



Eagle file photo

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay during a session of County Court.

# Juniper Ridge construction nears completion

House woes inhibit hiring

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The construction remodeling at Juniper Ridge Acute Care Center, an inpatient psychiatric facility in John Day, is nearly complete.

Community Counseling Solutions CEO Kimberly Lindsay said during a June 9 session of the county court that a few more things would require some "final tweaking" by the contractor.

She told the court members the facility could have up to 10 new patients in roughly two weeks.

She said the contractors originally planned to have the project completed in early April, but construction took longer than expected.

In November, in the face of financial losses, Juniper Ridge shut down and laid off four nurses with plans to shift to a secure residential treatment facility.

This year, the plan at the facility was to begin taking patients downgraded from acute psychiatric care from the Oregon State Hospital in Junction City.

Lindsay said the patients, deemed stable and no longer a danger to themselves or others, will be at Juniper Ridge for six months.

The funding to update the facility to secure residential treatment came through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

She said Juniper Ridge has been short-staffed and needs two resident associates. Lindsay said when the facility shifted to a secure residential treatment center, two qualified mental health associate positions opened up and they promoted two residential associates to those positions.

## Housing woes hit CCS

County Judge Scott Myers asked if the lack of housing in the county had prevented CCS from filling positions. She said the psychiatric nurse practitioner they hired could not find a place to live, but CCS ended up retaining him, allowing him to work remotely. However, she said, he and his family did not move here.

When asked if telehealth visits diminish the quality of

care a patient receives, Lindsay said the practitioner's patients would say they feel great about the quality of service.

Lindsay said the general consensus is that telehealth is just as productive for patients. However, she said something is lost when the visit is not in person.

"I think that we should strive for in person whenever possible," she said.

Lindsay said it ultimately is about giving the patient a choice.

"What's best is choice," she said. "And he's an excellent provider. But we don't have choice; we just have telehealth."

Lindsay said that CCS had an established relationship with the provider. She said he initially rented for nine months, but the goal was for his family to move with him to Grant County. She said it did not make sense to cut ties with him and go with an unknown telehealth provider.

## CCS passes reviews

Lindsay said that the health department passed its early assessment and support alliance review. She said the state requires health departments to participate in the ESA program and that there are funding streams attached to the health department's use of the program.

Lindsay said CCS and the health department did well on Oregon behavioral health metrics.

Lindsay said they review encounter data to ensure that medical providers and staff enter billable codes on the insurance claims.

She said the auditors are also verifying that the diagnosis matches the length of time and description written in the notes.

Essentially, she said, what the auditors are looking for when they audit encounter data is any semblance of fraud and that the treatment fits the diagnosis. Lindsay said they are also ensuring that the care they are providing is appropriate.

"We passed the audit," she said. "And we did very well."

She told the court, while the auditors did have administrative findings, six altogether, none of them were fraudulent.

# OSP wildlife unit named Team of the Year

'Professionalism, teamwork, mentorship, dedication to protecting Oregon's citizens and natural resources'

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Oregon State Police's East-Central Wildlife Division was named Fish and Wildlife Division 2020 Team of the Year last month.

The team was presented the award on June 10 at the ODFW Phillip Schneider Wildlife Area near Dayville.

According to the division's supervisor, Sgt. Erich Timko, the five-trooper team protects the state's natural resources, including fish, wildlife and other habitats, covering one of Oregon's largest geographical areas.

Timko said the team, created in 2019, covers an area that goes down to Nevada and up to Ukiah and over to Fossil and Heppner. Timko



Contributed photo/Oregon State Police

The Oregon State Police East-Central Wildlife Division poses with an award for Wildlife Division 2020 Team of the Year: from left, Khris Brandon, a senior trooper in John Day; Geoff Smith, a senior trooper in Burns; Dean Trent, a trooper in Burns; Sgt. Erich Timko, team supervisor in John Day; Brian Jewett, a senior trooper in Fossil; and Pat McCosker, a senior trooper in John Day.

said they cover all of Harney County as well.

According to Timko, this is the first year the team has won the award.

A June 10 OSP Facebook post noted that the team received the award for their "professionalism, teamwork, mentorship, dedication to protecting Oregon's citizens and natural resources."

Timko said, during elk hunting season, the team

works up to 18 hours a day. Additionally, he said the group works most weekends and holidays when most people are out recreating. Timko told the Eagle that the troopers would often start at 2-3 a.m. to get out to locations before dawn.

"It means a lot to me that they were recognized," he said. "Supervising those types of dedicated employees makes my job easier. I consider it an honor to be part of it."

Timko said he wants the public to know that the officers are "community troopers" and rely on citizens to be their "eyes and ears" because they have such a large swath of area to cover.

"Those relationships with the community are an integral part of making us successful in what we do," Timko said. "I would give credit to the community members who help support us and provide us those tips."

# Construction planned for sidewalks on Highway 395 in 2022

Route to Grant Union soon to be safer

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Students walking to Grant Union Junior-Senior High School can look forward to a safer journey in 2022.

The Oregon Department of Transportation's project to enhance safety along the west side of South Canyon Boulevard near the high school is progressing as they plan to take bids in December for the project with construction anticipated to begin in 2022.

Tom Strandberg, the ODOT public information officer for Eastern Oregon, said \$1.8 million has been budgeted for the project for the sidewalk from the high school to Southwest Sixth Avenue.

"This will improve safety along the area, and it is funding from our Safe Routes to School program," Strandberg said. "It provides safety enhancements for those areas considered school routes along our state highway."

He said the city of John Day has worked on trying to improve this section and its sidewalk in the last decade. He said this is a continuation of the work and is the last piece of the sidewalk to connect downtown John Day with the school.

People walking on Southwest Sixth Avenue toward the high school will notice only a small portion of the trail includes a sidewalk, which is in a shattered state. The rest of the trail includes a small divider between traffic and walkers.

Grant School District 3 Superintendent Bret Uptmor said the trail has a minimal gap between cars traveling and people walking. He said at around 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., he has seen stu-



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The gravel path beside Highway 395 that students travel on the way to Grant Union Junior-Senior High School will be updated with a sidewalk in 2022.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The sidewalk heading toward the high school crumbles away.

dents walk along that road, and he is concerned about the possibility of a student being in the line of traffic.

"When I think of a sidewalk, it gives both drivers and

pedestrians a path that belongs to them," Uptmor said.

Strandberg said the project will build new sidewalks, widen the existing bike lane and install a curb, gutter and

stormwater facilities.

Strandberg said that right of way issues are still being negotiated. However, he thinks they will be able to resolve them.

Stormwater issues have been a main challenge and a cause of delays, and they significantly increased project costs, according to Strandberg.

"Due to the increased costs the city put the project on hold," Strandberg said. "ODOT secured additional funding through the Safe Routes to School program to keep the project moving forward."

He said ODOT has the funds committed to complete the project.

"It definitely needs improvement, and that's why we're doing the project: road safety for everybody," Strandberg said.

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John Day Golf Course & the downstairs lobby at BMH, or call 541-575-1311 ext. 2213.

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