

The Bulletin

EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY

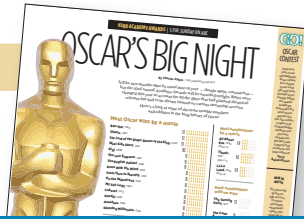
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LA PINE FIRE DISTRICT

Medical centers pay the bill for ambulance rides

BY SUZANNE ROIG

The Bulletin
 When a La Pine medical facility calls 911 for an ambulance, the La Pine Rural Fire Protection District charges that facility, not the patient.

The fire district's billing practice is an anomaly in Central Oregon, and the estimated \$2,000 fee it charges per ambulance ride to St. Charles Bend's emergency room has triggered a lawsuit and raised concerns among residents and medical professionals. The district's ac-

La Pine Rural Fire Protection District meeting

The next meeting of the La Pine Rural Fire Protection District board will be held at 9 a.m. May 13 at the fire station at 51550 Huntington Road, La Pine.

For more information, call 541-536-2935.

tions could jeopardize health care in a low-income community where the life expectancy of residents is already shorter than their neighbors in Bend. Those actions could also lead to the closure of the two rural

medical facilities as unaffordable fees pile up.

"It would be a tremendous step backward for our community," said Ann Gawith, La Pine Chamber of Commerce executive director. "The people in

the district need to know that ambulance service isn't paid through their taxes."

One La Pine health care provider fears the billing method incentivizes patients to drive to a medical facility when they're suffering a medical emergency in order to avoid ambulance fees.

While the La Pine fire district charges the facilities that call 911, in Bend and Madras, it's the patient's responsibility to pay the bill, regardless of who calls for emergency help.

See **Ambulance** / A5



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin file

A La Pine Rural Fire Protection District ambulance leaves the St. Charles Bend campus after taking a patient to the emergency room in 2020.

BEND

A dream of the '90s come true

The Oscar Mayer Wienermobile visits the last Blockbuster on Earth



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin photos

A crowd gathers Saturday to look at the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile during its stop at the Bend Blockbuster.

BY KYLE SPURR • The Bulletin

Two cultural icons converged in Bend on Saturday when the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile parked in front of the last Blockbuster video rental store on Earth. The Wienermobile, the rolling orange and yellow symbol of Oscar Mayer hot dogs, pulled into the Blockbuster parking lot off Third Street to a crowd of about two dozen people taking pictures and singing, "I wish I were an Oscar Mayer Weiner."

Jason Loesche takes a picture with his family while stopping to look at the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile.



Some people were busy picking out movies inside the Blockbuster and were startled when the 27-foot-long hot dog on wheels parked outside.

"I saw it pull up through the window, and I just started yelling and ran to the window," said Esty Pittman, who was visiting from Salt Lake City with her boyfriend, Jacob VanOteghem.

Pittman, 31 and VanOteghem, 30, stopped Saturday to visit the Blockbuster and had no idea the Wienermobile was scheduled to visit.

It was a flashback to childhood for Pittman, who remembers singing the Oscar Mayer song in the grocery store with her mother and looking for the Wienermobile on road trips with her family.

See **Wienermobile** / A6

Dry weather portends explosive fire season

Fuel moisture levels drop to seasonal lows, sparking early season wildfires

BY MICHAEL KOHN

The Bulletin

Seven months ago, Central Oregonians felt the impact of some of the worst wildfires in this state's history. Now there is growing concern that dry fuels across the region could ignite even bigger fires this year.

Tinderbox conditions have already ignited several fires around Central Oregon this year, even as higher elevations are still blanketed with snow. Part of that is due to a drying out of the forests at lower elevations, which are experiencing some of the lowest moisture levels recorded in years.

"The outlook is for an early fire season," said Kevin Stock, fire and aviation staff officer for Central Oregon Fire Management Service. "We are way behind in precipitation. It has been warm and dry through April, (causing) severe and exceptional drought."

See **Wildfires** / A5



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Smoke billows into the air April 15 as a prescribed fire burns within the Phil's Trail area.

TODAY'S WEATHER



Cloudy; a shower
 High 52, Low 29
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