

A modified version of Canyon City's '62 Days planned Saturday

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A smaller, modified version of the 99th annual '62 Days Celebration that organizers say will fit within Gov. Kate Brown's guidelines is scheduled June 13 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Colby Farrell of the Whiskey Gulch Gang, which organizes the '62 Days Celebration, said there would be kids' events in the park, displays and "stationary floats" throughout Canyon City.

Farrell said areas where people congregate will need to be limited to under 25 people. He said they would issue color-coded wrist bands and

rotate people in and out of those areas every half hour.

Farrell said Emergency Operations Center staffer Nathan Gordanier told him he spent 40 to 50 hours researching the regulations and had the plan approved by the EOC's core medical group, Canyon City officials and the state.

"(Gordanier) did all of the legwork on submitting the plan, but then he ran it by everybody, and they said it sounded good," Farrell said.

Farrell said the state wanted a little more detail regarding social distancing between the stationary floats.

"Other than that, the plan was good to go," Farrell said.

Farrell said people in

the community seem to be excited, and the group's Facebook page received positive comments.

"I think people around here are just ready to kind of get back to some sort of normalcy," Farrell said.

He said it is important to the Whiskey Gulch Gang, active and past members, to keep the tradition alive this year.

"I mean, 100 years is a long time to walk away from something and not be able to keep it going for just one year," Farrell said.

The fate of the demolition derby, Farrell said, "is not good."

Under the governor's cur-

rent guidelines, the grandstands at the fairgrounds can only hold 68 people, and the fairgrounds and organizers would lose money.

He said next week the group would reassess the scheduled date of July 18 and possibly look at dates in August and see what phases the county is in at that point.

"It's not like we're going to walk away from it anytime soon," he said. "We're just going to keep holding out hope that at some point we can do it."

Farrell said those interested in putting together a "stationary float" for the '62 Days Celebration could call 541-620-0874.



EO Media file photo

The Whiskey Gulch Gang fires off shots during the '62 Days Celebration in 2018. The century-old event is slated to go on in modified form June 13 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

A team of seniors delivered a swing set for a 7-year-old boy with cancer

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A team of up to 15 seniors delivered and assembled a swing set to a 7-year-old Mt. Vernon boy who has won his battle with cancer so far.

The Wyatt Strong Senior Project team is the brainchild of professional photographer Tanni Wenger.

When taking Humboldt Elementary School pictures last fall, Wenger noticed Wyatt Simmons had to have his photos taken separately while going through chemotherapy because he was at such a high risk.

Wenger said she made the senior team open to anyone who came to her studio to take their senior portraits. She said one of the prerequisites to joining the group was to take part in a community project.

"I just wanted these kids to give back to the community," Wenger said. "This little community does so much for them."

Wenger said she wanted to do something new for the seniors this year, and she saw a need when she heard about Simmons.

After throwing some other ideas out for the seniors, she said she let them decide on the project, and ultimately they decided on Simmons.

"All the kids just kind of fell in love with him," she said.

Rylee Browning said she loved that, despite everything he has been through, he is always happy and upbeat.

"I just loved his little smile," Browning said.

Tiler Voigt, a senior on the team, said she previously knew Wyatt from working with his father, Mike Westland.

"He's always super sweet and



Contributed photo/Tanni Wenger Photography

Wyatt Simmons celebrates after receiving his swing set May 16 in his backyard in Mt. Vernon. Simmons said the slide is his favorite part of the set.

happy," Voigt said.

For her senior project, Averie Wenger oversaw the project and was instrumental in organizing the auction last year.

"He is a super sweet and happy little boy," Averie said. "And he has the cutest little voice."

Wenger said they decided a swing set would be something that both Wyatt and his two brothers Noah, 9, and Blanton, 2, could each benefit from.

The team raised the money through a can collection and coin buckets at Grant County businesses such as Sinclair gas stations. It opened an account through Bank of Eastern Oregon — the name of the account was Wyatt Strong Senior Project. They also sold T-shirts and hoodies with sizes for children and adults.

Wenger said the students were responsible for the change buckets

and were expected to make regular deposits at BEO.

Wyatt's mother, Areah Anderson, said the outpouring of support from the community had kept her and her family going since the 7-year-old was airlifted from Burns to Portland after she took him in to see the family doctor for what she thought was appendicitis, but later turned out to be a Wilms tumor. This rare kidney cancer is said to be highly treatable.

"We just barely moved here, and it has meant a lot to all of us," Anderson said. "The boys love their swing set, and everything that they've done is amazing."

Anderson said the family moved to Grant County from Burns nearly two years ago.

Anderson said the community support transcends finances. She said the hospital and the hospice center have been very supportive.

The mushroom whisperer

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As social-distancing rules put the kibosh on many Grant County pastimes, recreational morel mushroom hunting is not one of them.

With social get-togethers on hold to control the spread of the new coronavirus, hunting for the elusive fungi has been a welcome activity.

A Mt. Vernon couple has spent their early days of spring doing what they do every year: hunting for the best, biggest, tastiest mushrooms.

Keith Nichols said that mushroom hunting is an old tradition for him and his wife.

Nichols said, in addition to eating the morels, he and his wife, both retired, enjoy being out in the woods.

Nichols said he enjoys eating the fungi the best, though.

"They're better than a ribeye steak," Nichols said. "Once you start eating them, you can't stop."

Nichols, who has been picking morels in the area for upwards of 30 years, said he had found several giant mushrooms.

He said, a couple of years ago, he came across one that was nearly 13 inches in length.

Typically, Nichols said, morels are 4 to 8 inches tall.

Nichols said morels are typically found from March to late May, at best.

Nichols said his wife breads the morels with egg, flour and garlic and tosses them on the skillet.

"Oh, man, when they come off of that skillet, they look like chicken fried steak," he said.

Nichols said, if there is something out in the forest that is edible, he'll eat it.

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