

Review

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The state bases its risk ratings on the numbers over a two-week period. From Dec. 27 to Jan. 9, the county reported 25 cases; from Jan. 3-16, the county reported 45 cases; and for Jan. 10-23, the county reported 25 cases.

The "moderate" risk level that the county moved into required restaurants to close at 11 p.m. and limited other establishments' capacity.

"Our concern is evident," Lindsay and the county commissioners wrote to Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, on Jan. 27. "We do not feel that Grant County should be required to move to the medium risk level when indeed our true case count by date does not support that. ... We should not be penalized due to a data issue that is not originating on our end of the system."

Grant Union High School's weight and conditioning program provided an outlet for exercise and provided mental health benefits for its students amid the pandemic.

The program's teacher, Jason Miller, said physical activity had been even more critical during the pandemic.

"I think the kids who can participate in weights and conditioning, and any vocational activity in general, can help relieve stress and get around and move," Miller said. "It's been huge for the mental aspect of the kids during these times."

Later in the month, a court dismissed murder charges related to the missing couple whose house on Nans Rock Road near Mt. Vernon burned in July 2018 after it learned that Grant County Undersheriff Zach Mobley improperly obtained a murder confession.

Isaac Connery, 23, and his mother, Gabrielle Connery, 47, had been charged with first-degree murder and arson in the



From left, the former chief of the now defunct John Day Police Department, Mike Durr; his wife, Pam; and Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley during an August John Day City Council meeting.

deaths of Terry and Sharon Smith.

Judge Daina Vitolins ruled that the confession by Isaac Connery obtained by Mobley could not be used at trial. The judge said state prosecutors could not prove the confession was knowing, intelligent and voluntary because of Miranda violations.

Vitolins said Mobley never asked whether Connery understood his Miranda rights — the right to remain silent and have an attorney present during questioning. After Connery invoked his right to defense counsel, she also said that Mobley continued talking to him in violation of the law.

"Once an individual invokes

their right to counsel, law enforcement must scrupulously honor that request and stop questioning," she said.

Vitolins said Mobley's testimony at the Feb. 10 hearing was "not helpful" because he did not review the interview tapes before the hearing and often said he was unsure and would have to check the recordings on the witness stand. She also said a face mask blocked the camera in one of the recordings, and a bag of chips blocked the view in another.

Without the confession, District Attorney Jim Carpen-ter said in a press release that the state had only "limited circumstantial evidence that does

not prove beyond a reasonable doubt" that Isaac and Gabrielle Connery murdered the Smiths.

MARCH

In March the Eagle reported that two out of three convictions of theft and possession of a stolen vehicle against former Monument Fire Chief Roy Peterson were overturned by the Oregon Court of Appeals.

The appeals court reversed the two convictions and remanded them to the lower court for resentencing. The appeals court otherwise affirmed the lower court's ruling, including a conviction on a charge of first-degree theft.

The charges stem from Peter-

son's acquisition of money and equipment for fire protection in Monument and his subsequent refusal to turn over the resources to the Monument Rural Fire District, which voters formed in November of 2012.

Later that month, the Blue Mountain Hospital District announced that it paid off its 20-year bond before its Feb. 1 due date, thus giving property owners a break on their taxes. The total amount of the bond, according to Grant County Assessor David Thunnell, was \$7 million, and the hospital received \$740,223.27 for the 2020-21 tax year.

Amy Kreger, hospital board chair, told the Eagle in March

that the 2001 bond measure narrowly passed and caused controversy.

Kreger, a landowner and a rancher, said the tax reduction would make a big difference for the county's taxpayers.

A request for peanut butter turned into a 15,000-pound food donation to the Grant County Food Bank. Grant County resident George Sintay, who recognized peanut butter was becoming an expensive item for the food bank to get, called The Church of Latter-Day Saints in La Grande to see if it could help as the church makes its own peanut butter in Texas.

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Omicron

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Given that, Lindsay said it is likely that more Grant County residents would contract the virus and experience severe illness and would likely need to be hospitalized.

With so many variables, though, she said she cannot say if the omicron variant would be worse than the county's most recent COVID-19 surge in the fall

of this year, which saw an increase in infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

She said vaccinated people are less likely to become severely sick, and early research tells health officials that a booster dose further builds antibodies to continue fighting the virus.

Lindsay noted that the Health Department is already seeing cases increase, with 13 new infections reported Monday, Dec. 27, and nine more reported on Tuesday, Dec. 28.

However, she added,

those numbers probably don't provide an entirely clear reflection of the amount of virus in the county, given the uptick in home testing. People who test at home, she noted, don't always report positive test results to the Health Department.

Lindsay added that her department is making sure

it has supplies and staff on hand in the event of a growing surge of new COVID-19 cases, and vaccines will be offered during the evening and on weekends in the third week of January.

She said the Health Department would release more information in the coming weeks.

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Committee Volunteers Needed
Grant County is now Recruiting Volunteers to Serve on Active Boards and Committees
Applications are Due by WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2022
Obtain an Application to Volunteer from the County Court, 201 S. Humbolt, No. 280, Canyon City, OR 97820
Online at [Committee Volunteer Application](#) or contact (541-575-0059) GCCourtAdmin@grantcounty-or.gov
Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

College Advisory Board
Seven members plus three ex-officio members serve a three year term and meet monthly to promote local educational opportunities and identify educational needs within the community.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council
Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Extension & 4H Service District Budget Committee
Members include two advisory members and a member-at-large serving three year terms. Annual meetings include the County Court and are held to receive, deliberate, revise and approve the annual budget as provided by the District Budget Officer. Any proposed programs are discussed and considered.

Mental Health Advisory Board
Seven members (including two consumer representatives) serve three year terms and meet no less than quarterly to facilitate the provision of quality mental health services to county residents and enhance community knowledge of available programs and services. Acts as the Local Alcohol and Drug Planning Commission and Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board. The board is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Planning Commission
Nine members serve a four year term and two alternates serve a two year term, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and siting new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production. Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed. The commission is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Senior Citizens Advisory Council
ORS 410.210. Five members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to define the needs of older adults, promote special interests and local community involvement, and represent senior citizens as an advocate to the local, state and federal government and other organizations.

Sera
The alliance provides a forum for local government agencies and the private sector to discuss, understand and coordinate long range transportation issues affecting the south east Oregon region including Grant, Harney and Malheur counties. The alliance acts as the Area Commission on Transportation. It reviews the process for determining transportation infrastructure and capital investments in the south east region, recommends priorities, and advises Oregon Transportation Commission on state and regional policies affecting the region's transportation system. Five members, plus one alternate, serve three year terms as Grant County representatives. Daytime meetings are held monthly, or as needed, at locations rotating among the three counties.

Wildlife Advisory Board
Created by Resolution 1993-29. Nine members serve three year terms and meet as needed to discuss issues regarding big game management and make recommendations to Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, including tag allocation and hunting season structure as they relate to population and damage of property.

Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee
OAR 603-019-0015. Members include one County Commissioner, two members who own or manage livestock and two members who support wolf conservation or coexistence with wolves. These members agree upon two business representatives to serve as additional members. The committee oversees the procedure established by Grant County for its Wolf Depredation Compensation Program. The current vacancy is for a business representative.
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