

Morrow County Fair takes off COVID EMERGENCY

The Morrow County Fair kicked off this week with judging for 4-H and open class events. Exhibits of photography, foods, animals and much more will be on display for fairgoers.

The fair continues every day until Sunday, August 22 with admission to the fair being free. The parade will be in downtown Heppner on Saturday at 10 a.m. The Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo performances will begin at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights and the Morrow County rodeo at 1 p.m. Sunday.

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shutting down the fair, even though cases in the county were on the rise. For perspective he said in the week ending July 31 there were 27 cases in Morrow County with two in the hospital, for the week ending August 7 there were 63 cases with one in the hospital, and for the week ending August 14 the county had 89 cases with three people in the hospital.

Commissioners asked fair secretary Ann Jones what measures were being taken for COVID. Jones said they do what they can. "I don't have the manpower to stand at every doorway and instruct people and tell them you have to put your mask on," she said. Jones said the best they can do is educate and provide people cleaning opportunities. "We have signs posted, we have hand sanitizing stations all around the grounds and we have hand washing stations at the fair," she said. "As far as making sure people have masks on, you know how that can go," she told the commission. She did say there would be boxes of masks available at the fair office and at the front gate for people to use.

Gray said the emergency declaration "doesn't mean we have to close the fair down and I personally don't want to close the fair down and that is not what this is for," he said of the declaration. "This is so we can get things going. Is it going to change the hospital bed situation we have going? No." He said the hospital bed shortage "is going to get worse and there is nothing we can do about it." Gray did say the Morrow County emergency declaration would "let the governor know we are doing something even if it is not closing the fair and rodeo down. We are saying yes, we recognize there is a problem," Gray explained.

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay, who has worked hard to bring the COVID numbers down in the county, said her main reason for voting in favor of the emergency powers would be helping free up more hospital beds for non-COVID patients. "This isn't about counting covid numbers, this is about your family that may not be able to get the service they need when they go to the hospital door. I'm willing to sign off on the declaration for those reasons," Lindsay said.

County Sheriff Ken Matlack said although he has seen various incentive programs such as paying people to take the vaccine, the county still has quite a few people unvaccinated (60 percent of county residents have chosen not to get inoculated). Matlack said if people knew the percent of people who contract COVID and aren't vaccinated maybe that would motivate them. "I think that would be helpful as the numbers rise to moti-

vate people to go get shots. What data can you bring to people other than saying its bad, it's really bad?" he asked. "Something to show that it makes a difference to become inoculated, to take the shot."

Lindsay said on the state website it says people taking the vaccination are getting less sick, and of the people in the hospital the majority are not vaccinated. Russell said nation-wide 95 percent of the COVID hospitalizations are non-vaccinated people, and the numbers are similar in Oregon. Doherty says the county has a responsibility to all its citizens, vaccinated or not. "Our challenge is to the folks that have the vaccine, and those that don't have the vaccine, and those that are never going to get the vaccine, we need to consider all of them," he said. He did admit it's not the vaccinated that are posing the challenge, but at the same time those that don't have the vaccine are not asking us to step in on their behalf. It's a bit of a conundrum and doesn't absolve us of the responsibility of looking out for everybody," he explained. Doherty said if the county wanted to enact the emergency, then all the county agencies should come together and treat the situation as a real emergency.

The commission ended up passing the emergency resolution anyway, with Lindsay and Russell voting yes, and Doherty voting no. "Maybe this will move the dial (make the infection rate lower). But, I did not hear that we are in an emergency now, and that is what we are declaring," he explained of his opposition.



Grand Champion Dog Showman, Kyra Shockman (Irrigon) with her dog Ranger and Reserve Grand Champion Showman, Preslie Bowles also of Irrigon with her dog Axl. -Photo by Erin Heideman.



Left: Briar Reeves and his dog, Daisy of Irrigon in the obedience competition. Above: Open class exhibits are on display. -Photos by Giselle Moses.



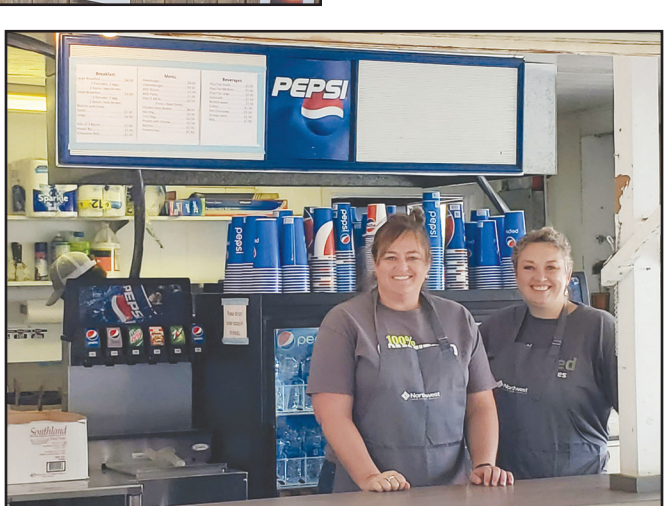
Eva Worden prepares her egg salad sandwich recipe for the judges during 4-H live food contests.



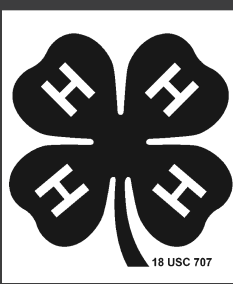
Contestants wait for their turn during live judging in the 4-H Annex.



Tylynn Cimmiyotti keeps the exhibits organized in the kid's corner.



Volunteers, Jeni McGlothlin and Darcy Sexson from NW Farm Credit ready to serve fairgoers at the 4-H Snack Shack. They are still needing for volunteers for Friday afternoon. -Photo by Giselle Moses.



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