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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Ann Marie Hardin, a hospital chaplain, poses for a portrait Friday, Oct. 8, in the chapel at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton.

Chaplain offers solace in pandemic

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The patient had been fighting in the intensive care unit for weeks, and the nurse had grown attached.

He was younger than most COVID-19 patients admitted to CHI St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton. It was August, and the delta variant was raging through Oregon, filling hospitals with patients and exhausting health care workers.

A record number of Umatilla County residents who contracted the virus died that month. He was one of them.

Ann Marie Hardin, a hospital chaplain, was called in to help with the next steps, telling the family and the funeral home. She turned a corner and saw the nurse, who burst into tears and fell into Hardin's arms.

"She felt that it was such a waste," Hardin said. "The patient was young. Had the patient been vaccinated, there potentially could have been a different outcome. And that was really hard to process for her. She felt that it shouldn't have had to happen. He shouldn't have had to die. And she looked to me as a safe place to lay some of that sadness."

Hardin did what she has done throughout the pandemic — she listened. The nurse vented to Hardin about things she knew few would understand but her.

"We had a conversation about how hard this was for her because she had gotten attached to the patient," said Hardin. "And I was reminded that I do this job to try to help our nurses through these hard moments."

As one of St. Anthony's three chaplains, Hardin's job is to walk around the hospital and talk to health care workers, helping them find solace and make sense of what they witness. It's a job several health care workers say has become especially critical as they endure the pandemic's toll.

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MAN OF STEEL



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle
Bruce Ward stands in front of a steel-framed house under construction. Ward, who owns Sunrise Construction Specialties, is a longtime evangelist for the fire-resistant construction technique.

Local homebuilder touts benefits of steel-frame construction

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

As wildfires in Oregon become more frequent and destructive, residents in at-risk areas, including Grant County, have begun to explore ways to keep their homes safe.

With hot, dry summers now a fact of life, an increasing number of the county's new homeowners have opted for steel-framed, fire-resistant homes.

Grant County resident Bruce Ward, who owns Sunrise Construction Specialties with his wife, Kimberly, has been building steel-framed homes for decades.

In fact, he is somewhat of an evangelist for the construction technique. For five years in the early 1990s, Ward hosted seminars across the country on the benefits of steel houses after spending the first part of his career at a steel plant in Salem.

Ward said he branched out on his own as lumber prices shot up and people started to con-

sider building steel-framed homes.

Ward said he started out building spec houses on the weekends and noticed that he was frequently getting calls with questions about steel-framed homes.

"I was on the phone every night for hours giving away information," he said. "I felt this could be a (trend)."

"I'VE HAD SEVERAL PEOPLE I'VE BUILT HOUSES FOR OVER THE YEARS SAY TO ME, 'WE DON'T HAVE ANY BUGS IN OUR HOUSE,' AND I'VE TOLD THEM, 'WELL, THERE'S NOTHING FOR THEM TO BURROW INTO.'"

Bruce Ward, owner of Sunrise Construction Specialties

Later, Ward said, he was recruited by the head of U.S. Steel and teamed up with an engineer from a national research center to conduct weekly seminars around the country for five years and later across the globe, to Europe and Japan.

Ward said he went on to work with a structural engineer from Oregon State University to develop a steel roof truss for a project in Hawaii.

He said part of the reason the project's builders opted for a steel frame was that termites were a significant problem in Hawaii.

Termite resistance is "one of the side benefits" of framing with steel, he said.

"I've had several people I've built houses for over the years say to me, 'We don't have any bugs in our house,' and I've told them, 'Well, there's nothing for them to burrow into,'" Ward said.

The overriding benefit of a steel-framed home, Ward said, is its resistance to fires and other natural disasters.

"The components in my house are not going to fuel a fire," Ward said. For example, he told the Eagle, a faulty electrical box inside a wall, a common cause of house fires, would not burn in a steel-framed home. Within an interior wall, with fire-resistant studs on each side, he said the fire has nowhere to go. Indeed, Ward said no home is 100% fireproof.

In addition, Ward said, he uses non-combustible building materials, metal roofs and roof sheathing products.

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Pfizer booster shots available for eligible recipients

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Grant County residents 65 and older and those with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes and chronic lung ailments who have received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 now qualify for booster shots to help increase their protection against the worst effects of the disease six months after receiving their second dose.

According to a news release from the Grant County Health Department, the Western States Scientific Safety Workgroup reviewed the federal process and recommended Oregon, Washington, California and Nevada make the booster shots available to the following groups:

- People over 65.
- Those living in a long-term care facility.
- People 18-64 with underlying medical conditions.
- People 18-64 working in a high-risk setting, such as first responders, educators, food and ag workers, and corrections officers.
- People living in high-risk settings, such as correctional facilities and homeless shelters.

While Grant County Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay noted that the Pfizer



Eagle file photo
A health care worker fills a syringe in the Trowbridge Pavilion at the Grant County Fairgrounds in January.

vaccine has been available locally only since June, the Food and Drug Administration plans to hold public meetings with its panel of independent vaccine experts on Thursday and Fri-

HOW TO GET A BOOSTER

The Pfizer-BioNTech booster is available to people over 65 and over, adults with weakened immune systems or those living in a long-term care facility who had their second shot at least six months ago.

Eligible recipients can call the Grant County Health Department at 541-575-0429 to schedule an appointment.

day, Oct. 14 and 15, to consider booster shots for adult recipients of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

The committee will also deliberate over whether people should get a shot from a different vaccine than they originally received.

The FDA plans to hold another public session Oct. 26 in anticipation of a request for emergency authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children 5 to 11.

Since mid-August, people with compromised immune systems have been eligible to receive third shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines 28 days after their second dose of the vaccine.

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