Baseball

Continued from A1 expenses to form a permanent

baseball program. The landlocked country, which is almost five times the size of Baker County, has no ports, and while the other countries focus on their economic output as relative to the good it creates for its citizens, Bhutan adopted a model that, instead, focuses on the happiness and sustainability of its people, young and old.

And from the videos and accounts of everyone connected to the baseball program, the kids aren't happy, they're ecstatic.

"What it is is that they're running out of funds," Kiefer said. "Buildings are falling apart and they rely on funding?

Baseball is a material import for a country that doesn't pursue material gains. Kiefer's fundraiser, which has a \$50,000 goal, has brought in more than \$5,000.

Bhutan maintains a capitalist democracy, one embraced by the royal family and established as recently as 2008. But a typical retiree in America has a net worth comparable to royalty in Bhutan.

Bridge Between Worlds

Though Kiefer says she didn't play baseball in her youth, the connection between the sport and Bhutan started with another American, originally from Connecticut, whom she met in her travels abroad.

"One of my trips I met this gentleman, Matt DeSantis, the guy who originally brought baseball to the country in 2013," Kiefer said. DeSantis was eager to discuss how it all



Karma Dorji/Contributed Photo

In Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, this baseball diamond was just recently completed.

got started.

"Myself and my three brothers played baseball outside day and night, which is how I built friendships with my brothers and my father," he said in an interview with the Herald. "It was an integral part of my life with family and friends and integral to the community."

DeSantis was himself an accomplished player, competing for Choate Rosemary Hall, the Connecticut boarding school he attended.

It was there that DeSantis met Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, who was also attending Choate and is the brother of the current Bhutanese king.

'We met on the basketball court, we had a very competitive relationship that turned into friendship," DeSantis said.

After the 2008 vote to change the government in Bhutan, DeSantis said Jigyel phoned him.

"They were transitioning from monarchy to democracy, he asked if I could build some systems for the government

for various ministries," DeSantis said. "I showed up for what I thought was four weeks, and eight weeks later I'm still walking across the jungle!"

The connection ultimately inspired DeSantis to found a travel design business in part with the prince, MyBhutan. com. On his first foray into the country he'd expected only to stay a short while, but, "Bhutan became home. I'm one of the longest residing foreigners in Bhutan."

DeSantis' skills in computer science helped him set up the infrastructure of the Bhutanese ministries and departments following the new democracy. During all this, DeSantis found himself with a lot of free time in the evenings, so he set out to establish some of the pleasures of home.

"Originally I'd only planned to hold a few sessions, at the time the plan was to have 5 to 10 baseball sessions, we posted it in the city center on a concrete slab between track and



Marvin Moore/Contributed Photo

Players in Bhutan often have to co-opt other fields to make room for ballgames, a young pitcher here makes use of a prop pitching mound.

ipated how Bhutan residents

responded to baseball. "Within a week we had 400 kids, in two weeks we had 500 kids," he said. "We decided to keep running the sessions, within a month 700 kids were showing up to camp."

Since then Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, has started its own baseball club, the Thimphu Red Pandas. Every new club has sub-

sequently chosen an animal mascot, using some of the proceeds from games to support wildlife conservation. The program came to be

so successful that a national poll recognized baseball as the sport with the most public interest in development, and at one point Bhutan opted to send an adult team to Japan for an invitational.

Unfortunately, that same year, 2015, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake shuddered through Bhutan's neighbor, Nepal, and consequences were felt as far away as the western side of Bhutan, damaging homes.

'I think we would have made an impressive appearance, that plan folded and so did the adult league following

the earthquake," DeSantis said. Since then the focus has been on bringing baseball to Bhutanese children.

The Ground Game

As DeSantis and prince Jigyel eventually sought out and found outside support in several venues, Jigyel ultimately enlisted fellow Olympic committee member Karma Dorji, who worked to help establish the official Bhutan Baseball and Softball Association.

Dorji, currently working in Australia, gave perspective especially on how the children have been affected by the sport as it grows, one community at a time.

"It's been a revelation," Dorji said. "I've seen firsthand the impact of sports, especially in truly young kids. It's been a very, very interesting observation to see changes in kids' behavior, in mindset. Most of all, kids who participate in it in the capital city come from rough backgrounds, the coaches and I noticed they're being very proactive, coming to training on time, bringing food, they have to travel a distance of about 25 minutes to get to a field."

Even with the luxury of a bus, the kids often have to do some intense hiking to board it, as many towns all but clinch to the steep hillsides that make up so much of Bhutan.

"During the lockdown, kids were practicing in their back yards!" Dorji said. "It was so encouraging to see kids sending us videos practicing, they were doing it on their own."

"A big requirement is equipment, it's expensive and not easy to come by," Dorji said. "We've been very fortunate to have guidance from Desantis, Pitch-In, and Baseball Without Borders."

Pitch-In and BWB have been supplying the organization, and the World Baseball-Softball Confederation has made it possible to officially certify Bhutan's coaches

and umpires. "Don't mean to brag, but we turned a high school soccer field into a baseball field," Dorji said. "We did everything as per the book, we were dubbed as the highest altitude baseball field in the world,

very neat." The program was further bolstered by Texas coach Marvin Moore, who has donated his time and enthusiasm to the kids there, pushing them to competitive levels they'd never anticipated.

If you would like to support the Bhutan Cultural Exchange's initiative or know more about the program, visit the gofundme at https://gofund.me/2d5dc824, or visit Kiefer's facebook page www. facebook.com/BhutanExperience, where you can see some of her footage and learn about Bhutan in detail.

Fires

Continued from A1

Wilderness since the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest instituted a policy allowing lightning fires to burn naturally. The Granite Gulch fire burned about 5,500 acres in August and September 2019.

The Eagle Cap, at 365,000 acres, is the biggest federal wilderness in Oregon.

Besides the Sturgill and Nebo fires, there are two other fires, also sparked by lightning Aug. 22 or 23, in the wilderness. The Goat Mountain Fire 1 is not active, according to fire managers. The Goat Mountain 2 fire is about 118 acres but, unlike the Sturgill and Nebo fires, it did not grow substantially on Saturday.

Sturgill fire

A group of firefighters is prepared to protect buildings on private parcels at Red's Horse Ranch and the Minam River

field," he said. He could never have antic-

Contributed Photo

The smoke plume from the Sturgill fire, in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, on Saturday, Sept. 3, 2022.

Lodge, both west of the Minam River. However, the fire remains east of the Minam River.

There was "minimal fire acivity" on Sunday, according to the overhead team's update.

Nebo fire

On Saturday the blaze

crossed Big Sheep Creek and crested Wing Ridge to the north. The fire also burned outside the wilderness toward Forest Road 39. On Saturday afternoon firefighters evacuated the Lick Creek Camp-

ground. On Sunday, firefighters be-

gin building a control line along the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road (Forest Service Road 39) to the 200 Road. On Monday, additional resources were assigned to assist with fireline construction and do backburns to reduce the amount of fuel. The goal is to keep the fire west of the 39 Road.

The following areas are closed to the public:

- Use of Forest Service Road 3900100 from the 39 Road junction to Tenderfoot Trailhead.
- Use of Forest Road 3925015 from junction of Forest Service Road 3925 to Lick Creek Trailhead.
- Use of Forest Road 3900200 from the 39 road junction to Forest Service Road 3925015 road.
- Use of Tenderfoot (1819) from the Tenderfoot trailhead to the 1828 and 1812 trail junctions.

Use of Lick Creek Trail

Trailhead to the junction of the South Fork Imnaha Trail

(1809) from the Lick Creek

Double Creek fire

On Saturday the fire spread north along Grizzly Ridge and east toward the Snake River.

To the south, the fire moved down the Granny Creek drainage toward the Freezeout Road. Firefighters are working to protect private property along the Imnaha River corridor, but they had to take refuge several times on Saturday due to intense and erratic fire behavior, according to fire managers.

Firefighters and evacuated several groups of hunters in the area.

Flames are also likely to continue moving downslope toward the Imnaha River along Schleur, Adams, College, Double, and Blackmore creeks. On Sunday, firefighters worked with task forces

from the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal to protect property and infrastructure along the Upper Imnaha Road.

Smoke

Smoke is expected to settle in the lower elevations and drainages in the early morning hours. Current air quality information for the local area is available at airnow.gov.

The air quality index in Baker City on Sunday, Sept. 4 was 64, in the "moderate" category. An index of 50 or under is considered good. The moderate range is 51 to 100.

Crockets Knob fire

The other major blaze in the region is Crockets Knob, on the Malheur National Forest about 19 miles north of Prairie City. The fire, started by lightning on Aug. 22, has burned 4,265 acres and was 20% contained as of Monday,

COVID

Continued from A1

April's total of 13 cases was the fewest since May 2020. There were 49 cases reported in May 2022.

Vaccinations

A total of 149 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, primarily the Moderna vaccine, were given in Baker County from Aug. 1-28, according to OHA.

That's a slower rate of inoculations than during July, when a total of 249 doses were administered in the county.

Overall, 57.8% of county residents 18 or older have had at least one dose, the sixth-lowest rate among Oregon's 36 coun-

The five counties with lower rates include two of Baker County's neighbors, Grant and Malheur counties, along with Harney, Gilliam and Lake.

Union County's rate is 63.1%, and Wallowa County's is 69.9%. The county with the highest rate is Hood River, at 98.9%.

Baker County's vaccination rate is highest among those who have a much higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying from the virus — residents 65 and older.

Of the 8,480 COVID-19-related deaths reported in Oregon during the pandemic, 67% were residents 70 or older, and 89% were 60 or older.

Baker County's vaccination rates by age group:

65 and older — 4,716

74.9% have had at least one one dose, 71.3% have had two doses, and 50.3% have had a booster dose.

Ages 50 to 64 — 3,385 residents

58.3% have had one dose,

der beyond the initial ship-

ment, said Meghan Chancey,

the department's administra-

tor. She encouraged people

interested in vaccines to fill

Results will also help the

department be proactive with

"We're trying to support

our community as well as not

overburden staff," Chancey

scheduling staff, she said.

out the survey.

said.

55.3% have had two doses, and 28.3% have had a booster dose.

Ages 20 to 49 — 5,173

residents

42.5% have had one dose, 39.5% have had two doses, and 14% have had a booster dose.

Ages 18-19 — 291 residents

45.1% have had one dose, 42% have had two doses, and

11% have had a booster dose. Ages 12 to 17 — 1,094 residents

28.5% have had one dose, 25.6% have had two doses, and 6.2% have had a booster dose.

Ages 5 to 11 — 1,362 residents

12.4% have had one dose, 11% have had two doses, and 1.1% have had a booster dose.

Ages 0 to 4 — 840 residents

3% have had one dose, 1.7% have had two doses, and none are eligible for a booster dose.

She said Baker County will receive 300 doses of the Pfizer bivalent vaccine and 100 doses of the Moderna version pending the state's approval in the coming days — and will order more based on interest.

Filling out the survey will place respondents on a waiting list to receive the booster, and the department will then contact them to schedule an appointment.

Samaritans

Continued from A1

"I was going to check it out, and as I started across the street it got a lot thicker, a lot more smoke, and as I ran across the street these three children came out of a house

and I told them to get back." The danger was more serious than Bryan thought.

"I went around the back of the building and the whole back of the building was a giant fireball, and I saw a propane tank was a part of the fireball," he said.

Bryan, who has had some fire support training for his corrections officer job, said he realized the propane tank was a more immediate threat than the burning porch.

"I immediately got the garden hose and started to hose (the tank) down," he said.

Moments later another passer-by, Landon Koontz, rushed to help, grabbing another garden hose and help-

ing Bryan douse the tank. "As we were waiting for the fire department, there were some motorcycles on the outside starting to catch fire, and we could see there was a lot of flame inside the building," Bryan said.

Clad in shorts and flip flops, Bryan said he wasn't equipped to go inside the building. He said he hoped



Ian Crawford/Baker City Herald Bryan Conklin of Baker City rushed to try to douse a fire at 3780 10th St. in Baker City on Friday, Sept. 2, 2022.

"I went around the back of the building and the whole back of the building was a giant fireball, and I saw a propane tank was a part of the fireball."

Bryan Conklin, who helped douse a fire at 3780 10th St. in Baker City

the propane tank wouldn't explode before professional firefighters arrived.

"It felt like forever, it was probably a solid 10 minutes we were fighting that thing with garden hoses," he said.

When firefighters from the Baker City Fire Department arrived, Bryan told them about seeing flames inside the building. He said they had to wait for

other firefighters to arrive before going into the building. "That really opened my eyes about the fire depart-

ment situation," Bryan said. "I

walked up and asked the chief about 'where do I sign up for fire volunteering?' He was referring to a re-

duction in staffing at the fire department. Within an hour Bryan was back home with Shannon and

five children, and visibly content with his day's work. "It's been a great lunch

break, I'll say that," Bryan said. The 4,332-square-foot building has a value of \$97,800, according to the Baker County Assessor's Office. The owner is Jacob

Heat

Survey

Continued from A1

vaccine — one that targets

both the original strain of

COVID and lineages of the

omicron variant, specifically

the BA.4 and BA.5 versions

will help the health depart-

ment figure out how many

more vaccines it needs to or-

that are more infectious. Results from the survey

Continued from A1

That, too, would set a new record for the date. The current record is 96, set

This week's weather — highs for Tuesday and Wednesday are forecast

For the 55-day period ending Sept. 4, the temperature at the airport hit 90 or higher on 38 days. The high was 100 or above on 4 days — the last three days of July (101, 101, 100) and

And even on the minority of days when the temperature didn't reach 90, it usually wasn't far off.

Of those 17 days, on just two did the temperature not get to at least 80 — July 18 (78 degrees) and Aug. 27

(77 degrees). This was the third-hottest August

on record at the airport, with an average high of 91.1 degrees.

predicting slight relief late this week as the ridge of high pressure that has dominated the weather pattern for almost 2 months recedes to the desert Southwest.

sinking, and that causes "compres-

sional heating," which boosts surface temperatures.

The high pressure ridge, which typically is centered around the Four Corners region during summer, occasionally expands into the North-County.

This summer the ridge has been more persistent than normal, receding briefly for a couple days at most

and then reasserting its control. According to the National Weather

Cooper.

Service, computer models have been hinting at a significant shift in the weather pattern over the Northwest starting later this week, with a cold front moving through, suppressing the ridge and allowing cooler air from the Pacific Ocean to sweep into Eastern Oregon.

This isn't likely to be a preview of autumn, however.

to be about 20 degrees above average — continues the torrid trend that started around the middle of July and has scarcely been interrupted since.

the final day of August (102).

The National Weather Service is

Under the ridge the air is generally

west, the pattern most likely to bring unusually hot temperatures to Baker