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Women's map and  
compass training



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Indigenous women  
overcome assault

# Baker City Herald

IN THIS EDITION: LOCAL • BUSINESS

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## QUICK HITS

### Good Day Wish To A Subscriber

A special good day to Herald subscriber Dee Swinyer of Sumpter.

## BRIEFING

### Baker County Garden club plans meeting

Baker County Garden Club will meet August 3, at the Dougherty Home at 995 J Street at 10:30 a.m. for their annual auction. Bring auction items, sacked lunches, and drinks. New members are welcome.

### Gubernatorial candidates to debate July 29

The three leading candidates in the race to become Oregon's next governor will appear live at a forum Friday, July 29, hosted by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

Republican nominee Christine Drazan, Democratic nominee Tina Kotek and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson are all scheduled to debate starting at 2 p.m. in Welches.

The forum is moderated by Pamplin Media Group President Mark Garber. Questions will come from editors of newspapers across Oregon.

The debate will be live-streamed on the Baker City Herald's website, beginning at 2 p.m. July 29.

## WEATHER

**Today**  
99/55  
Clear

**Friday**  
99/53  
Very Hot

Full forecast on the back of the B section.

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

# Fire breaks helped to stop June blaze

**Officials say fire breaks built 22 years ago, and maintained annually, gave firefighters a major assist during Willowcreek fire**

BY CLAYTON FRANKE  
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A tractor that plowed swaths through rangeland in northern Malheur County more than two decades ago is a major reason why the Willowcreek fire, the biggest blaze in the area so far this year, stopped when it did in late June, according to officials from the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District.

A series of fire breaks dug 22 years ago made "all the difference with suppression efforts on the Willowcreek fire," according to a

July 15 press release.

The blaze, which started on private land north of Vale on June 28 and burned 40,274 acres, mostly on that day and the next, was fully contained as of July 11, said Larisa Bogardus, public affairs officer for the Vale District.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation, Bogardus said on Thursday, July 21. The fire didn't burn any structures and no one was hurt. The fire burned about 24,400 acres of private land, 15,300 acres of public land managed by the BLM and about 572 acres of state ground.

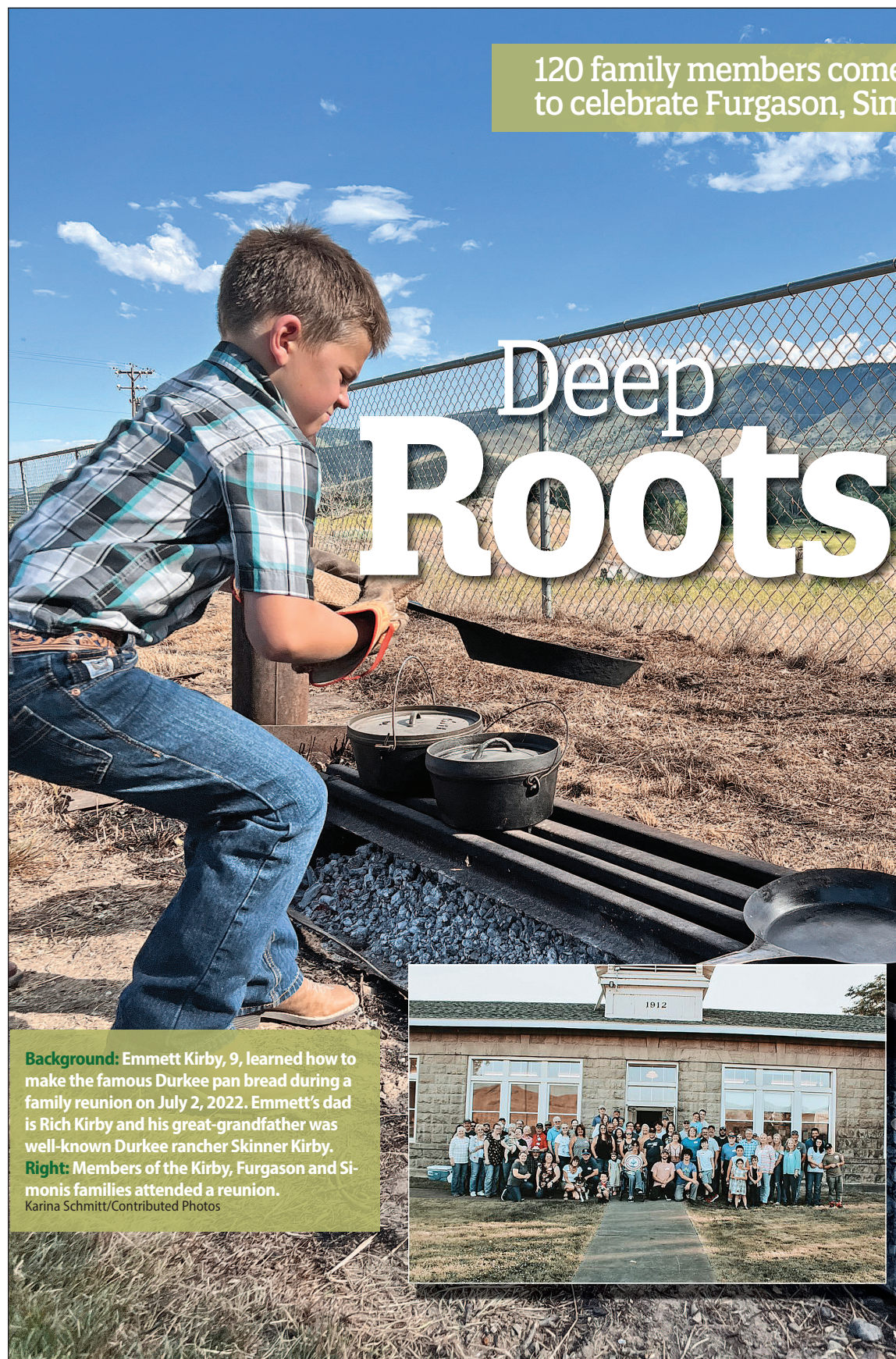
Flames likely would have spread across more of the sagebrush and grass range if not for those fire breaks, said Marcus Johnson, who was incident commander on the Willowcreek fire.

See Breaks / A3



An aerial photo shows how the Willowcreek fire in late June 2022 was stopped when it reached a fire break that was made about 22 years ago, and is maintained annually.

Kristen Munday/  
Bureau of Land  
Management



## 120 family members come together in Eagle Valley to celebrate Furgason, Simonis and Kirby heritages

BY LISA BRITTON

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Amber Schmitt didn't even know all the people who attended the family reunion.

But she knew one thing: everyone — all 120 attendees — had a connection to the families of Furgason, Simonis and Kirby in Eastern Oregon.

"We had a fantastic family reunion," Schmitt said. "I'd say I hadn't met half of the people who came. We had name tags."

The family story dates to 1874 when Fred Simonis came west with his wife, Mary (Furgason), and children.

Their destination was Eagle Valley, to meet Mary's parents, Alexander and Jennette Furgason, who had arrived in 1862 to settle in what is now Island City. They moved to Eagle Valley several years later.

Fred and Mary Simonis' daughter Ella married William Lee Kirby, whose family came to Oregon in 1886.

From that marriage came eight children, including V.S. "Skinner" Kirby, who was Schmitt's grandpa and ranched in the Durkee area. (Schmitt's mom is Cheryl Kirby Cornett.)

The reunion, originally planned for four years ago, was the idea of Schmitt and her cousin Stacey Tatlock, granddaughter of Skinner and daughter of Dick Kirby.

"Stacey and I really wanted to get our extended family together since we live all over the country," Schmitt said. "We wanted to celebrate our heritage."

"I want our kids to feel as connected to our ancestors, by knowing the family history as I do," Tatlock said.

The reunion finally happened in 2022, over the Fourth of July weekend.

"Our last one was in 1979," Schmitt said.

Family members were invited to a gathering at the Eagle Valley Cemetery in Richland on Saturday morning.

Then, Saturday afternoon, everyone gathered at the Durkee Schoolhouse for a barbecue — including pan-fried bread, which is a staple of the annual Durkee Steak Feed that Kirby started with other ranchers.

Members of the Durkee Community Corp., which still puts on a steak feed, assisted with preparing food for the reunion.

Inside the schoolhouse, different branches of the family set up displays with their side of the family tree.

See Roots / A2

# Local parents struggle to find child care options

BY MARK BOGART

For the Baker City Herald

As with housing, the availability of child-care can determine where workers live and how they make a living.

And like housing, the problem isn't new. Parents have struggled with finding good, affordable child care in Baker County for several decades.

Theresa Martinez, Eastern Oregon Child Care Resources Coordinator, said Baker County fits the state's definition of a "child-care desert," with a severe shortage of resources to serve a large number of families.

She said she receives at least three calls a week from people desperate to find child

care, but she often has no place to send them.

Part of her job is to support communities in Baker, Wallowa and Malheur Counties in addressing the problem.

And while there is a severe shortage in general, there are specific needs that are most critical. Care for infants and for children with special needs are especially hard to find because their greater needs require higher levels of adult responsibility. As a result, the necessary ratio of adults to children is also higher.

This, in turn, makes care more expensive and harder to find.

See Child care / A3

# Youth rider Dysan Robb ranks 47th nationwide

BY IAN CRAWFORD

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Three Baker students qualified for the High School Rodeo Association's 2022 National competition in Gillette, Wyoming: Clark Norton, Brycen Martin and Dysan Robb.

Circumstances didn't allow travel for Norton or Martin this year. Norton and his family had other commitments and Martin suffered a broken collarbone at a recent Haines Rodeo. Of the three, Robb was able to travel to this year's top show with his parents, Adam and Angela.

See Rodeo / A3



Adam and Angela Robb / Contributed photo  
**Dysan Robb and his horse Kit attending the 2022 National High School Rodeo finals in Wyoming on July 18.**



**TODAY**  
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