

Good news

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Executive Director Hannah Hinman was happy at the response from the community with tickets being oversold, businesses donating and great sponsorships.

“Every year I’m always kind of stressed coming into this fundraiser, but every year I am reminded of the generosity and support the community has for us,” Hinman said.

Covering the need: Volunteers make masks for health care workers

Sylvia Ross, the director of Blue Mountain Home Health and Hospice, said that 70 people — from local community members to those who live out of town and have family working at the hospital — made masks or gowns for the Blue Mountain Hospital, according to an article from April 15.

Jessica Moore, a Grant County resident, shared her story on providing a little over 120 masks for the hospital at the time of the interview.

“I always find joy standing back and looking at the big picture of how strongly this community pulls together when there is a need. Not surprisingly, we had a need, and our community does what our community does: rose to the occasion,” Ross said.

Drive-in ceremonies for graduation

COVID-19 presented challenges for graduation ceremonies, but schools in Grant County developed ways to recognize the seniors safely, according to an article from May 5.

Grant Union High School’s graduation ceremony was “drive-in style” as



Contributed photo

Tanni Wenger Photography
Graduates from Prairie City School toss their caps in the air at their May 29 graduation ceremony.

parents and graduates parked in the Grant Union parking lot to recognize seniors.

Prairie City School held a graduation ceremony in their football field as a drive-in celebration. Both Grant Union and Prairie City followed the graduation ceremony with a parade.

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

A team of up to 15 seniors delivered and assembled a swing set to a Wyatt Simmons, 7, of Mt. Vernon who won his battle with cancer so far, according to an article on June 10.

Professional photographer Tanni Wenger formed the Wyatt Strong Senior Project team and the group came together to carry out the project.

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

After providing project ideas to the seniors, she said they decided on a project for Simmons.

Wyatt’s mother, Areah Anderson, said the support from the community kept her and her family going since Wyatt was airlifted from



Eagle file photo

A caravan of motorcycle riders with the Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association ride through John Day to dedicate Highway 26 as a POW/MIA highway. A sign dedication ceremony and luncheon was held at the John Day Elk’s Lodge.



Contributed photo/Tanni Wenger Photography

From left, Kaden Madden, Cinch Anderson, Shaine Madden, Maddy Way, Tanni Wenger holding Wyatt Simmons’ younger brother Blanton, Rylee Browning, Tiler Voigt, Lauren Wenger, Ray Wenger, Noah Simmons, Wyatt Simmons, Jesse McKinley and Averie Wenger all took part in the Wyatt Strong project.

Burns to Portland after seeing the family doctor for 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.”

Dollar General submits application for store in John Day

The Zaremba Group, on behalf of Dollar General, sub-

mitted an application to the city for a store in John Day, according to an article on June 10.

John Day City Manager Nick Green updated the council on the Dollar General on Oct. 27 and said that all the permitting with the city was completed.

Highway 26 dedicated to POW/MIA

Roughly 80 motorcycle riders from the Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association passed through John Day to dedicate Highway



Eagle file photo

From left, American Legion past commander Charles Schmidt greets, Vivian Rookstool, widow of Melvin Rookstool, who was taken as a prisoner of war in the Korean War.

26 to Prisoners of War and service members missing in action as community members lined the streets with flags to honor them, according to an article from July 1.

Larry Moyer, president of the Central Oregon Chapter of the VMA and a Persian Gulf War veteran, said each rider has a personal reason for participating in the ride.

Meredith House breaks ground

The new facility for the Heart of Grant County’s domestic trauma service center in John Day is under construction, according to an article from Aug. 26.

The new center, the Meredith House, will feature improved privacy to talk to victims, a conference room to have more group activities in a private settings and the capability to house up to two to three families. “There is a need here, and I know a lot of people don’t want to recognize it, but some of the stuff that goes on here, the domestic violence, the sexual assault and the human trafficking is all here,” said Heart of Grant County Director Beth Simonsen.

Highway 26 salutes prisoners of war and service members missing in action

Roughly 50 people came out to honor prisoners of war and service members missing in action at the John Day Elks Lodge parking lot as John Day and five other cities dedicated Highway 26 a POW/MIA Memorial Highway, according to an article from Sept. 23.

John Day resident and Vietnam veteran Robert Van Voorhis said the purpose of the POW/MIA Memorial Highway is to honor Oregon’s nearly 1,000 POWs, of whom 200 died in captivity.

He said Highway 26 is the eighth highway in Oregon dedicated to POWs/MIAs.

Thanksgiving to go

Over 30 volunteers served upwards of 300 Thanksgiving dinners at the Elks Lodge, according to an article from Dec. 2.

Elks Lodge member Chuck Howe said the volunteers served over 400 pounds of turkey, 60 pounds of ham and all of the fixings, including mashed potatoes, gravy, green bean casserole, sweet potatoes, rolls, stuffing, cranberries and pies.

The annual event, free and open to the public, was by take-out or delivery only.

A convoy of Christmas cheer

Grant County residents got into the Christmas spirit at the Timber Truckers parade, according to an article on Dec. 16.

“This has been one of the best years ever,” said Leslie Traylor, an event organizer.

Traylor said there were 29 entries.

The parade brought back a sense of normalcy in a year like no other, where people’s lives slowed to a near halt with school and restaurant dining closures, bans on gatherings and other restrictions.

Investigative

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according to County Judge Scott Myers.

Grant County’s EOC had as many as 12 full-time and part-time employees, with some working overtime, costing the county more than \$100,000 in personnel costs alone in 12 weeks, from March through May.

The county’s EOC faced community-wide scrutiny in June for overspending its \$125,000 budget by almost \$75,000. At issue were the out-of-court purchases made by court members.

When the county court approved Dobler’s request, they added the direction that any purchases over \$200 would need to be approved by the county court, according to the approved meeting minutes — that didn’t happen, even for a \$35,000 software program and up to \$6,100 in laptop computers and printers.

The county also requested excess reimbursement for county court labor costs — about \$15,000 too much, according to Treasurer Julie Ellison.

A state report showed Grant County’s COVID-19 federal reimbursements could be at risk for a federal audit.



Eagle file photo

Grant County Court Judge Scott Myers during a May session of County Court

Upwards of 20 hours per week of overtime for EOC leaders and allocating 100% of county court labor costs to Grant County’s COVID-19 response with scant documentation could raise questions from federal or municipal auditors, according to a report from the Oregon Secretary of State’s Office obtained by the Eagle.

The county hired a new emergency manager in August, former Harney County Emergency Manager Paul Gray.

Gray, who took over the department Aug. 3, said the coronavirus is a “public health issue.” He developed a “unified command” between the health department and the county.

“We will not be running (the EOC) the way it was before,” Gray said Aug. 5.

Secret county commissioner meeting

In June, the Eagle reported 12 Eastern Oregon county commissioners, two of them from Grant County, met unannounced in Prairie City.

It was dubbed an “information seminar” and organized by Lake County Commissioner Mark Albertson. The Eagle and Oregon Public Broadcasting negotiated their way into the event as some of the representatives were reluctant to enter the Prairie City Visitors Center.

“We did not know the press was showing up,” Albertson said. “It’s spooky, and it’s, to be honest with you, it’s spooky because all of us have been burned.”

Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer said after the meeting he believed rural people and viewpoints were often mocked in the press and not taken seriously, much like he thinks state leaders in Salem ignore rural sentiments.

The commissioners expressed their disappointment with the response to COVID-19 spearheaded by Gov. Kate Brown.

Circuit court candidate backgrounds

Looking into the Grant County circuit candidates’ backgrounds, the Eagle reported that Grant County District Attorney and circuit court judge candidate Jim Carpenter was publicly reprimanded by the Oregon bar for dishonesty in 2004.

In 2001, Carpenter played what he characterized as a practical joke on a former high school acquaintance, a teacher at the time. According to the Oregon State Bar Bulletin in 2004, Carpenter posed as the teacher via a classmates.com account and implied the teacher had sexual relations with a student.

Circuit court judge-elect Rob Raschio was arrested for driving under the influence of intoxicants in 2009. Interviews with references and Raschio revealed the future judge had problems getting along with opposing attorneys in the past, according to Oregon State Police’s background check ordered by the governor as part of her appointment process.

Deputy recorded having ‘sex talk’ with inmate paid \$117,000 on leave

After an investigation of more than

a year, the Eagle uncovered the county paid a Grant County Sheriff’s Office deputy over \$117,000 while on administrative leave after she was recorded having sexual conversations with an inmate at the jail. Mobley resigned from county employment Dec. 26.

After investigations by the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office, the Oregon Department of Justice and the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office, Deputy Abigail Mobley was on administrative leave from March 18, 2019, to Dec. 26 and was paid between \$117,000 and \$149,000 while on administrative leave for 21 months. The DOJ concluded, despite the “sex talk” recorded on the jail phone, there was not enough evidence that custodial sexual misconduct occurred. The county has denied the Eagle’s records requests for the other agencies’ investigations.

A lawsuit also accused Carpenter and outgoing Sheriff Glenn Palmer of disseminating private information obtained from a cellphone, and a complaint filed with Oregon’s police licensing agency alleged Palmer discriminated against a whistleblower. Carpenter and Palmer denied the accusations, and Palmer filed a countersuit for defamation. The suits are ongoing.

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Grant County Health Department does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in admission, treatment, or participation in its programs, services and activities, or in employment.

Winegar

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for reporting COVID-19 cases or deaths.

Despite a statement from the state as to the reasons why it tracks people who died with COVID-19, Winegar said she received nasty text messages from people she thought were

her friends at one point in her life. But, she said, the health department has received encouraging messages from others in the community as well.

“I’ve lived here long enough to have gone through events that have split the community,” she said, “but you always see people pull together here and that’s what

I love about our community.”

Winegar said the Canyon Creek Complex fire in 2015 was an example of Grant County pulling together.

“It’s hard when you have negativity, but that’s just a part of everything that happens in life,” she said.

Winegar starts her last semester the second week of January.

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