

Local

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

50 YEARS AGO

from the Democrat-Herald
February 19, 1972

Gary Dielman, 32, left his law studies to accept an appointment Friday as juvenile court director to replace Ed Barnette, who resigned from the post effective March 1.

25 YEARS AGO

from the Baker City Herald
February 19, 1997

The Eltrym theater has new owners for the first time in 51 years. A new look and a new sound are coming soon, too. The owners are Rudyard Coltman, a Baker City attorney, and his wife, Forest.

The couple, who moved here in August from Eugene, bought the 57-year-old, 500-seat theater from Western Amusement Inc. of Pacific Palisades, Calif., which had owned the Eltrym since 1946.

The Coltmans plan to close the theater, at 1809 First St., beginning Friday for a month-long renovation during which they will remodel portions of the building's interior and exterior, as well as install a new stereo sound system and film projector.

10 YEARS AGO

from the Baker City Herald
February 20, 2012

Powder Valley just seems to have Pine Eagle's number this season.

The teams met for the third time Saturday — this time for the title in the District 7-1A girls basketball tournament — and for the third time the Lady Badgers were victorious.

Powder Valley won the first regular season meeting by four points, and in the second prevailed in overtime.

Saturday, in the Baker High School gym, Powder had to overcome a second-quarter rally by Pine Eagle to earn the district title and a first round bye in the Class 1A state playoffs.

ONE YEAR AGO

from the Baker City Herald
February 20, 2021

Peter Johnson is not the sort who begrudges a blizzard.

But even as someone who depends on snow, Johnson concedes that it's possible for a little too much to fall a little too rapidly.

As much as 4 feet of powder in less than a week, for instance.

The positive part of this frozen onslaught is that it accumulated on the ski runs at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, where Johnson is the general manager.

In the midst of a rather lackluster winter, the series of potent Pacific storms that have plowed through Oregon the past several days were welcome.

But because skiers and snowboarders have to drive to the resort, and because they like to park when they get there, this wintry barrage, even as it created conditions that skiers dream about, was causing a nightmare for Anthony Lakes' maintenance crew.

They had 9 miles of steep road to plow.

And a couple of acres of parking lots.

"Our crew's been at it since 6 a.m. Wednesday (Feb. 17)," Johnson said on Thursday morning. "And they're still going."

The weather offered only a brief respite for the beleaguered plow drivers as they prepared the ski area for its opening Thursday morning. Snow tapered off late Wednesday, but the latest storm arrived Thursday and added another half a foot or so to the ski area's base.

Anthony Lakes is open Thursday through Sunday.

OREGON LOTTERY

MEGABUCKS, FEB. 16

11 — 24 — 27 — 31 — 36 — 37

Next jackpot: \$1.8 million

POWERBALL, FEB. 16

22 — 30 — 40 — 42 — 48 PB 16

Next jackpot: \$31 million

MEGA MILLIONS, FEB. 15

2 — 4 — 15 — 21 — 63 Mega 19

Next jackpot: \$64 million

WIN FOR LIFE, FEB. 16

19 — 39 — 70 — 75

PICK 4, FEB. 17

• 1 p.m.: 8 — 1 — 0 — 4

• 4 p.m.: 3 — 5 — 7 — 3

• 7 p.m.: 7 — 6 — 2 — 8

• 10 p.m.: 1 — 0 — 4 — 4

LUCKY LINES, FEB. 17

4-8-10-14-17-21-27-32

Next jackpot: \$30,000

SENIOR MENUS

MONDAY (Feb. 21): Closed for Presidents Day

TUESDAY (Feb. 22): Chicken and broccoli fettuccine, mixed vegetables, garlic bread, cottage cheese and fruit, peach crisp

WEDNESDAY (Feb. 23): Pork roast, red potatoes, carrots, rolls, applesauce, birthday cake

THURSDAY (Feb. 24): Hot turkey sandwich, mashed potatoes with gravy, mixed vegetables, fruit cup, lemon squares

FRIDAY (Feb. 25): Spaghetti, garlic bread, broccoli, green salad, cookies

MONDAY (Feb. 28): Baked ham, candied yams, mixed vegetables, rolls, green salad, brownies

Public luncheon at the Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St., from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; \$5 donation (60 and older), \$7.50 for those under 60.

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Closures and staffing shortages are making pharmacies less accessible for many Oregonians

BY JAMIE GOLDBERG
oregonlive.com

Rick Meis drives an hour and a half through a winding canyon from his home in Halfway every six weeks to pick up his prescriptions at a Safeway pharmacy in Baker City.

It's an onerous process that has only become tougher. One local retail pharmacy in Baker City closed shortly after Meis moved to the rural Eastern Oregon community seven years ago. Last fall, retail chain Bi-Mart then announced it was getting out of the pharmacy business entirely. That left just five pharmacies in all of Baker County — two of which are in hospitals or clinics and less accessible, and one which Meis says is currently without a full-time pharmacist.

The result for customers has been long lines and difficulty contacting overworked pharmacy staff. Meis spent several days in December calling Safeway before he was finally able to get through to someone who could tell him his prescription was ready. He arrived at the pharmacy shortly after it opened but still had to wait 30 minutes to get his medication. Friends have said they waited two hours at busier times later in the day.

"It's truly a crisis for people who live rurally, especially older people," said Meis, 69.

Between closures and pandemic-related staffing shortages, pharmacies are becoming less accessible to many Oregonians at a time when their services are in greater demand than ever.

There are 731 active retail and hospital pharmacies in Oregon, according to data provided by the Oregon Pharmacy Bureau. That is 41 fewer than in 2016.

Roughly 60% of the counties in the state have fewer than two pharmacies per 10,000 residents. Two, Wheeler and Sherman counties, don't have any pharmacies at all.

Even before the pandemic, independent pharmacies said they were being squeezed by rising costs and declining reimbursement rates that made it harder to stay open, much less hire sufficient staff.

The pandemic has exacerbated those issues. Pharmacies have become the first stop for many to receive COVID-19 tests and vaccines, but staffing shortages have made it harder for pharmacies to keep up with demand.

"You're seeing burnout with a lot of pharmacists in Oregon and across the country," said Huy Hoang, a pharmacy professor at Pacific University and a floating pharmacist for CVS/Target. "You're seeing a lot of pharmacies closing down, mainly in the independent pharmacy sector, and now even the big chains are having to close some of their stores because they're trying to catch up on two to three weeks of prescriptions."

He said independent pharmacies have watched their profit margins shrink as pharmacy benefit managers have reduced their reimbursements. There's little they can do, he said, because only three corporations control 75% of the U.S. market, according to Drug Channels, a pharmaceutical



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald, File

Customers wait in line for the pharmacy at the Baker City Safeway store on Nov. 4, 2021.

economics newsletter.

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden has pushed for reform in the industry and an investigation into business practices by pharmacy benefit managers.

"Pharmacies are one of the most accessible health care provider services that communities have," Hoang said. "When closures happen, patients, especially in rural communities, have to travel a lot further for the nearest health care provider service and that just makes it more difficult for people to get the care they need."

Oregon Employment Department estimates indicate that the number of open jobs at pharmacies has skyrocketed during the pandemic.

There were an estimated 680 postings for pharmacist jobs and 1,303 job postings for pharmacy technician jobs in Oregon per year from mid-2019 to mid-2021, according to an employment department analysis of online job posting data from Help Wanted Online. That compares to an estimated 211 pharmacist job postings and 458 pharmacy technician job postings in a normal year.

That mirrors what those who work in the industry have seen on the ground.

Hoang said there had been a spike in burned out pharmacists and underpaid pharmacy technicians leaving the industry as the pandemic has increased the workload. In some cases, he said, a lack of technicians is forcing pharmacists to take on even more work to keep pharmacies open.

During the public health emergency, Oregon is allowing companies to hire pharmacists who hold licenses in other states in an attempt to fill the void.

Ryan Thueson, a regional pharmacy leader for Rite Aid who manages pharmacies in central and southern Oregon, has seen firsthand how challenging it is to fill vacant pharmacist and pharmacy technician jobs right now. The Rite Aid in Florence has been without a full-time pharmacist for three months and has only been able to open when a floating pharmacist is available to come to the store.

"There are a lot of pharmacies right now that are limiting hours, limiting days because there's a lack of staffing, both with pharmacists and pharmacy technicians," Thueson said.

Those temporary closures are causing uncertainty for patients who may find themselves with fewer COVID-19 testing and vaccine options, or may be unable to fill prescriptions when they need them.

pharmacy industry.

Bi-Mart had said its patient files would be transferred to nearby Walgreens locations and that Walgreens staff would operate pharmacies within Bi-Mart locations in areas where the drug store didn't have a nearby location.

But that hasn't been the case in many locales. Walgreens is only operating pharmacies inside six Bi-Mart stores across Oregon. While patient files have been transferred to Walgreens stores in many cities, that still leaves 31 communities with fewer pharmacy options than before. And in locations where there aren't any nearby Walgreens stores, other pharmacies have had to pick up the slack.

Jeanne Mendazona, the owner and pharmacist at Hometown Drugs in Madras and owner of three other independent pharmacies in Oregon, said she had taken on many former Bi-Mart patients. Hometown Drugs and Safeway are the only two retail pharmacies operating within the city.

With the influx of new patients and the added responsibility of providing COVID-19 testing and vaccinations on top of other vaccinations, Mendazona said she has often worked until midnight filling prescriptions. That schedule isn't sustainable, she said, and it could in fact be dangerous if pharmacists are asked to continue to take on more responsibility in the face of ongoing closures and staffing shortages.

"It is life and death in a pharmacy," Mendazona said. "We're not making hamburgers. If I put mustard on your burger and you don't like mustard, you're probably not going to die."

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KIWANIS STUDENT OF THE MONTH


JANUARY



Sophomore at Baker High School.


Ryann Paulsen

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JANUARY



Junior at Baker High School.

Neah Thomas

News of Record

DEATHS

James Allison: 76, of Baker City, died Feb. 16, 2022, at his home, surrounded by his family. A celebration of his life will take place Saturday, March 12 at 3 p.m. at the Harvest Christian Church, 3720 Birch St. in Baker City. Arrangements are under the direction of Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be shared at tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

FUNERALS PENDING

Rhonda Culley: A celebration of her life will take place on Saturday, Feb. 26, at 1 p.m. at the Community Connection Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St., in Baker City. For those who would like to make a memorial donation in honor of Rhonda, the family suggests Heart 'N Home Hospice through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be shared at tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

James Bacon: Memorial service with military honors will take place Saturday, March 12, at the Harvest Church, 3720 Birch St. in Baker City. Memorial donations in Jim's name can be made to the Powder River Sportsmen's Club

rifle range, through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be shared at tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

POLICE LOG

Baker City Police
Arrests, citations
PROBATION VIOLATION: Chuck Wayne Briny, 28, Baker City, 10:40 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 16, at Campbell and Ash streets; cited and released.

Baker County Sheriff's Office
Arrests, citations
FOURTH-DEGREE ASSAULT, HARASSMENT: Holly Melinda Cooney, 47, Halfway, 9:01 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 17, in Halfway; jailed.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF INTOXICANTS: Anthony Michael Rino, 35, Baker City, 12:40 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 17, at Auburn Avenue and Third Street.



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