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Behind the mask



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
According to the OHA, Oregon has reported the largest increase in cases per day in July.

People with health problems treated differently while following guidelines

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

With the number of COVID-19 cases in Oregon reaching new heights last week and masks being required indoors statewide, some local residents say they have been treated differently for wearing a mask.

Gov. Kate Brown announced that all Oregon residents will be required to wear masks or face coverings in indoor public spaces starting July 1 to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

“Over the last month, we have seen the disease spread at an alarm-



ing rate in both urban and rural counties,” Brown said.

Grant County residents Dean Reynolds and Helen Myrick said before the mask-mandate went into effect that masks were very important for them because of vulnerabilities, but some people have reacted when they wear masks.

Myrick said that she has hypogammaglobulinemia, a rare blood disorder, which puts her in a vulnerable situation and makes recovery a taxing process.

“When I get sick, without infusing plasma donated by other people with the antibodies for the illness, it takes me months to recover,” Myrick said. “What can be a normal illness for other people can debilitate me for months.”

Myrick said other people assume she looks well because the illness is not physically visible, but the public is unaware of her circumstances or the situations of others.

She said that both she and Reynolds cannot take the risk of possible exposure.

“We can’t assume somebody’s

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Lack of COVID-19 insurance may hamper schools

Liability coverage plays major role in what can open

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

As planning continues for school districts around the state on how to best conduct the new school year for their students and staff, insurance was a part of a recent discussion by state Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale.

As of June 30, PACE insurance, which covers a majority of school districts in Oregon, will no longer provide liability insurance for schools against lawsuits related to COVID-19.

“This means any student, staff member, parent, or private citizen who contracts COVID on school property or at a school event would be able to sue the school district,” Owens and Findley said in a press release.

The release said, without liability insurance, some schools are deciding to not open since it will leave them vulnerable to lawsuits, which could financially impact a school for years.

Findley was hopeful a bill would be passed to address this matter during the special session in June, but it did not happen.

“One thing I was disappointed to see not pass in the special session was liability protection for schools and private businesses in Oregon from COVID-19 related suits,” Findley said. “Without any sort of liability protection, schools will not be able to open in the fall, and businesses who follow all OHA safety guidelines could still be held liable for the natural spread of COVID-19.”

Grant School District 3 Superintendent Bret Uptmor said, while PACE will not cover COVID-19 and other communicable diseases as far as a liability, their insurance coverage will continue as planned. He said his hope is that, legislatively, something is done to reduce the risk of lawsuits in the coming school year.

“We would like to come back to school in the fall and not be worried because we’re in person and somebody might get COVID that we would be responsible for,” Uptmor said. “Now, if we’re irresponsible in our actions, then it makes sense we would be held accountable, but most of us have been planning very heavily to be very responsible.”

Uptmor added that he hopes that, in the July special session, legislators would develop a plan to protect schools from liability.

Insurance has been a concern for more than just schools.

The Grant County Library had been preparing for a chance to begin reopening



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

A slip-n-slide was set up Saturday at the Fish House Inn and RV Park in Dayville.

A socially distant Fourth of July

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As coronavirus cases spiked and hospital beds filled up across the state, Grant County communities found alternative ways to celebrate the Fourth of July.

In Monument, upwards of 100 people came out to take in the town’s yearly fireworks display.

“Monument is the biggest little fireworks show,” organizer and pyrotechnics specialist Jeremy Boyer said.

The annual festivities were held privately on the North Fork of the John Day River at North Fork RV and Camping Park.

With every RV and campsite full, visitors competed in the annual cornhole tournament and



Contributed photo/Kalli Wilson
A lamp post in Dayville, decorated by Kalli Wilson, reminds folks of the spirit of Independence Day Saturday.

floated along the river before the fireworks show.

Redmond resident Earnie Slavey said he wanted to step

back for the weekend.

“We just wanted to get away from our phones and the internet and just unplug for the weekend,” he said.

He said the small-town feel and friendliness of the area is what keeps him coming back.

“As soon as you get to Mitchell, people are much more friendly,” he said.

While Redmond’s annual Fourth of July fireworks show at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bend’s traditional fireworks show from the top of Pilot Butte was one of the few fireworks display that went on as planned in Oregon.

Dayville’s residents held a

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Fireworks illuminate the night sky Saturday along the North Fork of the John Day River at North Fork RV and Camping Park in Monument. North Fork RV and Camping owners Steve and Susan Mills held this year’s festivities privately.

Plaintiffs voluntarily dismiss lawsuit challenging governor’s pandemic restrictions

By Jayson Jacoby
EO Media Group

The plaintiffs, including a Baker City church, who sued Oregon Gov. Kate Brown in early May, claiming she had exceeded her legal authority in restricting activities due to the pandemic, have voluntarily dismissed their complaint.

In a motion ending the lawsuit, Salem attorney Ray Hacke cited the Oregon Supreme Court’s June 12 ruling in the governor’s favor.

The state’s highest court ordered Baker County Circuit Court Judge Matt Shirtcliff to vacate his May 18 decision to grant a preliminary injunction to the plaintiffs, which include Elkhorn Baptist Church in Baker City.

Shirtcliff agreed with Hacke and another Salem attorney, Kevin Mannix, who represented a group of inter-



Judge Matt Shirtcliff

nor-plaintiffs, including Bill Harvey, chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer and Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer.

The plaintiffs argued that Brown’s executive orders related to the pandemic, including ones that restricted businesses and limited the size of public gatherings, were limited to 28 days.

One state law, dealing with public health emergencies, that the governor invoked in many of her orders includes the 28-day limit.

But the governor’s attorneys argued that Brown’s orders were not subject to the 28-day limit because her original emergency declaration invoked a differ-

ent state law, one that has no time limit.

Shirtcliff sided with the plaintiffs and granted their request for a preliminary injunction that temporarily voided the governor’s executive orders.

But that injunction was only in effect for several hours on May 18. Later that day the Oregon Supreme Court issued a temporary stay on Shirtcliff’s order, which meant Brown’s executive orders remained in effect.

The Supreme Court later accepted written arguments from both sides.

On June 12 the court issued its ruling, ordering Shirtcliff to vacate his decision granting the preliminary injunction.

That decision only affected the injunction, and the lawsuit was at that time still active and could eventually have led to a trial in Baker County Circuit Court.

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