



SPORTS A6
Bulldogs avenge
Fruitland loss



GO! MAGAZINE
Your weekly guide to arts and entertainment
events around Northeast Oregon

SATURDAY
The winter wind as sculptor
— and as scalpel

Baker City Herald

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QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber

A special good day to Herald subscriber Gordon Schaad of Baker City.

BRIEFING

Haines Fire Protection District board meets Jan. 10

HAINES — The Haines Fire Protection District board of directors will have its monthly meeting Jan. 10 at 7 p.m. at the main station, 816 Cole St. All district residents are invited. COVID-19 protocols will be followed.

Baker County seeks volunteers for committees

Baker County is seeking volunteers to serve on several committees, boards and commissions. These include:

- Baker County Planning Commission.
- Natural Resource Advisory Committee.
- Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Local Community Advisory Committee.
- Compensation Board
- Northeast Oregon Economic Development District Board.

Anyone interested must submit a volunteer form. Forms are available online at www.bakercounty.org/commissioners. More information is available by calling the county commissioners' office at 541-523-8200 or by emailing Heidi Martin at hmartin@bakercounty.org.

WEATHER

Today
40/33
Rain likely



Wednesday
40/31
Light snow



Full forecast on the back of the B section.



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Plowing Ahead

Persistent snow keeps city crews working around the clock

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Snow has occasionally, if briefly, stopped falling in Baker City this week, but scraping the stuff off city streets has been a constant task.

Crews from the Baker City Public Works Department had scarcely finished plowing high-priority routes when the latest in a series of storms commenced on Tuesday afternoon, Jan. 4.

"It snowed pretty much all night," Tom Fisk, operations supervisor for the department, said on Wednesday morning, Jan. 5.

That means workers will be busy for at least the next few days not only plowing snow, but also loading snow from berms on some streets and hauling it away in dump trucks.

The burgeoning berms usually are dealt with at night, when

there's little traffic, Fisk said.

The berm crew typically starts around midnight.

On the morning of Jan. 5 a four-man crew started around 4 a.m., plowing the several inches of snow that had accumulated overnight near Saint Alphonsus Hospital, schools and other high-priority areas.

With snow continuing to fall, Fisk said it's likely that city crews will also plow the less-traveled neighborhood streets across the city, possibly starting on Thursday, Jan. 6.

Although warmer temperatures and rain are forecast for Thursday and Friday, Jan. 7, Fisk said the depth of snow on streets, when it turns to slush, could make some areas impassable to some vehicles.

A wavering front

The culprit in this week's

snowy onslaught is a weather front that can't seem to decide whether it wants to be warm or cold.

This lethargic front has alternated between a north-moving warm front and a south-traveling cold front, said Jay Breidenbach, the warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Boise, which issues forecasts for Baker County.

Often during winter, fronts move through relatively quickly, propelled by the powerful jet stream winds 20,000 feet and higher in the atmosphere, Breidenbach said.

But for the past several days the jet stream has plunged well to the south of Oregon, leaving the state, and most of the Pacific Northwest, in what meteorologists call a longwave trough.

See, **Snow**/Page A3

COVID-19 SURGE

Goal is to continue schools, sports

School chief says it could be challenging

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Although Oregon state officials are recommending schools pause sports and other extra-curricular activities due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, the head of the Baker School District remains optimistic that the district can continue to operate as usual.

"I remain hopeful," Baker Schools Superintendent Mark Witty said on Wednesday morning, Jan. 5. "We've been pretty successful to this point."



Witty

See, **Schools**/Page A2

Property tax payments exceed 6-year average

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Although a Baker County group distributed a flier this fall urging residents to withhold their property tax payments until Baker City and County officials defied Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 vaccine mandate, tax payments through the end of 2021 were higher than the six-year average.

As of Dec. 31, 2021, the county had received almost 90.2% of property taxes for the 2021-22 tax year, said Alice Durlinger, the county's treasurer and tax collector.

See, **Taxes**/Page A3

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

Christina Witham files for county commissioner

Baker City native is first to file for one of the two positions to be decided this year

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Christina Witham has been making signs for other people for many years but she isn't quite comfortable with seeing her own name on one.

Much less signs all over Baker City.

But Witham will have to get used to it as she seeks her first elected office.

Witham, 52, a Baker City native, has filed for position 2 on the three-member Baker County Board of Commissioners. That's the part-time position held now by Mark Bennett.

Bennett, whose term continues through the end of

2022, is not seeking reelection.

Witham, a 1987 Baker High School graduate, is the first person to file for either of the two commissioner positions.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey, whose term also expires at the end of 2022, has also said he won't seek another four-year term.

Witham, who owns Oregon Sign Company in Baker City, said the uncertainty about who will replace Harvey as the lone full-time commissioner was the factor that was hardest for her to overcome in deciding to file as a candidate.

But ultimately she decided this fall to collect signatures on a candidate petition, which was approved Dec. 8.

Witham said friends have encouraged her to run for a county commission position

in the past, but she always declined.

"I'm not a politician at all and don't want to be," she said in an interview on Tuesday, Jan. 4.

When a friend broached the topic again in October 2021, Witham said she was initially hesitant as before.

But she said she talked with Harvey, and others, and she concluded that she "didn't have any excuses" not to run.

Witham said Russ Witham, her husband of 33 years, also encouraged her, telling her he was confident she was capable of doing the job.

Christina Witham said she ultimately decided that this is the right time for her to try to serve Baker County in a new way.

"Now, more than ever, I think people need to be stand-

ing up if they see something that's wrong or they want to change something," she said.

Witham emphasizes that she believes the current commissioners — Bruce Nichols, along with Bennett and Harvey — have done a good job representing county residents, including during the pandemic, during which Bennett has served as the county's incident commander.

Witham said that although COVID-19 "is a real thing," she doesn't support mandates for vaccines or masks.

She thinks residents should decide for themselves, and for their children, whether to be vaccinated or to wear masks.

"We're going to have to learn to live with COVID and its strains," Witham said. "We're going to have to be smart about it, and protect the most vulnerable."

See, **Witham**/Page A3

Election Schedule

The deadline for county commissioner candidates to file is March 8, 2022. Both position 2, held by Mark Bennett, and position 1, held by Bill Harvey, will be on the ballot. The primary election is May 17, 2022. If there are two or more candidates for either of the positions, and one candidate receives more than half the votes, that candidate would be elected in the primary. If none of the candidates in either race gets more than half the votes, the top two candidates would advance to a runoff in the Nov. 8, 2022, general election.



TODAY
Issue 100
28 pages

Business.....B1 & B2	Community News.....A3	Horoscope.....B3 & B4	Obituaries.....A2	Sports.....A6
Classified.....B3-B4	Crossword.....B3 & B4	Lottery Results.....A2	Opinion.....A4	Turning Backs.....A2
Comics.....B5	Dear Abby.....B6	News of Record.....A2	Senior Menus.....A2	Weather.....B6