

Idaho man arrested at campground

Baker City Herald

An Idaho man who was hired to work as a camp host at Union Creek campground this summer was arrested at the campground Sunday night, May 1, after he allegedly entered the garage of the caretaker's home and banged on the door.

Joshua Don Morgan, 32, of Weiser, was charged with second-degree burglary, second-degree criminal mischief and second-degree criminal trespass.

Morgan was taken to the Baker County Jail.

The caretaker, who had his minor child in the home, which is near the campground entrance off Highway 7, called 911 about 8:30 p.m.

That was not long after members of the Baker County Sheriff's Office, who had hosted a search and rescue training exercise based at the campground, left, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the sheriff's office.

The campground has not opened to the public for the season.

According to a police report, Morgan allegedly caused damage to the door of the caretaker's home.

Sheriff's deputies and Oregon State Police responded.

Morgan was scheduled to be arraigned on Monday afternoon, May 2, in Baker County Circuit Court.

COVID

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Monthly case totals fluctuated, sometimes by considerable margins, during much of that period.

After hitting a then-record of 196 cases during December 2020, cases dipped to 70 in February 2021, rose again to 162 in April 2021, then plunged to 51 in May 2021 — the fewest until this March's total of 14.

During the surge caused by the delta variant in the summer of 2021, Baker County set consecutive records with 300 cases in August and 465 in September.

Power

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Idaho Power was asking a judge to order the landowners to allow access to their properties for a variety of surveys, including looking for certain wildlife and plant species.

The company sought to dismiss the lawsuits because "we were able to obtain rights-of-entry out of court from all of the Baker County landowners we requested it from," Sven Berg, an Idaho Power spokesman, wrote in an email to the Herald.

Cases then dipped significantly during the fall of 2021, to 168 in October, 143 in November and 106 in December.

The omicron variant surge spiked in January 2022, with a record 646 cases.

Since then, cases have dropped at a much more precipitous rate than previously.

February's total was 230, and then the case rate plummeted in March.

Baker County hasn't reported a COVID-19-related death in more than a month.

The county has reported 3,217 total cases, and 48 related deaths,

during the pandemic.

The situation has been different overall in Oregon, as the BA.2 strain has led to an increase in cases, although COVID-19-related deaths have continued to drop, and hospitalizations have risen only slightly.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 1,464 cases statewide on April 28 — the highest daily total since mid-February. The daily average, based on the previous seven days, has increased statewide from 228 in late March to 991 on April 28.

State and federal officials have pointed out that recent figures

could be underestimating the prevalence of the virus, since many people are doing home tests, the results of which don't have to be reported to public health agencies.

The number of recorded tests in Baker County has not varied dramatically over the past several weeks:

- March 6-12 — 193
- March 13-19 — 156
- March 20-26 — 131
- March 27-April 2 — 108
- April 3-9 — 145
- April 10-16 — 105
- April 17-23 — 127
- April 24-28 — 48 (does not include April 29 and 30)

including Baker, Union, Wallowa and Morrow in Oregon.

Idaho Power would have to pay private landowners for an easement to build the power line across their property. This would be a one-time payment, not an annual lease, according to the boardmantohemingway.com website.

Berg said the line would affect about 30 private landowners in Baker County, who combined own about 60 separate parcels.

Berg said Idaho Power does not pay for access to private property to do pre-construction surveys.

Staten

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Staten said Lamb, who participated in most of those and other virtual meetings, helped her immensely.

"We're very fortunate to have him," she said. "He's been there every step of the way. He's been amazing."

Staten recalls that in the spring of 2020, there was less opposition to the restrictions that Oregon Gov. Kate Brown imposed through executive orders.

Although subsequent studies have concluded that lockdowns of the sort used in Oregon and much of the U.S. likely didn't have a significant effect on the spread of COVID-19, Staten said she has never questioned Brown's intentions.

"Her intent was to keep people safe," Staten said.

Dealing with complaints

As the pandemic progressed, Staten said it was apparent that residents' attitudes had changed.

She and other health department staff fielded occasional complaints about school restrictions, which continued into the 2020-2021 school year, limits on restaurant capacity, and mask mandates.

Staten said the situation was frustrating at times because the health department "wasn't calling the shots" — the restrictions were set at the state level.

Not all the complaints were from people concerned that the state rules were too restrictive, Staten said.

The health department

also heard from people who thought the county should have been enforcing, for instance, the mask mandate.

Staten said she had to explain to people that the health department is not responsible for enforcing such rules.

She said her goal, as it has been throughout the pandemic, was to distribute accurate information and to answer residents' questions.

"We knew we were never going to please everyone," Staten said. "We do our best."

'Long days, Nights and weekends'

Although the terms "case investigation" and "contact tracing" have long been familiar in epidemiology, neither was especially common in ordinary conversation until COVID-19 arrived.

But once Baker County had its first confirmed case on May 6, 2020 — and particularly when cases became more common starting in July of that year — investigating cases and trying to interview everyone who might have been in close contact with someone who tested positive came to dominate Staten's work and those of her staff.

"Long days," she said. "Nights and weekends. It was unlike anything else we've dealt with."

But even with the massive increase in workload, Staten said the health department had to continue its usual tasks — the WIC program, for instance, which brought her to the department, and administering childhood vaccines.

"It's taken a toll, the past two years. But I care about people and I want people to be taken care of. I wanted to do the best I could for the people of our community."

— Nancy Staten, retiring director of the Baker County Health Department

By the fall of 2020, Staten said, the imminent arrival of COVID-19 vaccines became a major topic for public health officials across the country.

Baker County received its first doses in mid-December 2020.

Perhaps her most poignant pandemic memory is from Feb. 12, 2021, when the health department put on its first large-scale vaccination clinic at Baker High School.

Despite snow showers and temperatures hovering around 20 degrees, about 300 county residents — most of them 80 or older — turned out to get their first vaccine dose.

Staten remembers the volunteers who drove people in golf carts from their cars to the BHS gym to minimize their time exposed to the wintry weather.

She remembers the challenging logistics.

But mostly she remembers the smiles.

"People were so excited to be getting their vaccines," Staten said. "I will never forget that. It gave everybody hope. It was very touching."

Pandemic divides society

COVID-19 vaccines weren't a universal source of optimism, to be sure.

Although the vaccines were, and continue to be, very effective at preventing people from getting severely ill, their ability to prevent infection isn't as robust.

The prevalence of "breakthrough" infections starting in the summer of 2021 with the delta variant, and continuing with the omicron variant in the winter of 2021-2022, combined with Gov. Brown's requirement that some people be vaccinated or risk losing their jobs, contributed to the widening divide in public attitudes about the pandemic.

Staten watched that division — and occasionally heard it directly, through phone calls and other comments from local residents — with dismay.

She understands that people have differing viewpoints, and she respects those.

But Staten said she was bothered that some people downplayed the risk that COVID-19 posed, or worse, accused officials of using the pandemic as an excuse to expand government power.

Staten said she encourages respectful debate about the approaches to dealing with the virus. But she was also disheartened by skepticism about COVID-19 even as she received the latest report about a county resident who died after testing positive.

"These are our people — people we knew and loved," she said. "It's very difficult."

Ready to retire

Staten said she had begun to at least contemplate retirement not long before that life-changing phone call on Jan. 24, 2020. The previous November, she

and her husband had started renovating a home they were moving into.

What they intended to be a team effort turned out quite differently.

"My husband has carried the burden of home for the past couple of years," Staten said.

She has had a few brief vacations during the pandemic, mainly camping trips. But even then she had her laptop computer along.

"I didn't venture too far," Staten said with a laugh.

She decided early in the pandemic that she wouldn't retire until the situation had improved.

This winter, with the peak of the omicron surge passing, Staten finally set a retirement date of May 2.

"It feels like a better time for me to leave," she said.

Her successor, Meghan Chancey, who joined the health department as office manager in late October 2021, has been working "hand in hand" with Staten, preparing for the transition.

"I think she's going to do great," Staten said of Chancey, who previously served as director of the Eastern Oregon Health Alliance.

On Friday, April 29, her penultimate work day as health department director, Staten conceded that she can't yet truly

reflect on the tumultuous final two years of her career.

"I'm going to have to take some time to process it," she said. "I haven't been able to do that."

She doesn't anticipate having any trouble staying busy in retirement.

All five of her grandchildren are scheduled to visit this summer, for one thing.

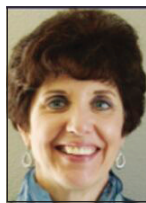
Staten said the past two years have been a challenge without precedent during her career, and life.

And although her job meant she was more directly involved in the pandemic than most people, she understands that for everyone, this era will be like no other.

"I think it changed all of us," Staten said. "I think I've seen the very best in people, and I've worked with some amazing people. I've also seen the other side."

With the conclusion of her career actually looming, Staten said she plans to finish by doing what she has been doing the past two years.

"I will be working until probably 5 o'clock on Monday (May 2)," she said with a smile. "It's taken a toll, the past two years. But I care about people and I want people to be taken care of. I wanted to do the best I could for the people of our community."




Staten

Celebration of Life
Linda Koplein
Jan. 20, 1949 - Sept. 14, 2021
May 21st, 2022 • 1 PM - 4 PM
Baker City Elk's Lodge
Please bring memories, smiles and laughter.
Luncheon will follow

Harold "Ray" Baxter
February 14, 1953 – March 27, 2022

Our father, Harold "Ray" Baxter, Jr., passed away on March 27, 2022. Ray was 69. Ray was born on February 14, 1953, to his parents, Harold Ray Baxter, Sr., and Lily Beryle Roscoe in Albany, Oregon. Ray was somewhat of a "math genius" which served him well in the US Air Force during the Vietnam War as a Radio Relay Equipment Specialist, along with the many years he worked as one of the main technicians for the local "PNW"/CenturyLink until his retirement. He is survived by his two daughters, Amber Christian and Kelsey Baxter. In addition to his older sister who helped raise him, Lily Cunningham. We mourn the loss of our father, our brother, our friend, and encourage any and all who knew him to remember the beauty he brought to this world.

For any interested, there will be a Celebration of Life at The 41 Club, at 2129 2nd St., Baker City, OR 97814 on May 11, 2022, at 5 p.m. Burial services with military honors will be held at 1 p.m. on May 12 at Mount Hope Cemetery, Veterans section. If you would like to donate or show your support for our family, please visit our memorial website at <https://gofundme.98c24f7c>.



Wanda Gene Coles Kempfer Springer
December 9, 1928 - December 2, 2021

Wanda passed to her heavenly home on December 2, 2021, with family by her side. Born December 9, 1928, in Baker City, Oregon, to James Bernal Coles and Aleta Grace Kelly-Coles, Wanda went to school in Haines, Oregon, until sixth grade then went to school in Baker City until her senior year. She graduated in 1947 from high school in Umatilla, Oregon. Wanda married James "Ted" Kempfer on December 31st, 1947, and had two children, Ed and Cindy. Ted passed January of 1970. In 1974, Wanda married Clark Springer.


Wanda enjoyed life to the fullest. Some of her passions were cooking, horses and being a farmer's wife. She spoke fondly of her summers as a child with her grandmother and grandfather herding cattle in Haines, Oregon. Wanda moved to California with her love, Ted, where they farmed in Lindsay until he passed. Her joy for traveling was fulfilled during her marriage to Clark Springer. After his passing she cherished her time with her family, friends and kitties.

Wanda belonged to the Civil Air Patrol from 1944-1946. She is a life member of the American Legion Auxiliary 18; life member of the Ladies Auxiliary 7668 to the Veterans of Foreign Wars; life member of VFW National Home for Children and was President/Secretary for the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) for many years.

Wanda was predeceased by her parents, husbands Ted and Clark, and son Ed. She is survived by her daughter Cindy (Bill) Visalia, CA, grandson Erich (Ashley) Kalispell, MT., granddaughter Leanne (Wallace) Rocklin, CA, and four great-grandchildren, as well as her sister Sara, Monterey, CA, four brothers Jim, Ron, David, and Roger of Oregon, and numerous nieces/nephews.

Special thanks go to John Juarez and the care staff at Park Visalia as well as Nurse Jill and the care staff at Kaweah Health Hospice for their care and compassion.

Graveside service will be Saturday, May 14, 2022, at 3 p.m. at Haines Cemetery, Haines, Oregon.



John "Dale" Nebeker
November 8, 1939 - November 17, 2021

John "Dale" Nebeker passed away in Casa Grande, Arizona, on Wednesday, November 17, 2021, with his daughter Debra by his side.

Dale was born in Baker, Oregon, on November 8, 1939, to Merna and Edwin Nebeker. Dale was raised in Baker and attended Baker High School. Just before graduating with the class of 1957 he joined the Navy. Upon returning from the service, he married Bertha Mae Moore and they had five children.

Dale had many interests. He joined the Jaycees in his younger years and performed in melodramas as the hero. He enjoyed sharing a joke with his friends, and his grandchildren have fond memories taking trips with him singing to the radio as they traveled.

Dale's career span varied from being a barber to law enforcement as police officer and then a parole and probation officer. One of his greatest career achievements was capturing three escaped convicts from the Utah State Prison by himself while working for the Burley, Idaho, city police department. However, Dale stated his true enjoyment was barbering because he enjoyed working around people.

Dale divorced later in life and was remarried to Daralee Long. They made their home in Springfield, Oregon. Dale went to work for the state of Oregon as a parole and probation officer first in the Springfield office and later in the Eugene office. He did take a manager role in the Springfield office before returning to the role of a parole officer. He was forced into early retirement because of sustaining a back injury on the shooting range in 1999.

After retirement, Dale and Daralee shared many adventures through the years traveling in their motorhome. They would make Baker City their summer home and Casa Grande, AZ their winter home. They would also enjoy taking cruises to Hawaii and Mexico.

Tragically, 41 days after Dale passed away, Dale's one and only son, Shawn Dale Nebeker, passed away on December 28, 2021, from COVID-19 complications.

Dale is survived by his children: Lynda Reynolds of La Pine, OR, Debra James, Casa Grande, AZ, Shauna Phillips of Peoria, AZ, Merna Bennett of Caldwell, ID; a brother, Bryson DeVear Nebeker of Leewood, KS, and many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Merna and Edwin Nebeker, his sisters, Betty Nebeker and Lee Montoya, and his granddaughter Jennifer Edison.

A graveside funeral will be held on May 14 at 11 a.m. in the veterans area of Mt. Hope Cemetery in Baker City, Oregon.

