



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

When kids at Melody's Playce day care reach kindergarten age, Melody Brooks celebrates with a graduation ceremony. The last such event was held May 5, 2022, and the graduates were joined by older children who had also stayed at the day care.

Melody

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"They come to my door on weekends — I get after hour teeth pulling," she said with a laugh.

Beth Shirtcliff, whose sons Spencer and Payton stayed at Melody's Playce, appreciated Brooks' help with teeth.

"She is definitely the master of pulling teeth," Beth Shirtcliff said. "Even after my youngest was no longer attending day care with Melody, I called her up and took him over to pull a tooth. I couldn't do it."

Matt Shirtcliff remembers showing up at his boys' baseball game at the same time as Brooks.

The boys ran to give her a hug first.

"They loved their Melody. They still do. And she still loves them," Beth said.

Spencer is now 20, and Payton turns 19 in June.

Special days

Another Miss Melody tradi-

tion is Wednesday lunch box days, when all the kids bring a special lunch from home.

"I get them a lunch box when they're one," she said.

And then there's GI Joe Day. "We get all dressed in camo," she said.

Toys and books are stored in special drawers or plastic bins. The kids, she said, know the routine of cleaning up after they play, with everything back in its right place.

And they can all recite "The Pledge of Allegiance" by age 2.

She knows day care is hard to find, and hopes others will decide to open a business to fill the need.

"I'd have at least 27 on my waiting list," she said.

Crowell said the closing of Melody's Playce will leave a hole in Baker City.

"What I think is extraordinary is the impact that she has had on this community," she said. "I grew up in this community and still remember the kids who were 'Melody's kids' when I was growing up. She has helped raise and shape

countless members of this community."

Peter Fargo, whose children stayed with Brooks, echoed that sentiment.

"I can't imagine raising our kids in Baker City without Melody Brooks," he said.

"While the importance of quality child care cannot be overstated for working parents, Melody takes her vocation to a whole different level — making the kids (and parents) part of her family, teaching life skills and building good character.

"She has given these gifts to generations of Baker kids, leaving a legacy that will last generations more. We are grateful that we and our kids could be part of Melody's family."

As for the youngsters who spent the final week at Melody's Playce, Brooks knows they will be just fine on their next adventure.

But she will never forget.

"There's an ache in my heart," she said. "Kids are resilient, they move on. I'm the one left with a lonely heart."

BAKER TENNIS

Cunningham takes 2nd at regionals

Baker City Herald

Baker's Danny Cunningham placed second at the regional tennis tournament, a two-day event that concluded Saturday, May 14, at the Ash Grove courts near Baker High School.

Cunningham is one of four Bulldogs who qualified for the Class 4A/3A/2A/1A state tournament Friday, May 20, and Saturday, May 21, at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

Sarah Plummer finished third in regionals in singles, and Baker's girls doubles team of Maya Smith and Olivia Jacoby placed fourth.

Cunningham advanced to the championship match by beating Creed Russell of Stanfield, 6-0, 6-0, and then beating Trinidad Mendoza of Riverside, 6-1, 6-2, both matches on Friday, May 13.

In Saturday's championship match against Nyssa's Dawson Richard, Cunningham lost in straight sets, 6-3, 6-1.

Plummer, who advanced to the state tournament for the second straight year, beat Cali Johnson of Sherman in her opening match on Friday. In the semifinals later on Friday, Plummer lost a close match to Ontario's Laken Herrera, 7-6, 7-5.

In Saturday's third-place match, Plummer beat Nyssa's Mary Esplin, 7-5, 6-4.

The doubles team of Smith and Jacoby won their opening match on Friday in three sets over Abby Colby and Krysten Smith of Condon, 6-2, 3-6, 6-0. In a semifinal match later Friday, Smith and Jacoby went three sets again but lost to Vale's Brenda Ramirez and Elise Seals, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. Ramirez and Seals went on to win the regional title.

In Saturday's third-place match, Smith and Jacoby lost to Riverside's Marta Barajas and Italia Rodriguez, 6-3, 7-5.

Ambulance

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The proposed budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, 2022 — a budget the City Council has until June 30 to adopt — is based on the fire department ending ambulance service Sept. 30. The loss of an estimated \$1 million annually in revenue from ambulance billing, and the fact that most of the fire department calls are for ambulances rather than fires, would force the city to lay off six firefighter/paramedics.

Although members of the firefighters' union and other critics of the city's proposal to drop ambulance service have said the staffing cuts could lead to higher homeowner insurance rates, Cannon disputes that contention.

In the newsletter he writes: "Our initial discussions with the officials providing ISO ratings to fire departments in the state indicate that we are not likely going to see a change to our ISO ratings.

ISO ratings are in part what insurance companies use to determine fire risk for Baker City residents."

Cannon wrote that even if the city no longer operates ambulances, LifeFlight would continue to provide air transportation to patients.

"Many of our citizens use LifeFlight," he wrote in the newsletter. "LifeFlight is a private ambulance company that in our area provides air ambulance transportation. They do a fantastic job and save many lives. I am unaware of any changes by Baker County to this vital service."

Other topics Cannon addressed in the newsletter:

- Collecting ambulance bills.

Cannon wrote that the city does pursue past due accounts through collection agencies, using Cam Credits. Since 2007, the city has submitted more than \$2 million in past due bills for collection. The city's collection recovery rate is 9%, compared with a national average of 11.1%, according to Cam Credits, Cannon wrote.

- How ambulance costs have affected city's budget.

Cannon wrote that although the city "has not made extensive and obvious cuts to its budget directly attributable to ambulances. What the city has done over the years, is as expenses continue to increase, the city is forced to trim its budget. This means skipping projects which need to be completed, and foregoing necessary maintenance and upgrades on facilities. The fire department needs a roof, replacement fire trucks, SCBA bottles, and more. The police need important technology updates. Finance needs modernized software and a new cash register. The entire city needed new data servers and up-to-date software licenses. City Hall needs to repair and fix its foundation and install fire escapes. The list goes on. Projects and equipment mentioned have been either perpetually postponed or simply ignored because funding is not available."

Drought

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County Commissioner Mark Bennett, who also owns a cattle ranch near Unity, in the southern part of the county, said on Monday, May 16, that one of the largest potential benefits of the governor's drought declaration is that it allows farmers and ranchers more flexibility in where they divert irrigation water for which they have a legal right.

This is the second straight year Baker County commissioners, and Brown, have declared a drought disaster in the county.

The situation in the county has improved somewhat over the past month or so.

Since early April, a series of storms has brought significant amounts of rain and mountain snow to Baker County and the rest of Northeastern Oregon.

During April, 1.26 inches of precipitation was recorded at the Baker City Airport. It was the first month since May 2020 with more than an inch, and the wettest month since February 2019, when the total was 1.92.

The pattern, which is forecast to persist for at least the next week, has slightly eased the severity of the drought in Baker County.

On April 5, the U.S. Drought Monitor placed 84% of Baker County in extreme drought, the second-worst category in the five-level rating system, which ranges from abnormally dry to four drought ratings — moderate, severe, extreme and, the worst, exceptional.

As of May 10, the amount of



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

This image taken from a drone on Sunday, May 15, 2022, shows Mason Dam, at left, and Phillips Reservoir severely depleted by drought. The reservoir, about 17 miles southwest of Baker City, is holding about 12% of its capacity.

land in Baker County rated as being in extreme drought had dropped from 84% to 62%.

That swath included most of the central part of the county, including Baker Valley.

Almost the whole of the rest of the county is in severe drought, mostly in the eastern and western parts. A sliver at the far northwest part of the county — less than half of one percent of the county — was rated as moderate drought. That area is in the mountains and doesn't include any farmland.

Bennett said rain and snow over the past month or so has spurred the growth of grass both in valleys and in forests where many ranchers have allotments to graze cattle during the late spring and summer.

But Bennett said he remains concerned that live-

stock forage, and hay crops, will diminish late in the summer unless the season is abnormally damp.

That would exacerbate the shortage of hay resulting from the 2021 drought, and the resulting high prices.

Despite recent storms, drought ratings in Baker County are worse now than they were a year ago.

In the second week of May 2021, just 16% of the county was in extreme drought — compared with the current 62% — with most of the rest in severe drought.

The northeast part of the county, including the Pine Valley around Halfway, was rated as abnormally dry, but not officially in drought, a year ago.

Conditions worsened through much of 2021 however. The year ended with 5.37 inches of precipitation at the Baker City Airport — slightly more than half of the annual average of 9.83 inches.

Watermaster's office sees effect from recent rains

Marcy Osborn, Baker County watermaster, said the irrigation season started early.

She said her office started receiving requests for water in early April, about a month earlier than usual, following a winter with a below-average snowpack and much drier conditions in the valleys than is typical.

But Osborn said that with

the weather turning damp over the past month, the number of calls from water rights holders has dropped significantly.

In Oregon, water is doled out based on the date on each individual right — landowners who have the oldest rights will keep receiving water when others have water shut off.

Osborn said she and other workers in the watermaster's office respond to calls from people with water rights, checking the priority date on the right, the volume in the stream for which the right exists, and then adjusting headgates to divert the water as needed.

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

Estrella "Lisa" Simmons

May 20, 1944 - May 10, 2022

With profound sadness, we announce the passing of Estrella "Lisa" Simmons, our loving and devoted mother, wife, grandmother and friend to all whose lives she touched. On May 10, 2022, she left us at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise. She was in her 78th year.



Born in Lapinig, Samar, Philippines, on May 20, 1944, "Lisa" met her loving husband, Delo Simmons, in the Philippines and moved to Baker City, Oregon, USA, to start their family.

Estrella "Lisa" was the beloved wife of Delo Simmons, a loving mother of Jody Larkin, Reynaldo, Laila, Emily, and Renato, and a caring grandmother of Holly Larkin and the rest of the 20 grandchildren in the Philippines.

She lived a full life as a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother, friend, and dedicated employee. She loved playing bingo with her friends, gardening, and collecting antique furniture like vases. She also loved collecting jewelry pieces and making personalized jewelry that she enjoyed. Her lovely memories would always live on with us.

Her love, sweet smile, laughter, and care will be dearly missed by all.

We are going to miss everything about you. We thank you for your infinite love and care for each of us.

A visitation will be held May 18, 2022, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Gray's West & Co. Pioneer Chapel, 1500 Dewey Ave. Her funeral service will be May 18 at 2 p.m., at Gray's West & Co.

Memorial contributions may be made in honor of Lisa to a charity of one's choice through Gray's West & Co. Pioneer Chapel, 1500 Dewey Ave., Baker City, OR 97814.

To leave an online condolence for the family of Lisa, please visit: www.grayswestco.com.

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The Nurses and Techs at Saint Alphonsus Baker City would like to say THANK YOU and show our support to the Baker City Fire Department's First Responders for the work they do 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in our community. Thank you from the Oregon Nurses Association of Saint Alphonsus Baker City.

Remember, these brave men and women not only respond to fires and emergency medical calls they also provide many other invaluable services to Baker City and surrounding areas including:

- "Stop the Bleed" campaign
- FREE Blood Pressure checks at the Community Center
- EMT Preceptors
- School Education
- Fire Inspections
- Community Basic Life Support (CPR) and First Responder Courses
- Rural Fire Department Training

Thank you for ALL you do to keep us Safe

ONA Oregon Nurses Association
 Voice of Oregon Nurses Since 1904