



SPORTS A5
Baker beats Fruitland



OUTDOORS & REC B1
Snow drifts create a frozen desert

TUESDAY
High school sports roundup

Baker City Herald

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BRIEFING

Baker County seeks volunteers for committees

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

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.

Home Builders group offers scholarships

The Northeast Oregon Home Builders Association is offering two \$1,500 scholarships to help educate and train individuals in a profession related to the building industry.

Applicants must currently be a senior enrolled in high school, enrolled as a college student or in a qualified apprenticeship program. The students must be a resident of Umatilla, Morrow, Union, Baker, or Wallowa County and have an interest in or intend to pursue a career in the construction profession. Scholarship application forms are available at:

- www.neohba.com
- www.columbiabasinstudenthomes.org
- Local high school counseling offices

Deadline for application is April 15, 2022.

WEATHER

Today
32/16
Partly cloudy



Sunday
28/13
Mostly sunny



Monday
29/14
Increasing clouds



Full forecast on the back of the B section.

'We serve'

Baker City Lions Club continues projects amid declining membership

BY LISA BRITTON

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The Lions go about stringing lights, working in a coordinated way that shows they've done this many, many times.

And as they unwind strings and test to make sure the bulbs glow, they catch up on each other's lives and ask how other members are doing.

Decorating several structures at Geiser-Pollman Park for the holiday season is just one community service project of the Baker City Lions Club.

The local Lions club was founded in August 1929. The national organization started to 1917. It went international in 1920.

"We do a lot of things for the community and the kids," said Jeff Nelson, current president of the Baker City club. "The Lions are wonderful — they have a good time, they enjoy it, and they enjoy each other."

Nelson has been a member for about 18 years.

Gregg Hinrichsen joined about 30 years ago.

"It's a very positive, energetic group of people who I enjoy spending time with," he said.

Steve Fiddler joined about seven years ago.

"I was a good friend of someone who was a member and he talked me into it," Fiddler said. "It's been a lot of fun. The commitment of the core group is really dedicated to the community."

But this club, like many service organizations, is trying to do the same projects with fewer members.

Today's membership is about 35.

"Compared to 52 about two years ago," Nelson said.

And of those 35, about 14 actively participate in meet-



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Baker City Lions Debby Ray, left, Jeff Nelson and Steve Fiddler decorated the gazebo at Geiser Pollman Park with lights on Dec. 2, 2021.

ings and committees.

Blake Marlia, who joined the Lions about 18 years ago, is worried about the declining membership.

"The biggest thing is to figure out the next generation — how to inspire them to help out," he said.

He saw the Lions Club as a good way to volunteer in Baker City.

"I wanted to be involved in the community," he said. "This was an easy way to do that. It's a good avenue for people to volunteer."

And he likes the company. "They're fun," he said of his fellow Lions.

One of their more visible club projects — and fundraiser — is serving breakfast on Saturday and Sunday of Miners Jubilee every July. In 2021, the Lions recruited extra help from the Kiwanis Club and a local volleyball team.

Other projects include serving dinner at Community Night Out every August, tending burn barrels and providing hot cocoa at

the tree lighting in December, and various projects along the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, such as the exercise zone near Kirkway and H streets and the memorial park just north of Broadway Street.

Nelson said the summer of 2022 will see the addition of a memorial wall in that park to honor Lions who have passed away. The club is working with Natural Structures.

See, [Lions/Page A6](#)

COVID cases surge

Officials optimistic that omicron effects will be less severe

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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The surge in COVID-19 cases has arrived in Baker County, but local officials say they're optimistic that because the new omicron variant is less virulent than earlier strains, there won't be a repeat of the rapid rise in hospitalizations and deaths that followed previous surges.

"Hopefully that's the case," Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said on Friday morning, Jan. 7.

"This variant isn't as virulent as the delta variant, but if you have underlying health issues there is still that risk," said Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, who has served as the county's incident commander throughout the pandemic.

"There are still folks that this (omicron variant) will be really, really impacting," Bennett said on Jan. 7.

Baker County reported 27 cases on Thursday, Jan. 6. That's the highest one-day total since 27 cases on Sept. 16, during the peak of the surge driven by the delta variant.

There were 17 cases in the county on both Wednesday, Jan. 5, and Tuesday, Jan. 4.

See, [COVID/Page A3](#)



Staten



Bennett

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

Warming shelter unlikely this winter

BY SAMANTHA O'CONNOR

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Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett said during a meeting Wednesday, Jan. 5, that he doesn't think it will be possible to open a temporary warming shelter for homeless residents this winter.

"I don't see how we could get anything done before winter's over," Bennett said.

He said the county lacks community support, a detailed plan and people to work at a shelter.

Bennett suggested as an alternative that the county supply local police agencies with sleeping bags and tents that officers could give, at their discretion, to people who need them.

He also said police can encourage homeless residents to seek services through agencies such as New Directions Northwest and the Oregon Department of Human Services.

"I think if we raise the bar to the level where they've got to go and they have to meet with the officer and they have to show something and then we connect them up and they have services," Bennett said.

He said the goal is to ensure people have some protection from winter weather.

Then commissioners and other officials can continue the discussion later this year about potentially opening a warming shelter.

Bennett and Commissioner Bruce Nichols voted for a motion to provide the sleeping bags and tents.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey, who initially proposed the warming shelter on Dec. 1, 2021, did not vote on the motion.

"I still believe there should be something done on an emergency basis, my own personal opinion obviously, as far as cold weather con-

cerns that we have from time to time," Harvey said.

After commissioners initially discussed a warming shelter Dec. 1, the Baker City Council had a work session on Dec. 29.

Baker City Police Chief Ty Duby said his officers have been interacting with about 10 homeless people in town recently.

Resident expresses concerns about fairgrounds

During the commissioners Jan. 5 meeting, Suzi Smith expressed concerns about a warming shelter and urged commissioners to not pursue opening one in Baker City.

"After listening to Bill Harvey's proposal at the Baker City Council work session, I'm convinced that it's not necessary, it would be both expensive financially and detrimental to the quality of life in Baker City," Smith said.

Among the issues Smith cited are how many people would actually use a shelter, the potential that a shelter could attract people from outside the area, and possibly competing with other organizations that work to solve the root causes of homelessness.

"Would it not be better to coordinate and support the efforts of those employed in the endeavor already?" Smith said. "Why do we not make arrangements to transport those in need right now over to the overnight warming center that La Grande already has? Would a supporting role with the warming shelter in La Grande not solve the emergency and also give us time to better assess the problem and seek solutions before making unnecessary mistakes?"

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OREGON LEGISLATURE

Owens seeks to curb the governor's power

BY STEVEN MITCHELL

Blue Mountain Eagle

CRANE — A state lawmaker from Eastern Oregon will look to trim the powers of state government during an emergency when the Legislature meets for a short session in February.

A bill written by Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, whose district includes Baker County, would amend Oregon's Constitution to spell out when governors can declare emergencies, and how powers they can exercise and, more importantly, how long they can unilaterally keep them in place.



Owens

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