

## Cafe

Continued from A1

The other dishes were Basque soup and Basque salad, flat-grilled rib steak, Basque beans, green beans, flan and Basque rice pudding.

"She's amazing. She can do anything," Sara said of Brown's cooking. Food for the international dinners is made from scratch. "I really try to stay true to what they would make," Sara said.

There's been one exception — she did order scrapple fresh from Pennsylvania for the Amish dinner.

(Scrapple is a special Amish food made from pork scraps and spices.)

The Amish dinner also featured chicken and waffles and shoo-fly pie.

For Russian night, Sara made a bird's milk cake.

"Jeff said it was the best I've ever done," Sara said.

"It was," Jeff said, popping into the cafe's dining room.

For each international dinner, Sara decorates the dining room in a style of the featured country or culture and provides an informational sheet with tidbits about the food or area's history.

"We try to feed your mind and your body," she said.

Reservations are required for these once-a-month experiences, and prices vary. She offers two seatings, and has filled up every time.

"Our community has been very supportive," she said. Prior to each featured night, she posts the menu on the cafe's board and on the Facebook page.

She'd like to bring in guest chefs for future international nights, especially meals with an Asian influence.

To inquire about the next international dinner, or make a reservation, call 541-893-6167.

### Friday night dinners

On the other three Friday nights of the month Sara stays open until 7 p.m. and offers special meals.



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Miss Pickett greets everyone at Sara's Richland Cafe. She even has her own Instagram page.

*"We want to give people an opportunity to open their horizons."*

— Sara Artley, co-owner of Sara's Richland Cafe

Reservations for these non-international nights are recommended, but not required.

These meals are also posted on the cafe's Facebook page.

Sara's Richland Cafe is open Monday through Satur-

day, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Fridays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

And expect a greeter at the door — the Artley's border collie, Miss Pickett, loves playing fetch. She even has her own Instagram page: @MissPickettPup.

## Roadkill

Continued from A1

"This is not to say this is going to solve our raven problem, because it's not," she said. "But it is a deterrent. If we're doing a good job of denying food sources to ravens, they'll have to travel farther, and probably not spend as much time in that area (that includes sage grouse habitat)."

Sage grouse tend to remain in relatively small areas, Defrees said, so the consistent presence of ravens can constitute an ongoing threat to the grouse.

Defrees said Oregon State University researchers are studying, in the Cow Valley area along Highway 26 in northern Malheur County, the effects on raven concentrations by removing road-killed animals.

### Reducing raven numbers

Dealing with ravens is not so simple as summoning a group of volunteers with shotguns. That's because ravens, unlike sage grouse, are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

That federal law does allow government agencies to apply for permits to kill ravens, however.

In Baker County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and ODFW last year started a two-year project to remove raven nests in and near sage grouse habitat in Baker County, Defrees said.

Depending on how effective that tactic is at curbing raven populations, the agencies could also use a permit to kill ravens, Defrees said.

### Birds and politics

Sage grouse, which are about the size of a chicken, have been a candidate for federal protection for more than a decade.

In September 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list the bird as threatened or endangered.

But environmental groups have repeatedly asked the federal government to classify the bird as a threatened or endangered species, a



Nick Myatt/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, File

A male sage grouse inflates the air sacs in its breast and fans its tail feathers as part of the bird's elaborate spring courting ritual.

decision that could curtail activities, including cattle grazing and motorized vehicle use on public land, that could degrade sage grouse habitat.

According to ODFW's 2021 sage grouse report, the estimated population of the birds in Baker County (and a small part of southern Union County) in the spring of that year was 704. That's a 42.6% increase from the estimate of 494 birds in spring 2020, but the report notes that this increase "was likely a result of the analysis methodology used to generate population estimates."

The report states that sage grouse populations in the county have risen since 2014, including an average annual increase of 1.7% in the number of male grouse at "leks" — the open areas where the birds gather each spring and where the males perform the species' elaborate courting ritual, which includes inflating air sacs in their breasts and fanning their tail feathers.

However, between 2005 and 2021, among leks that were surveyed in both years, the number of males present declined by 81%.

"This area has experienced a long-term population decline and has remained stagnant in recent years," the report states.

### Carcass conundrum

Although other animals are killed by cars, deer are the biggest animals frequently hit on Highway 86 east of Baker City.

The challenges, Defrees said, are how to gather the carcasses in a timely way, and then what to do with them.

She said Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) crews can't be expected to pick up carcasses and haul them to a processing site.

The proposed place for that is Baker Sanitary Service's landfill near Sutton Creek, a few miles southeast of Baker City off Old Highway 30.

The idea, Defrees said, is to turn the carcasses into compost.

Ace Clark, manager for ODOT's District 13, which includes Baker County, said he has met with Defrees and Baker Sanitary Service officials about the proposal, most recently on Jan. 13.

Clark said ODOT does not plan to use any of the LIT's Lottery money to do any work in Baker County in collecting and hauling carcasses. He said ODOT did give Defrees and Baker Sanitary Service information about the composting guidelines the agency uses.

For about a decade, ODOT has had a composting center near Heppner where road-

killed deer are taken from just the local area, including state highways 206, 207 and 74.

That facility was built to discourage scavengers such as coyotes from congregating near ranches and farms, and potentially increasing the risk of more collisions between cars and wildlife. ODOT also cited bacteria and other pathogens on animal carcasses that potentially cause health and environmental hazards in its request for a permit for the compost center.

That project has nothing to do with sage grouse, since there are no nearby populations of the birds.

David Henry, president of Baker Sanitary Service, and Garrett Virtue, the landfill manager, said the company is interested in working with Defrees and the sage grouse LIT to dispose of roadkilled deer and turn the carcasses into compost.

Baker Sanitary opened a compost facility at the landfill in the summer of 2021. It initially processed yard waste, but Virtue said the company wants to add food waste and other meat to the facility. Deer carcasses present a different challenge, he said, because they would need to be ground up before being added to the compost process.

He said he'd like to have the company contribute to the effort to potentially benefit sage grouse and create another source of material for the compost processing.

"If we can help out and do a good thing, it's a win-win situation for everyone," Virtue said.

Henry said Baker Sanitary Service would also need to ensure it has a reliable supply of woody material to add to the mix, as an increase in meat and other food wastes would need to be offset by wood debris to ensure the proper ratio to produce usable compost.

Virtue said Baker Sanitary is still looking at the best way to sell, or otherwise make use of, the compost it produces.

One possible option is to use the material to improve the condition of soils in rangelands in the area, he said.

## Council

Continued from A1

ahead with the quiet zone plan proposed more than two years ago by a group of residents.

That group has also offered to raise the estimated \$150,000 needed to upgrade five railroad crossings to make it harder for a vehicle to reach the tracks while a train is passing. Federal rules require those improvements for a city to qualify for a quiet zone.

"I'm a believer that people put city council folks in charge to make decisions on their behalf, no different than what we see at the state level and or at the US government level," Guyer said on Monday morning, Jan. 24. "If there is a reason for the voters to vote on everything that comes up in city council, then what's the purpose of city council?"

The Tuesday, Jan. 25, Council meeting starts at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

In a quiet zone — a designation both La Grande and Pendleton have, two of 13 quiet zones in Oregon — freight trains are not required to sound their whistles when approaching a street crossing.

Train crews would still trigger their warning whistles at their discretion — if, for instance, they saw a vehicle or pedestrian on or near the tracks.

In Baker City, where about 24 freight trains roll through each day and there are five crossings within the city limits, trains moving at 50 mph have to use their whistles almost constantly to comply with the requirement that the warning be sounded at least 15 seconds, and no more than 20 seconds, in advance of reaching public crossings.

(For trains traveling faster than 45 mph — trains in Baker City sometimes move at about 50 mph — engineers can sound the whistle within 1/4 mile of a crossing, even if that's less than 15 seconds before it reaches the crossing.)

The City Council most recently discussed the quiet zone issue in October 2021, when it was still a six-member group.

During the Oct. 12 meeting, councilors deadlocked twice on 3-3 votes.

The first motion was to put the quiet zone matter on the May 2022 primary election ballot, letting city voters decide whether the city should pursue the designation. Mayor Kerry McQuisten and Councilors Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Joanna Dixon voted in favor.

Councilors Shane Alderson, Jason Spriet and Heather Sells voted against the motion.

The second motion was similar to what Guyer is proposing — to have the city make a formal application with the Federal Railroad Administration for a quiet zone designation.

The vote on the motion was divided the same way.

This time the trio of Alderson, Spriet and Sells was in favor, and the threesome of McQuisten, Waggoner and Dixon was opposed.

Guyer, in his proposal on the agenda for the Jan. 25 meeting, writes that although city staff could work on aspects of the quiet zone project as part of their normal work, money raised by the citizens group would be used "exclusively" to pay for crossing improvements.

The city could also sponsor grant applications promoted by the group.

Under Guyer's proposal, the Council would direct the city staff to make the quiet zone a priority for 2022-23, and to make the safety improvements at crossings "when sufficient external funds are available."

"The Council expects the City to install all necessary safety measures and to establish the Quiet Zone by 2023, or as soon as possible after construction is complete," Guyer wrote in his proposal.

He said in an interview Monday morning, Jan. 24, that he believes the positives of a quiet zone outweigh the negatives.

Guyer cited health issues from the whistles, and their effect on students learning at South Baker Intermediate School, which is next to the railroad tracks.

"Most kids probably don't have a problem in getting re-engaged but there's that very few that are in the classrooms that do have difficulty re-engaging after being disrupted," Guyer said.

"I don't think the trains alone are going to be a cause for somebody's hearing loss but I think it can be a contributing issue at a very young age," he said.

Guyer said he knows that some residents have expressed opposition to the quiet zone based on cost and safety.

But he pointed out that the citizens group has proposed to raise money for the work that would make the crossings safer.

He has also heard people expressing concerns about people walking down the railroad tracks who won't hear an oncoming train that doesn't sound its whistle.

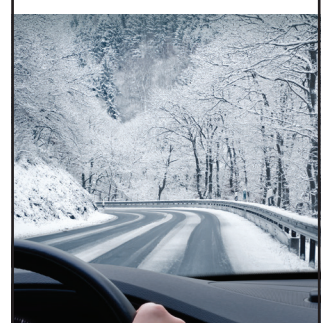
But he noted that engineers are still able to use their horns.

"This does not eliminate the engineers from using their horns when they see an issue," Guyer said.

He said he understands that his support for the quiet zone could diminish his chances of being elected to a four-year term on the City Council in the November 2022 election (he was appointed to replace Lynette Perry, who resigned in August 2021 due to health issues, and her term runs only through the end of 2022).

"If they do, I understand, but I'm still sticking with my original thought; I think this is a benefit to the community as opposed to a negative thing," Guyer said.

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## COVID

Continued from A1

And Staten pointed out that during previous surges, Baker County has tended to lag behind the state in reaching a peak of new infections.

A total of 29 people went to a free testing clinic in Baker City on Saturday, Jan. 22, but those PCR test results won't be available until later this week, Staten said on Monday, Jan. 24.

The county's case total for the week Jan. 16-22 was 183. That eclipsed the record set the previous week, Jan. 9-15, with 176 cases.

(Both weeks broke the record of 139 cases set Sept. 12-18.)

Daily case totals exceeded 25 on all but one day from Jan. 11 to Jan. 20, including a one-day record of 55 on Jan. 18, and the second-highest total of 40, on Jan. 20.

The daily counts for Jan. 21, 22 and 23 were 23, nine and nine.

Weekend case totals tend to be artificially low due to delays in reporting.

However, the total of nine cases for Saturday, Jan. 22, was lower than for each of the previous three Saturdays — 29 cases on Jan. 15, 10 on Jan. 8, and 12 on Jan. 1.

Sundays typically have the fewest cases — nine on Jan. 23, four on Jan. 16, six on Jan. 9 and zero on Jan. 2.

Staten said that although a

small number of people who have taken home tests that were positive have reported those results to the Health Department, she believes there are county residents who have also tested positive at home but have not reported the result.

She urges people who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, but who test negative with a home test, still try to be isolated for at least five days. Those tests aren't as accurate as the lab-processed PCR tests, Staten said.

As for symptoms, she said Health Department workers who do contact tracing and case investigations have found that cold-like symptoms, including a sore throat, headache, congestion and sometimes fe-

ver, have been the more common ailments recently.

In general, people are reporting somewhat less severe symptoms than with other variants — consistent with what health experts have found with omicron — but Staten cautioned that omicron can also make people severely, and potentially fatally, sick.

Staten said the record-setting number of new cases this month means the Health Department can't interview everyone who tested positive.

She said some people decline to talk with Health Department workers.

Staten said case investigators have linked some of the recent cases to holiday gatherings.

They have also noted that

more households have had multiple members infected, which she said is to be expected given how contagious omicron is.

The Oregon Health Authority didn't list any new workplace outbreaks in Baker County as of Jan. 16.

Staten said she hopes that, as statistics in other countries suggest could happen, the omicron surge will "go down almost as fast as it went up."

But with cases remaining high in Baker County, she urges people to continue to take precautions.

"We want people to have hope," Staten said. "We know people are tired of wearing masks and social distancing. It's hard for everyone."

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