

Race

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Ellie May, the lead dog, is at the front of the team and responsible for heeding the musher's commands, such as for turns.

To round out her team of five dogs for the Eagle Cap Extreme, Kaaen borrowed dogs from two other veteran mushers, Bino Fowler of Bend and Craig Anderson of Enterprise.

Kaaen said that sort of cooperation among mushers has been one of the more gratifying parts of the experience.

"I was really impressed by how much of a community the mushers are," she said. "They help each other even though it's a competition."

She said veteran mushers gave her advice during the first 11-mile leg of the route, from Ferguson Ridge to Salt Creek Summit.

As the only competitor in the Junior race, Kaaen said she was pretty much alone during the 11-mile run back to Ferguson Ridge.

She started the race at 12:52 p.m. and arrived at Salt Creek Summit at 2:12, covering the 11 miles, most of it uphill, in 80 minutes.

"You can get going pretty fast," she said. "Definitely a lot faster than I could run by myself."

After a 14-minute rest at Salt Creek Summit, Kaaen and her team made the trip back to Ferguson Ridge in 96 minutes.

Although the second leg was mainly downhill, Kaaen said her average speed was lower because a dog she borrowed from Craig Anderson had a toothache and a fever, so the dog rode in the sled.

Looking out for the dogs is a vital part of sled dog racing, and Kaaen said the



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Sofie Kaaen of Baker City stands at the helm of her dogsled Thursday, Jan. 20, 2022, before beginning the 22-mile juniors Eagle Cap Extreme Dog Sled Race at Ferguson Ridge Ski Area outside of Joseph.

veterinarians who work at the event have great advice.

She said mushing, despite its obvious differences from cross-country, also bears some similarities.

That was especially true at the start, with the competitors gathering, and during her return leg when she was by herself. Cross-country runners often have a similar experience, at least at times during a race.

"Out on the trail it's kind of just you and the dogs," Kaaen said. "It was peaceful and nice."

The weather was eclectic. "It was a little foggy, then

we had a little sun, and snow and rain — a little bit of everything," Kaaen said.

She said on Thursday evening, Jan. 20, that she probably wouldn't be able to do the second 22-mile stage on Friday, Jan. 21, not with one dog unavailable.

"That would be a lot for four dogs to do," she said.

Now that she's actually strapped on a numbered bib and guided a team in an official race, Kaaen said her enthusiasm for mushing has only grown.

"I definitely want to do it again next year," she said. "I'll be more prepared."

County

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Baker City Manager Jon Cannon attended the meeting.

"We have provided this service since before the 2018 (RFP — request for proposals), which the county released," Cannon said. "And after the RFP was released, Baker City has continued to provide ambulance services in your Baker ASA. We are pleased to be your provider."

As prescribed by state law, county commissioners establish ambulance service areas and choose their allowed providers.

The Baker City Fire Department is the longtime provider for an area that includes the city as well as much of Baker Valley and other parts of the county. The service area is about 1,600 square miles,

slightly more than half of the county area.

Two private companies, Med Transport Inc. of North Powder and Metro West Ambulance Inc. of Hillsboro, submitted bids for providing ambulance service in the area in 2019, but the county, in early 2020, put on hold the process of potentially awarding a new 10-year contract.

Cannon told commissioners that in 2021, the Baker City Fire Department, which responds to fires as well as medical calls, responded to approximately 2,050 calls for an ambulance. Around 20% of those were outside the Baker City limits but elsewhere in the

1,600-square-mile service area. The statistics come from Baker County Dispatch Center records, Cannon said.

"Each year, for the last five years, we've seen a consistent growth of 100 or more inci-

dents per year," Cannon said. "So, this is a significant growth for the Baker ASA. We anticipate that we will cross more than 2,200 incidents in this year, 2022," said Cannon.

Ambulance revenue, not including FireMed memberships, brought in about \$877,000 to the city for the 2019-20 fiscal year. That equates to about 38% of the fire department's budget for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2022. The rest comes from city property taxes, Cannon said.

"Right now, with these rising incidents, currently the ambulance service for Baker ASA is coming off of the city taxpayers," Cannon said. "It costs us, right now, right at two million dollars to run it."

He said if the number of ambulance runs continues to increase, the city will need to hire more employees.

"We're working real hard to pursue whatever grants and funding sources we can get," Cannon said.

He told commissioners that the city wants to continue

Wolves

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The committee also awarded money to several ranchers who reported lost or missing cattle that they believe were killed by wolves, or loss of weight due to possible wolf harassment.

- Lee Wright, \$27,980 for loss of value of cattle that didn't gain as much weight as expected. He applied for 50 pounds of lost potential weight on 400 head. This is full amount requested.

- Deven Thompson, \$20,400 for four missing calves, 10 missing cows and one missing bull (full amount)

- Stan Gulick, \$13,200 for 17 missing dry cows and 12 calves (full amount)

- Lee Wright, \$2,320 for two heiferettes, each about 860 pounds, found dead, but not confirmed as wolf kills (full amount).

- Carlton Andersen, \$2,550 for three missing calves (full amount).

The committee also had \$13,500 for work designed to deter wolves, money that the county has to spend by Jan. 31, 2022, or return to the state (30% of the county's allotment from the state must go to non-lethal prevention activities).

The committee approved the following amounts, all for hiring "range riders" — employees who travel in areas where cattle are grazing to try to deter wolves.

- Deward and Kathy Thompson, \$9,800 (requested \$18,775). The Thompsons' cattle were attacked multiple times by Lookout Mountain wolves last year.

- Barry and Shella DelCurto, \$1,450 (requested \$10,975).

- Deven Thompson, \$1,400.

- Colby Thompson, \$500 (requested \$1,425).

- Warnock Ranches (Jeanne Warnock), \$350 (requested \$720).



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo

A trail cam photo from May 30, 2021, of one of the two yearling wolves in the Lookout Mountain pack.

In addition to awarding money for 2021, the committee agreed to use money from its current year allocation to buy four radio receivers, at an estimated cost of \$5,000 to \$6,000, that would allow ranchers to keep track of the movements of wolves that ODFW has fitted with tracking collars.

The committee also decided to allocate \$30,000 for range rider deployments.

Both county and state officials have advocated for the state to give counties more money to compensate ranchers for wolf-related losses.

Rep. Bobby Levy, a Republican from Echo, in Umatilla County, plans to introduce a bill, when the Legislature convenes Feb. 1, allocating \$1 million for the compensation program for the next two-year budget cycle.

During 2020 the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which administers the wolf compensation program, distributed \$130,164 among 12 counties, including Baker. That was just 37% of the amount requested. In 2019 the state awarded \$251,529, or 58% of requests.

Bennett said last fall that he "wholeheartedly" supports Levy's bill.

Biologist gives update on county wolves

Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office, gave the commit-

tee an update on wolf packs around Baker County.

"The Pine Creek pack is no more," Ratliff said, referring to a pack in eastern Baker County that killed four head of cattle and injured seven others in the Halfway and Pine Valley area during the spring of 2018.

He said some wolves from that pack had migrated to Idaho, where there is sport hunting of wolves, unlike in Oregon. Just a few wolves have been confirmed recently in that part of Baker County, and not on a regular basis.

"The Pine Creek Pack that caused a bunch of problems in years past are not there," Ratliff said.

In that pack's absence, the Cornucopia pack is still active in that area.

The Keating pack, which consists of at least 10 wolves, has four wolves fitted with tracking collars.

Ratliff said he's targeted pups for collars because they stay longer with the pack, so their location is a better indication of where the bulk of the pack is roaming.

The Keating pack killed a herding dog in the Keating Valley earlier this month.

Ratliff said the Lookout Mountain pack, following the killing of eight wolves last year, is officially down to two wolves. He has had reports from people who saw a third wolf in the area, but that hasn't been confirmed.

providing ambulance services, as it has for decades.

Cannon suggested the city and county negotiate a contract under which the city can continue to provide ambulance service, and city and county officials could later mutually agree on any changes needed in services for the entire service area, including outside the city limits.

"It makes clear the scope of services which you can rely on," Cannon said of his proposal.

He said a new contract also provides a potential avenue for the city to "come to the table and discuss solutions for your other ambulance service areas," where the county might need further assistance from the city.

Cannon said the contract should also outline how the county would contribute money for ambulance services outside the Baker City limits.

Commissioner Bruce Nichols said the commissioners haven't had time to look over Cannon's proposal and wanted to take time to go over the ambulance service area and also get input from Jason Yencopal, the county's emergency management director.

"The concept is good," Nichols said.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said the county, in addition to working with Baker City, needs to address ambulance needs elsewhere in the county, including Huntington.

"The incorporated cities are autonomous and they are equal to Baker City, so we can't say Haines, Sumpter, Unity, Huntington, that's up to whatever they do," Bennett said.

County officials discussed in 2019 the possibility of asking voters to approve a ballot measure that would impose

a fee to raise money for ambulance services outside the Baker City limits.

Bennett expressed concerns, though, about going to the taxpayers or budgeting for something that does not have a finite number.

Cannon said the city is interested in being a part of the discussion about providing ambulance services in the Huntington area or other parts of the county.

"If it's useful to the county, we're open to having that discussion," Cannon said.

Bennett said he appreciated the work that had gone into Cannon's proposal, and he thinks it's a good starting place.

Cannon will bring more information to the commissioners at a later meeting.

"We'll be ready to keep these discussions rolling first of February," he said.

Rodney Lewis Loennig

April 16, 1955 - December 22, 2021

Rodney Lewis Loennig, loving father, brother, uncle, and friend died Wednesday, December 22, 2021, in Baker City, Oregon. He was 66 years old.

Rodney was born April 16, 1955, in Baker, Oregon, to parents Frank Loennig and Marjorie Marie Loennig. After graduating from North Powder High School, he moved to Eugene and obtained an associate's degree in Electronics from Lane Community College while living with his grandfather.

It was while attending North Powder High School that Rodney accompanied a friend to visit his family. The family happened to be the home of Sherry's parents, his friend introduced Rodney to his cousin, Sherry Cairns, at her home in Baker. The two began dating shortly afterwards. Though they were apart for two years he did not let his move to Eugene stand in their way. While Rodney worked to obtain his degree as well as work full time he would make the long drive back to Baker, in his '66 Volkswagen named "Cookie" to see Sherry on the weekends. The month after Sherry graduated Baker High School, they were married July 27, 1975.

The newlyweds moved to Creswell, Oregon, where Rodney honed his skills with electronics before taking on a position at Peace Health Hospital in 1979 where he would fashion a 35-year career. He started humbly enough calibrating blood pressure cuffs and the voltage on electronic equipment. As the hospital grew and acquired more complex machines Rodney earned the opportunity to become a Radiographic Service Technician which saw him flying all over the United States from North Carolina to New Jersey, Wisconsin to California to be trained on how to service and repair

the hospitals' X-ray and radiation therapy machines along with anything else that seemed to fit into his job description.

During this time Rodney and Sherry welcomed their two daughters, Lisa and Cassie. Though living in the Willamette Valley, they would often take their children most summer and winter vacations back to see family and friends in the Baker Valley and surrounding areas.

Once Rodney retired in September 2016, he returned to his family's land outside of North Powder and began to prepare it to be a permanent home for he and Sherry, who joined him once she retired the following year.

Rodney enjoyed spending time with his family and friends. He took great pride in making breakfast, "Papa's Famous Pancakes" for his wife, his daughters, and their families when they came to visit. His love for building and electronics never left and he would often find amusement in racing his own modified remote-control cars to the delight of his daughters and grandsons. Most days during Rodney's retirement he would often partner with his brother Gerald to help work the timber on their neighboring properties, reminiscing about shared memories while making new ones.

In addition to Sherry and their children, Lisa Loennig-Tinker (Noah Tinker) and Cassie Loennig, Rodney is survived by two grandsons, Aiden Tinker and Dylan Ritz, his brothers, Derry and Gerald, and sister, Helen, along with 3 nieces and 4 nephews.

A celebration of life will be planned for early summer.

Online condolences may be made to the family at www.lovelandfuneralchapel.com.

COVID

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For the week Jan. 9-15, there were 55,612 cases statewide, and 10,570 were breakthrough cases.

The breakthrough case rate of 19% is the state's lowest since early September.

The statewide breakthrough case rates for the five weeks prior to Jan. 9-15 ranged from 31.3% to 46.5%.

Baker County's breakthrough case rate also declined over the most previous week, to 31.8% for Jan 9-15.

The rates for the previous two weeks were 38.5% and 41.4%.

According to OHA, throughout the pandemic,

3.2% of people with breakthrough infections have been hospitalized, and 0.8% have died. The average age of vaccinated people who have died is 81.

Testing and vaccinations

Baker County mirrored Oregon as a whole in seeing an increase in COVID-19 testing over the past week.

Baker County had 394 tests for the week of Jan. 2-8, and 595 from Jan. 9-15.

The percentage of those tests that are positive has also risen, from 20.6% from Jan. 2-8 to 28.6% from Jan. 9-15.

Partial results for the current week, Jan. 16-22, showed, as of Jan. 20, a test total of 336 and a positivity rate of 34.2%.

Baker County's vaccination rate remains the fifth-lowest among Oregon's 36 counties, with 55.3% of residents 18 and older having had at least one dose.

Among those who are fully vaccinated, including a booster dose, Baker County residents 65 and older have the county's highest rate, at 42.3%. The statewide average for that age group is 58.9%.

The booster dose rate for other age groups in the county:

- 50 to 64 — 24.6% (statewide average, 41.7%)
- 20 to 49 — 11.8% (statewide average, 29.4%)
- 18 to 19 — 11.1% (statewide average, 18%)
- 12 to 17 — 3.1% (statewide average, 14.3%)

New At The Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. Recently, Baker County Library has added 15 new bestsellers, six audiobooks, 26 children's books, and 113 other new books, including 65 that are available online. See everything new to Baker County Library District at www.bakercountylibrary.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

- "Armageddon 2419 AD," Philip Francis Nowlan
- "Criminal Mischief (Stone Barrington, #60)," Stuart Woods
- "Dead by Dawn (Mike Bowditch Mysteries, #12)," Paul Doiron

- "Greek Myths: A New Retelling," Charlotte Higgins
- "Invisible," Danielle Steel
- "Kaleidoscope," Brian Selznick
- "The Last Story of Mina Lee," Nancy Jooyoun Kim
- "A Man of Honor (Emma Harte #0.5)," Barbara Taylor Bradford
- "The Paris Dressmaker," Kristy Cambron
- "Where the Drowned Girls Go (Wayward Children, #7)," Seanan McGuire

DVDs

- "Dear Evan Hansen" (Musical)
- "The French Dispatch" (Comedy)
- "The Jesus Music" (Documentary)
- "The Last Duel" (Action)
- "No Time to Die (Bond #25)" (Action)