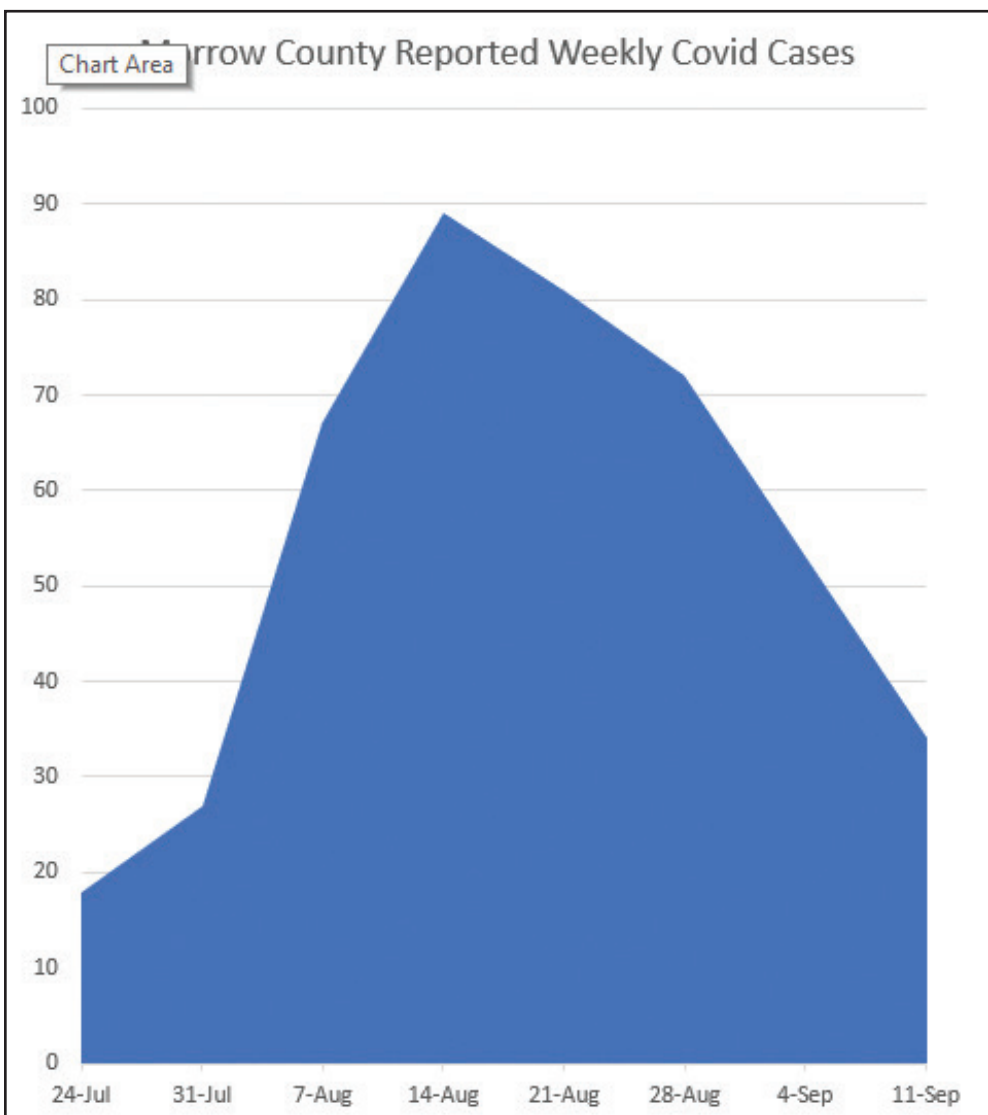


Morrow County COVID-19 cases showing significant decline

Mirrors state-wide trend, but local officials worried home testing may be hiding true infection rate



A recent graph released by Morrow County shows a significant decline in the number of new COVID-19 cases being detected in the county.

By David Sykes

The number of new positive COVID-19 cases in Morrow County has shown a significant drop in the past several weeks, figures from the Health Department show. In mid-August there were almost 90 new cases in the county, and in the latest figures as illustrated new cases are now down in the mid-30s.

County officials are not sure what's causing the drop, but some are saying it may be because more people are using the home COVID testing kits, and therefore fewer people are coming into health facilities for testing and documentation of new cases. "They may be just not coming in, so we don't know about the true number of cases," Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay told the Heppner Gazette-Times.

Lindsay did not have actual figures to back up

if there is less "official" testing going on, but she did say the declining graph represents good news. "This is very exciting and creates a lot of hope for the State and the County," Lindsay said. County Emergency Manager Paul Gray said state-wide positive COVID cases are going down in nearly every Oregon county except for some in the southern part of the state. Gray said the reduced figures coming out are good news for the county and the state. "The Delta Variant is starting to drop away. We are on the downs side," Gray told the Gazette.

County Commission Chair Don Russell also says home testing may be hiding the true infection rates in Morrow County but said there was not data to confirm this theory. The county has not changed any of its data collection or reporting procedures to account for the declining

trend. Russell also said the lower rate if true is good news for Morrow County. "The health care workers are getting tired. Everyone is just getting burned out on this," Russell said of the pandemic.

Although hopeful and excited about the news Lindsay urged people not to let their guard down. "I hope people will not let their guard down as the numbers become less concerning as we know fewer people are testing and home test kits do not become reflective in the numbers. It is great to see the spike starting to decline. I hope people will continue to seek input from their medical providers about the vaccine for their personal use and when they feel ill or test positive at home that they will stay home and quarantine under the CDC guidance as well as notify those they have been in contact with," Lindsay said.

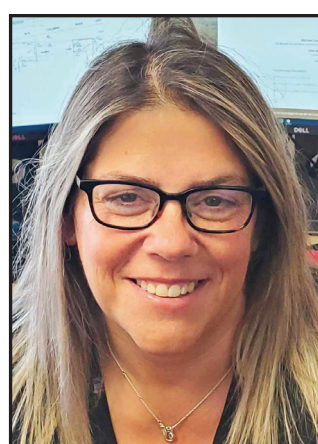
New faces at Planning Department

There are a couple of new faces at the Morrow County Planning Department office in Irrigon. George Nairns recently joined the staff as the office manager, and Bobbie Ingraham is the new compliance planner.

Nairns comes to the planning office from the Willow Creek Terrace Assisted Living Center where she was the manager. Ingraham transferred from another county job where she worked at the courthouse in Heppner in the assessor's office.



George Nairns, Office Manager



Bobbie Ingraham, Compliance Planner

OSP reports fatal crash on Hwy. 207

Oregon State Police Troopers and emergency personnel responded to a motorcycle crash on Hwy. 207 near milepost 20C, south of Heppner, Sunday, September 12, at approximately 12:16 p.m.

Preliminary investigation revealed a Suzuki motorcycle, operated by Edmund LaPlante, 70, of Oregon City, was south-

bound when it failed to negotiate a curve and left the roadway.

LaPlante sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased.

The Oregon State Police were assisted at the scene by the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Morrow County Ambulance and ODOT.

Heideman earns American FFA Degree

Jake Heideman, a 2020 Ione High School graduate, earned his American FFA Degree, the highest award that can be bestowed in the organization.

No stranger to FFA involvement, Jake follows a lineage of American Degree recipients starting with his mom, Erin Heideman, who earned her American in 1995 followed by three uncles; TJ, Kenz & Luke Hansell (1997, 2000 and 2007). His great uncle, Senator Bill Hansell, was awarded the honorary American Degree in 2007 as well.

As the highest degree achievable in the National FFA Organization, the American FFA Degree shows an FFA member's dedication to his or her chapter and state FFA association. It demonstrates the effort FFA members apply toward their super-



Jake Heidemann

vised agricultural experience and the outstanding leadership abilities and community involvement they exhibited through their FFA career.

Heideman currently serves in the US Navy and completed the degree requirements while enlisted. His SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience) projects have included raising market hogs, dairy

heifers and working on his family farm, Blown Away Ranch, for Krebs Livestock and for Pacific Ag operating equipment and working with livestock. His FFA participation included a variety of contests and activities including public speaking, rituals, tractor driving, serving as an officer and community service.

FFA members are not eligible to apply for the American Degree until they have been graduated from high school at least one year.

Heideman is continuing his US Navy A-school training in fire control learning the critical skills to manage all weapons electrical systems on destroyers currently in Great Lakes, IL. Jake is the son of Deacon and Erin Heideman of Ione.

AWANA starts next Tuesday Club goes back to in-person with new location

Heppner AWANA Club will begin its 2021-22 club year next Tuesday, Sept. 21, with registration and an ice cream social for club members and their parents. After meeting via Zoom last year, the children's club is returning to in-person meetings, this time at the Christian Life Center ("dome church") in Heppner.

The evening will begin at 6 p.m. with club registration and ice cream for everyone attending. The event will also include games and a short welcome from AWANA Commander Dale Bates. Attendees are asked to wear masks due to current COVID-19 restrictions.

Meetings will be held from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays throughout the club year. Every week includes a different theme; club members can start planning now for "Bring a Friend" night on Sept. 28 and a family barbecue for



AWANA game leader Troy McGill doubles as a cameraman during AWANA's virtual phase last year. Leaders say they are looking forward to seeing club members face-to-face again. -Contributed photo

"Parent Night" on Oct. 5. The Heppner AWANA program is the combined effort of local churches to teach children what the Bible is all about. AWANA stands for "Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed," based on II Timothy 2:15. Games, songs and a Bible lesson are included during

a typical club meeting. The Christian Life Center is located at 535 W. Morgan St. in Heppner. For more information, contact AWANA Secretary Andrea Di Salvo at awana.heppner@gmail.com, 757-285-5792, or via Facebook Messenger.

TEACHER

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the staff as just people I work with. There is a definite divide that is slowly growing and becoming a chasm with the creation of the "MOU" that is still unsigned. I want my second home and family back. Please help me create that special working environment again."

Morrow County School District parents Brian and Genessa Knowles and Corey Miller spoke concerning the detrimental effects the mandates have on children. InterMountain ESD director Mark Mulvihill also contributed concerning the mandates and the board's position. The board is basically bound concerning the state governor's mandates.

Also at the meeting, the board approved a school-based counseling agreement with Community Counseling Solutions for \$240,395 (adjusted). In other business the board:

-received a report from Superintendent Dirk Dirksen via zoom.

-heard a report on graduation requirements for a basic, standard, honors and modified diplomas and alternative certificates from

-approved a request for the Riverside FFA Chapter to attend the 2021 National FFA convention in Indianapolis.

-approved a resolution

accepting and appropriating unanticipated revenues as follows: Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-\$20,000 from Columbia River Technologies; SBE-\$425 from Umatilla Electric; Windy River Elementary-\$1,500 from Columbia River Technologies; Heppner schools-\$9,322.89 from Oregon Community Foundation.

-learned that the "district's beginning fund balance was larger than anticipated due to the federal COVID funding and state grants. This was also due to vacant positions in the prior year that were difficult to refill."

-received the following enrollment report: A.D. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon-217 enrolled, one no-show; Sam Boardman Elementary Boardman-342 enrolled, one no-show; Heppner Elementary-177 enrolled, all attending; Irrigon Elementary-184 enrolled, all attending; Windy River Elementary, Boardman-258 enrolled, six no-shows; Heppner Jr./Sr. High School-164 enrolled, two no-shows; Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-380 enrolled, 15 no shows; Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, Boardman-505 enrolled, five no shows; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon-84 enrolled, all attending; total-2311 enrolled, 30 no

shows.

-approved the following employment action: Resignations/non-renewals-Lorna Botefuhr, HES ed assistant 9-21, Lyman Branson, RJSHS facilities coordinator, Jennifer Jaca, HJSHS ed assistant 9-17, Richard Moore, WRE/RJSHS PE teacher and coach, Tera Tolar, WRE library tech/ed assistant 9-14; Employment/Promotions/Transfers-Michelle Hagen, IJSHS ed assistant, Dylan Hodges, IES temp, special ed teacher, Stacie Johnson, IJSHS ed assistant, Margaret Klinger, SBE/WRE assistant cook, Antonia Nichols, HES head cook, Aislynn Pope, ACE ed assistant, Mariah Stephens, HJSHS ed assistant; Extra Duty Contracts-Jacob Arnold, IJSHS high school assistant football coach, Kylee Briggs, IJSHS high school assistant volleyball coach, Carri Grieb, HJSHS assistant golf coach, Michael Hughes, RJSHS junior high head football coach, Dan Locey, IJSHS junior high assistant football coach, Eric Solis, IJSHS junior high head football coach, Aymee Wilson, HJSHS head cheerleading coach.

-received the following announcements: STEAM Friday, October 15; next board meeting-Monday, October 11, Heppner.

Pet owners cautioned

It was reported that caretakers had been baiting gophers at the Heppner Cemetery last week. Dog walkers were advised to watch their pets.