



**SPORTS A5**  
**Baker track athletes**  
**compete in 3 meets**



**SPORTS A6**  
**Bulldog baseball, softball**  
**teams both sweep Mac-Hi**

# Baker City Herald

IN THIS EDITION: LOCAL • HOME & LIVING • SPORTS

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**QUICK HITS**

**Good Day Wish To A Subscriber**

A special good day to Herald subscribers Tony and Benita Britt of Baker City.

**BRIEFING**

**Art show, open house May 6 at Baker Early Learning Center**

Baker Early Learning Center, 2725 Seventh St., will have an art show, art sale, live music and open house on Friday, May 6, from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. A free family meal and cookies will be available until 6:30 p.m.

This event is sponsored by the BELC Advisory Council. Proceeds from the art sale will support child care scholarships.

This coincides with the First Friday art walk in Baker City. Other participating places are Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, Royal Artisan, Churchill School, Sweet Wife Baking, Sunn Juice + Decor, White House Art and Design, Ruffled Feathers Boutique and Cody's General Store.

**City begins testing fire hydrants**

The Baker City Public Works Department started its annual fire hydrant testing and water line flushing Monday, April 25, and the campaign will continue for about two to three weeks.

This can make water run cloudy temporarily. If that happens in your home or business, turn on a cold water faucet outside and let it run until the water is clear. If your water continues to be cloudy, call the city water department at 541-523-6541.

**WEATHER**

**Today**  
 59/33  
 Mostly sunny

**Wednesday**  
 67/44  
 Increasing clouds

**Full forecast on the back of the B section.**

## Pandemic delayed retirement plans

**Nancy Staten, Baker County Health Department director, reflects on her final two years**

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**  
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 The telephone call that changed Nancy Staten's life — and indirectly, pretty much everybody else's in Baker County — happened on a Friday. She remembers that part clearly, even if so much that was to come in the ensuing two years passed, as she puts it, "in a blur."

The date was Jan. 24, 2020. Staten had been working for the Baker County Health Department for 34 years, and as its director for almost three years.

The topic of the phone call from the Oregon Health Authority was something unfamiliar to almost everyone who isn't a virologist.

A novel coronavirus, first detected in Wuhan, China, was beginning to worry public health officials across the globe. Including in Oregon.

Staten was curious but not terribly concerned.

The first U.S. case had been confirmed in Washington state four days earlier.

There were none as yet in Oregon.

The concept that a pandemic could affect Baker County was not completely farfetched, to be sure.

Staten remembered the swine flu outbreak in 2009.

The Baker County Health Department had distributed vaccines, but the outbreak was relatively short-lived.

About two weeks later, in early February 2020, Staten participated in another call with state health officials.

This call was different.

The novel coronavirus was spreading.

What was to become the COVID-19 pandemic was underway, even if most people didn't realize it.

"I remember that sinking feeling," Staten said.

In March her trepidation would be justified.

Schools closed. So did businesses.

The term "social distancing" shoved its way into the lexicon.

For the first time in a century, an infectious disease was the dominant force in America.

"Things exploded," Staten said. "It was becoming more apparent that this was going to be a big deal."

And suddenly the last stanza of her career, with retirement actually conceivable, turned into an ordeal Staten couldn't have imagined.

**A Baker County native**

Staten, now 62, was born and raised in Baker City. A member of the Colton family, she graduated from Baker High School in 1977.

She attended a business school in Phoenix, Arizona, and earned an associate's degree. She didn't envision a career in public health.

But in 1986, Beth Baggerly, then director of the Baker County Health Department, offered Staten a job, one day a week, in the WIC program, which helps buy nutritious food for Women, Infants and Children.

Staten and her husband, Chuck, had two children. Their son, Jason, was four, and their daughter, Kari, wasn't yet two.

"I was a stay-at-home mom," Staten said.

She enjoyed the part-time job, though.

And when it expanded to three days per week, adding front desk duties to her work with the WIC program, Staten accepted the offer.

In 1991 she started working at the school-based health center at Baker High School. She became a certified nursing assistant, and stayed with the school-based clinic, which was operated by the health department, until February 2008.

She worked at the health department's front desk until she was named interim direc-



Ian Crawford/Baker City Herald

**Nancy Staten talks about her hectic final two years as director of the Baker County Health Department. Staten's final day was May 2, 2022, ending a 36-year career with the department.**

tor in late 2016, dropping the interim from the title in the spring of 2017.

For the first two and a half years the job was busy but predictable.

Until that fateful phone call.

**A pandemic begins**

The first phase of the pandemic was in some ways the most hectic, Staten said.

"There was so much we didn't know," she said.

Schools closed before spring break and then didn't reopen.

Restaurants, prohibited from having indoor dining, shifted to takeout.

And as the number of confirmed cases rose in Oregon, Baker County awaited its first.

It took longer than most.

The health department announced the county's first positive test on May 6.

During those initial weeks, Staten said, her tasks, and that of the health department staff, included preparing for what Dr. Eric Lamb, the

county's public health officer, described as the inevitable arrival of the virus.

Indeed, Staten said she wonders — and she knows many county residents share her curiosity — whether COVID-19 was here well before May 6, 2020.

"There were a lot of ill people around here in January and February," she said, noting that other viruses, including influenza, could have been responsible.

Regardless, even before the May 6 announcement, Baker County, like the rest of Oregon, was engulfed in the pandemic and its effects.

Staten said her life became a series of phone and video conference calls.

With officials from the Oregon Health Authority.

With other county leaders.

With representatives from the county's four school districts.

The 6:30 a.m. calls with school officials, for instance, became something of a ritual.

See, Staten/Page A3

## COVID cases remain low

**April had 13 cases, after 14 in March**

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**  
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Baker County's rate of COVID-19 cases remains at its lowest level since early in the pandemic.

April's total of 13 cases followed March's 14.

Both numbers are lower than any month since June 2020.

Baker County's first confirmed case was reported on May 6, 2020. There were no additional cases until July 2020. July's total was 28 cases, and there were at least 20 cases in each month from July 2020 through February 2022.

See, COVID/Page A3

## Idaho Power gains access for surveys, withdraws lawsuits

**Surveys are part of Boardman-to-Hemingway project**

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**  
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Idaho Power Company has withdrawn all of the 10 lawsuits it filed this winter against Baker County landowners seeking access to their property to do surveys related to the proposed Boardman-to-Hemingway transmission line project.

Attorneys for the company filed the civil petitions between mid December 2021 and early February 2022.

See, Power/Page A3

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

## Search training goes on despite soggy Saturday

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**  
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 Mannequins, fortunately, don't mind getting soaked.

They're immune to hypothermia, too.

Those attributes helped keep a major search and rescue training exercise going last weekend despite heavy rain on Saturday afternoon and evening, April 30, in the forest near Phillips Reservoir.

About 50 search and rescue team members from six Eastern Oregon counties gathered for the annual training, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the event's host, the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Baker County search and rescue members were joined by their counterparts from Union, Walla, Malheur, Gilliam and Umatilla counties, McClay said.

Those six counties, along with

Grant, Harney, Morrow and Wheeler, constitute the Eastern Oregon Search and Rescue group.

Participants spent the weekend at Union Creek campground, on the north side of Phillips Reservoir about 17 miles southwest of Baker City.

The initial plan was to have a ground search, involving a live "victim," as well as a rope rescue, involving a mannequin, both on Saturday, followed by a second ground search on Sunday, May 1, McClay said.

But with rain forecast, organizers decided to replace the live subject of the search with a pair of mannequins, simulating a father and son who failed to return from a trip to the woods, McClay said.

"We didn't want to have someone sitting out in the cold and wet for several hours," she said.

The rain also delayed the rope

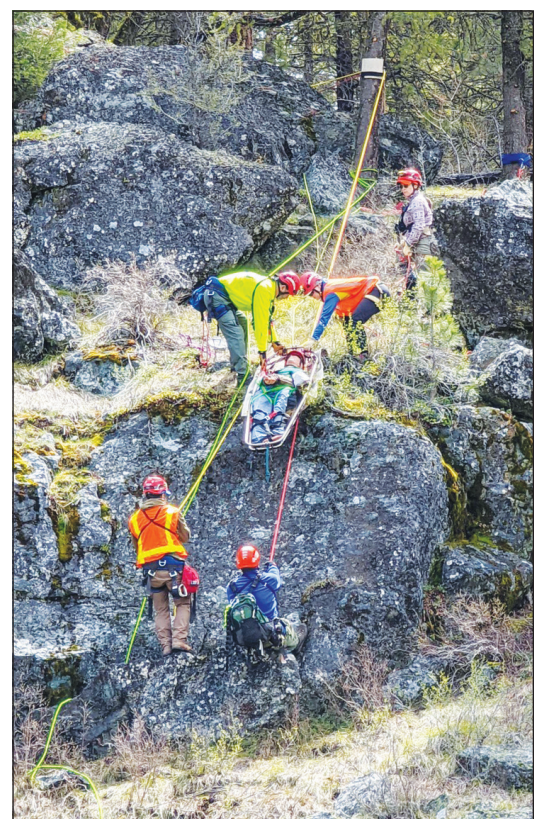
rescue since the showers made the rock cliff slick.

Instead, searchers, after finding the two mannequins during the ground search Saturday in the Old Auburn Road and California Gulch area, north of Highway 7, returned to the campground and welcome meals provided by retired Baker County Sheriff Terry Speelman.

On Sunday, with the skies having cleared, the rope rescue exercise took place, but the second planned ground search was canceled, McClay said.

In addition to the ground searchers, teams from Umatilla and Malheur counties brought aerial drones to participate in the training.

The annual exercise shifts among the 10 counties in the region. This was the first time Baker County has played host since 2015.



Genie Ogg/Contributed Photo

**Rope teams pull a mannequin, strapped to a litter, up a cliff near California Gulch during a training exercise on Sunday, May 1, 2022.**



**TODAY**  
 Issue 149  
 14 pages

Classified.....B2-B4	Crossword.....B3 & B5	Horoscope.....B4 & B5	Opinion.....A4	Sudoku.....B7
Comics.....B7	Dear Abby.....B8	Lottery Results.....A2	Senior Menus.....A2	Turning Backs.....A2
Community News.....A2	Home & Living.....B1-B3	News of Record.....A2	Sports.....A5 & A6	Weather.....B8