for the 2021 version of the contest, which she’s calling “Light Up Eagle Valley.” Prizes are again sponsored by the New Bridge Grange.

Cole is accepting entries now. Judging will happen between Dec. 18-21, and the winners will be announced before Christmas.

“I’m hoping to have more entries,” she said. “It’s to get everyone in a better mood and feeling good. It’s just a happy time.”

For information about the lighting contest, or to enter, call Cole at 541-893-3285.



Sherrie Kvamme/Contributed Photo

Residents of Eagle Valley illuminated their yards and homes during December 2020 for the first lighting contest sponsored by the New Bridge Grange. The tradition is continuing this month.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### CASA plans multiple events in December

CASA of Eastern Oregon has a busy month, beginning Friday, Dec. 3, with the tour of gingerbread creations at businesses in downtown Baker City. This year’s theme is Santa’s Village. A map of where to see the gingerbread displays will be available at the CASA office, 2024 Main St., Crossroads Carnegie Art Center and the Chamber of Commerce.

Also on Friday, the Baker Heritage Museum will have a pop-up exhibit featuring sleigh bells and other wintery artifacts in front of CASA during the First Friday art walk. Also, the museum is holding a toy drive for CASA during this pop-up exhibit.

Friday is also when gingerbread houses decorated by youth will be delivered to the former location of The Little Bagel Shop. These will be on display for a week.

On Saturday, Dec. 11, CASA will sponsor a walking tour of historic home porches. Maps can be picked up at Low Bros. Les Schwab, the CASA office, and the Chamber of Commerce. Donations will be accepted — this tour is in lieu of CASA’s tradition-

al fundraiser of the historic homes tour, which isn’t happening for the second year in a row.

CASA is also holding the annual toy drive for children in foster care. Toys can be delivered to Low Bros. Les Schwab. Gift tags are also available at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center — gifts can be returned there or to the CASA office by Dec. 15. Inquires about gift donations can be directed to CASA, 541-403-0405. Mary Collard, CASA executive director, said items for teens are especially welcome, such as gift cards.

### Cultural Coalition seeking grant applications

The Baker County Cultural Coalition (BCCC) is welcoming grant applications for arts, culture and heritage projects through Dec. 15.

BCCC receives a grant annually from the Oregon Cultural Trust to support local heritage, arts and culture projects in the county. Over the past 18 years, the coalition has awarded more than \$100,000 in grants to local artists, programs such as “Chalk It up to Art,” local orchestra, children’s program, Halfway music events, heritage events such

as restoring the Haines School bell, history summer program at Baker Heritage Museum and the Baker 5J School District oral history collection.

Grants are typically \$500 and are not restricted to nonprofit organizations. Occasionally grants are given in larger amounts where a project warrants critical support. The BCCC board of directors seeks applications from any individual or group who has a program or project addressing arts and culture in Baker County and it looks forward to receiving creative ideas.

The local grant process through BCCC for 2022 is in two stages. The first deadline is Dec. 15 for grants given in January; the second stage is May 15 for grants given in June for projects taking place before the end of 2022. Grant applications and instructions for reports can be found on the Baker County website at [www.bakercounty.org/cultural\\_plan/contact\\_us.html](http://www.bakercounty.org/cultural_plan/contact_us.html).

Since few grants were able to be given during 2020 and 2021 because of COVID limitations on programming, BCCC has money left over from those years to support more cultural activities.

# Commissioners discuss warming center for homeless

By SAMANTHA O’CONNOR  
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With winter just around the corner, Baker County Commissioners discussed the homeless situation in Baker County and the possibility of finding a building where people could stay overnight.

During the Wednesday, Dec. 1 meeting, Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said he called the warming center in La Grande and asked operators there about their center.

“They basically open up right about four in the afternoon and they lock the door at nine o’clock at night and it’s locked down until seven o’clock in the morning when everybody has to go out,” Harvey said.

The facility serves breakfast daily and allows people to sleep overnight during the winter.

Harvey told fellow commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols that the La Grande warming center has a separate area for women and children, a kitchen to serve meals, and a common area with tables and chairs.

“I’m thinking we have to have maybe a two-pronged approach — one as a temporary start up, trying to accommodate basic needs we have for this winter, because it’s going to be quick

and down and dirty, if you want to say that,” Harvey said. “What I would like to do is look at a building that we could quickly facilitate, throw some walls up, I’m looking for something that’s got enough space to accommodate dormitory style sleeping and a common area and some sort of kitchen facilities with ideally bathrooms and showers.”

Harvey said this is not a permanent housing scenario, but rather a temporary emergency services program to get through this winter, so officials have more time to plan a permanent situation.

“And then a long-term strategy — funding, staffing, facility,” he said.

Harvey said the county needs to coordinate with New Directions Northwest, the Baker City Police Department and the Baker County Health Department.

He said the long-term goal should be to help people find permanent homes.

“I don’t want to be spending tons of money every year just to keep them as they are,” Harvey said.

Bennett said the county’s emergency management department has cots and blankets that could be used at a warming center, as well as sleeping bags.

Harvey said he was prompted to raise the issue by recent comments from

the public about an increasing number of homeless residents in Baker City.

“We need to do something,” Nichols said.

“If we don’t, we’re only going to be reactive,” Bennett said.

Baker City Police Chief Ty Duby said last month that he plans to ask the Baker City Council to approve an ordinance limiting where, and when, people can camp on public property within the city limits.

Duby said the city’s homeless population seems to have increased over the past few years, based on his own observations and from what he’s heard from other police officers and from the public.

This summer the police department received multiple complaints from residents about people camping beneath the bridges along the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, Duby said.

Nichols said he wants to talk with New Directions and Community Connection, and get Baker City officials involved in the discussion.

The commissioners will also be looking into funding opportunities for the project.

“We know there are state funds out there, so what we need to know is what we have as a match, because that’s the first thing they are going to ask,” Bennett said.

## COUNTY

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The county disposed of that material, as well as fiberglass insulation and treated and painted wood, in an open pit on Orr Road near Halfway, where the materials were burned, according to the letter.

Oregon law prohibits those materials from being burned.

Asbestos, a known carcinogen, was used in many building materials in past decades.

The debris remained in the pit until May 2021, when the county “properly packaged and disposed of the material as asbestos-containing waste material,” O’Donnell wrote.

Laura Gleim, public affairs specialist for the DEQ’s Eastern Region, wrote in an email to the Baker City Herald that the agency learned about the incident several months after the demolition when “a county employee contacted DEQ to ask if they should have followed asbestos rules. The answer is yes.

The county then hired an asbestos contractor to survey and properly dispose of the remaining ash and debris.”

The county has 20 days to decide whether to appeal the fine.

Mosier said county officials will be discussing the matter with DEQ, including the possibility of reducing the fine by doing an environmental improvement project somewhere in the county.

“So, the county’s going to investigate that and try to

make a good outcome,” Mosier said. “There are some things that we may be able to appeal but it’ll be up to the commissioners to decide if they want to go that route or invest in a local project with the penalty funds.”

In addition to the county’s proposed fine, the DEQ has notified Rodney Tarter, who owns the property where the material was disposed of, that the agency is fining him \$3,300 for maintaining an illegal solid waste disposal site.

According to DEQ documents, on April 19, 2021, an accredited inspector collected samples from the material in the pit on Tarter’s property.

A subsequent analysis showed the 60% chrysotile asbestos concentration in the wallboard.

On May 5, a licensed asbestos abatement contractor removed about 10 cubic yards of material from the pit and disposed of it.

The proposed \$7,400 penalty includes three separate violations:

- \$3,200 for failing to have an accredited inspector examine the mobile home before demolition.
- \$2,400 for performing an asbestos abatement project (the demolition qualifies as such) without a license.
- \$1,800 for disposing of material in a non-permitted site.

In her email to the Herald, Gleim wrote: “DEQ understands the county’s goal in demolishing the mobile home was to eliminate the safety

hazards it posed to the public. But in doing so, the county put the public, as well as its employees, at risk of exposure to asbestos and other harmful chemicals.”

### Second asbestos-related issue in 2021

In late March, DEQ notified the county of a proposed \$8,400 fine, also related to the removal of asbestos-containing material.

The agency alleged that Bill Harvey, chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, had removed asbestos-containing flooring in the summer of 2020 from the building at 2200 Fourth St. that the county bought as headquarters for the Baker County Health Department.

Harvey, who is a building contractor, denied that the flooring he removed contained asbestos.

DEQ later rescinded its proposed fine after the county’s attorney provided evidence that the flooring Harvey removed matched other sections of flooring in the building that tests showed did not contain asbestos.

Gleim, the DEQ public affairs specialist, said in July 2021 that although the county did not have photos or other documentation confirming that the two sections of flooring were the same, the agency also did not have evidence to contradict the county attorney’s claim that the flooring Harvey removed was the same as the sections that did not contain asbestos.



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