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Vaccination winners announced as county inoculation rate hovers at 40 percent

Commission approves \$20 Visa gift cards, and recommends county residents 'mask up'

By David Sykes

With COVID infection rates on the rise and the county vaccination rate hovering around 40 percent, county commissioners last week recommended all county employees wear masks, and "encouraged" all county residents, vaccinated or not, to wear masks while indoors at public gatherings. Commissioners also approved giving out \$20 VISA gift cards to those getting vaccinated at upcoming public inoculation events. They had earlier authorized \$70,000 in county money to be spent on a lottery open to county residents receiving the vaccination. Those winners were recently announced, and commissioners hope all these efforts will bring down COVID infection rates in the county.

The 40 percent vaccination rate puts Morrow County at number 28 in the state for percent of the population inoculated against COVID-19. Lake County is the lowest at 31.2 percent and Hood River County is number one with 68.3 fully vaccinated. In total numbers Morrow County has 4,578 people vaccinated, including 68 percent of its 65 or over population.

At its August 4 meeting, in addition to approving the \$20 Visa gift cards, after hearing a report from the public health director, commissioners voted two to one on the masking recommendation. "We recommend universal mask usage in the county. Whether you are vaccinated or not we recommend you wear a mask in public," Morrow County Health Director Nazario Rivera said. He said that recommendation came down from the national Center for Disease Control and the state Health Department, and although it is not a mandate the county is strongly urging people to comply.

Nazario said the county health department has been seeing an uptick in vaccinations among the population with his office averaging about 10 vaccines per day during their three clinic days per week. "We have seen a slight increase in people seeking the vaccine in the last couple of weeks," he said.

"There has been a significant jump in recent cas-



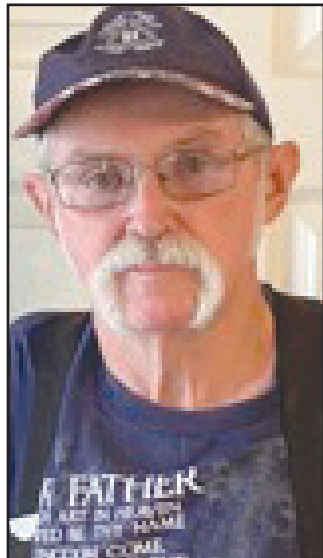
Pat Sweeney, Heppner, wins \$20,000 vaccination prize



Jose Montes, Irrigon, wins \$20,000



Cecilia Coria, Boardman, \$10,000



Merlin Pengelly, Irrigon, \$10,000

lic health director, Rivera would recommend at this time that the county fair and rodeo not move forward. Rivera said at this time he is not saying events should be shut down, only that the public mask up in public indoor settings. A motion to recommend the public mask up passed two to one with Doherty voting no.

In other COVID business Lindsay said the county would be setting up booths at public events to give vaccinations and asked the county commissioners to authorize giving \$20 Visa

es and hospitalizations," Rivera later told the Gazette-Times. "In response, new national guidance has been released calling for masking measures to prevent the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant. The Morrow County Health Department is following the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) guidance in recommending universal mask use in public indoor settings in an attempt to protect ourselves and the community from COVID-19," he added.

At the August 4 meeting commissioner Melissa Lindsay, who has been at the lead championing vaccinations and other COVID prevention actions in the county, said Morrow County is headed back to a high-risk category and she did not want to see the county receive lock downs or other strict orders again from the state level. "It is still there," she said of the COVID virus. Lindsay said she was concerned the population has become lax. "I don't see people wearing masks," she said pointing out it appears a lot of the public has stopped paying attention to new cases. "But the state has not. How do we make sure we don't send ourselves back into a shut down? We are told it is with vaccines and masks," she emphasized.

Prior to voting on a motion recommending masks for county government employees and supporting the health director in efforts to get more vaccinations and

encourage people to wear masks, county commissioner Jim Doherty said he thinks the public already knows and understands all of it. "I think the constituency out there after a year and a half fully understand this issue," Doherty said. "A top-down approach of us banding them (the public) about is not going to lead to more vaccinations and not going to lead to more masks."

He said he understands the position Rivera is in to follow the CDC guidelines and state recommendations but as a commissioner, "I am reluctant at this time to go out and tell the constituency and the employees of the county something they are fully aware of at this point," he emphasized. "I want to stress the fact even if we are adding breaking cases (of new COVID infections) you are aware that the vaccinations we have available now are working against hospitalizations and deaths," Rivera replied. "If 60 percent of our citizens are not going to get vaccinated, and I have to get a mask to keep those 60 percent from getting sick or going to the hospital, how does that work out for the folks that have gone and gotten vaccinated?" Doherty asked.

Rivera reiterated he is only following the recommendations from the CDC and state health officials. However, Doherty wanted to know if, as county pub-

gift cards as incentive with each inoculation. "I think people can make a choice," Doherty said before also voting no on this motion. "I don't want to pay them."

As an earlier incentive by the county, commissioners voted to put up \$70,000 in county money toward a lottery for people in Morrow County taking the vaccine. Those winners were recently announced. Pat Sweeney of Heppner and Jose Montes of Irrigon won \$20,000, Cecilia Coria and Luis Reyes of Boardman both won \$10,000 as well as Merlin Pengelly of Irrigon.

Although the lottery is over Rivera wanted to remind county residents that the vaccine is readily available for all who want it. "The Public Health Department is continuing to offer the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccine. This vaccine is available at no cost. If you have any questions about the vaccine, please call: 541-676-5421," Rivera told the Gazette-Times.

See page 4 for vaccine information.



Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty



Morrow County Health Director Nazario Rivera

Look for the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo insert in today's issue of the Gazette



The 24-page Morrow County Fair and Rodeo special edition is included in the paper this week.

They've 'goat' a 'dam' job



Goats have arrived and are busy clearing the overgrown vegetation on the Willow Creek dam this week. -Photo by Giselle Moses.

By Giselle Moses

Approximately 1000 goats arrived last Thursday and Friday to clear the overgrown vegetation on and surrounding the Willow Creek Dam. Sage and Hayden Petty with Petty Family Goats of Pomeroy, WA, have once again been tasked by the US Corps of

Engineers to have their herd do what they love to do, eat.

The goats will spend the next week clearing the area on the town side of the dam and will move to the upper end of Willow Creek Reservoir early next week. The herd consists of both, adults and kids of various breeds of goats.

Farra celebrates 104th birthday



Above: Ida Farra (front row center) celebrated her birthday with friends and family. Pictured front (L-R): Cara Osmin, Farra and Mary Ann Elguezabal. Back row (L-R): Frank Osmin, Bill Mahon, Sonny Biddle, Peggy Fishburn, Earl Fishburn and Rick Drake. Right: Ida Farra.



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