

LIFEWAYS

continued from Page A1

workers for the service.

GOBHI, as the contracting agency, has Lifeways' fate in its hands. Campbell said the board met Feb. 8 to discuss the issue. Board members gave their approval for hiring Spriggs-Flanders.

"We took into consideration the progress that has been made to date," Campbell said. "The action of the board was to hold in abeyance termination of the portion of mental health services

contract for crisis services in Umatilla County."

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts, who has been involved with discussions with both Lifeways and GOBHI, said he thinks the group is making positive changes.

"One thing we have now that we didn't have before is investment by the CEO," he said, referring to Tim Hoekstra, who was hired in January.

He said they are working with law enforcement to close some of the gaps in following through with patients. He said that

includes implementing a strategy that ensures that people in crisis are released to a responsible person, and to a safe location.

Roberts said he wasn't so concerned with Lifeways making changes by the Feb. 20 deadline, as long as they continued to make them.

"That's a pretty aggressive timeline," he said. "As long as I can see progress being made, I'm willing to play along. As far as I'm concerned, the probationary status is kind of ongoing until we get to where we need to be, and we've got a long path to travel."



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Registered nurse Eryn Griffin fills a syringe while preparing a dose of the Menactra vaccine on Thursday at the Umatilla County Health Department offices in Hermiston. Menactra is a vaccine that prevents some forms of meningitis.

EXCLUSION

continued from Page A1

Such outbreaks are examples of waning herd immunity, said Umatilla County Public Health Administrator Jim Setzer. When the majority of a group gets vaccinated, a virus can't easily spread from person to person and unvaccinated people are generally protected, but herd immunity works only if most people get immunized.

Vaccinations are top of mind right now for Setzer due to Exclusion Day. The county sent letters warning of potential exclusion to parents of 530 students on Feb. 5.

"Some of them aren't up to date and others simply have incomplete records," Setzer said. "We want to help them resolve this however it works for them."

Last year on Exclusion Day, schools in the county sent 147 students home. Parents have three options: get their children's records to school, secure the required vaccines or file an exemption. Exemptions are either medical or non-medical.

Parents can qualify for non-medical exemptions by completing a 15-60 minute online class and print out a Vaccine Education Certificate. Many parents have done just that. Oregon's non-medical exemption rate is one of the highest in the country. During the 2016-17, 6.7 percent of Oregon's kindergarteners had exemptions for at least one vaccine. Despite that statistic,

most Oregon schools have relatively few exemptions with only a small number of schools having extremely high rates, according to Stacy de Assis Matthews, the Oregon Health Authority's school immunization law coordinator.

According to the Oregon Health Authority's searchable database, for example, in the 2016-17 school year, most Umatilla and Morrow county schools had exemption rates of under 6 percent, including Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston (1 percent) and Irrigon Elementary (1 percent). While Sandstone sent home 16 students last year, Armand Larive Middle School sent home the highest number of students in the district at 37.

De Assis Matthews defined "herd immunity."

"If enough people in a population like a school are immunized, there's a protective bubble around kids vulnerable to disease — the kids who are medically unable to be immunized," she said.

According to the CDC, research has debunked antivaxer claims that immunization leads to autism. Nine CDC-funded studies found no link. A mercury-based preservative called thimerosal was a major focus, but no relationship between thimerosal and autism was found. Thimerosal was phased out for other reasons by 2001.

"Immunization is the very best and safest way to protect children against vaccine-preventable diseases such as whooping cough

and measles," Setzer said. "Immunization helps keep our schools and community safe and healthy."

For the most part, most schools have healthy herd immunity.

"It appears that the non-vaccinated tend to cluster in particular schools or communities," he said.

Like de Assis Matthews, Setzer worries about students with medical exemptions, those who can't be vaccinated for health reasons such as cancer. They must rely on herd immunity to stay safe. Some, he said, describe healthy people who choose not to vaccinate as "epidemiological freeloaders."

Setzer said parents who are unsure about their children's immunization status may call Umatilla County Public Health (UCo) at 541-278-5432 for help reviewing records, and Wednesday the Hermiston clinic will be taking walk-ins so that parents can get their child back in the classroom right away.

"We're all hands on deck," Setzer said. Pharmacists can give vaccinations to children, aged 7 and older. Duron said Hermiston School District hopes parents will get their children immunized or get their records updated as soon as possible so that the students don't miss out on educational opportunities.

For more information on required vaccinations, go to www.healthoregon.org/imm.

Jade McDowell contributed to this report.

HOUSE FIRE



Umatilla County Fire District #1 responded to a house fire on North Ash Road in Stanfield Tuesday afternoon. The fire may have started in the basement, and smoke was coming out of the chimney and eaves, but officials at the scene said the cause was still unknown. No one was injured.

BTW

continued from Page A1

RSVP, please call 541-969-8938 or email marika@oregonwatercoalition.org.

There's still time to win sweet prizes during the **Valentine Reading Challenge**.

Kids need to turn in reading logs by Wednesday, Feb. 28 at the **Hermiston Public Library**, 235 E. Gladys Ave. For more information, call 541-567-2882.

TruCare Pregnancy Resource Center recently celebrated the success of its first fundraising event. The local nonprofit organization provides assistance to people facing an unplanned pregnancy.

The Jan. 28 event featured keynote speaker **Kirk Walden**, a longtime pro-life advocate and author of "The Wall: Rebuilding a culture of LIFE in

America and ending abortion as we know it." Executive director **Debbie Cissna** said the generosity of local churches, businesses and individuals was overwhelming. Money raised during the banquet helps in highlighting life-affirming choices to community members.

"We would like to extend our deepest and most heartfelt appreciation for your support at the 'Rebuilding A Culture of Life' banquet," Cissna said. "Thank you for making the evening such a special community event. Each donation enables us to continue bringing hope to moms and dads facing pregnancy decisions."

TruCare Pregnancy Resource Center is located at 105 S.W. Second St., Hermiston. For more information, contact 541-567-2393, info@trucareprc.com or visit www.trucareprc.com.

Tickets are still available

for "**An Evening in Paris**," a fundraiser for the **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** program. The gala event transports people to the "City of Love" and features an elegant dinner and a dueling piano show. Money raised helps local children in foster care.

The event is Saturday from 6-10 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway 395. General admission is \$40 per person and VIP seats are \$75 each. Tickets, which are \$40 per person and VIP seats are \$75 each, can be purchased at **Umatilla Morrow County Head Start**, 110 N.E. Fourth St., or www.umchs.com/donate. For questions, call 541-564-6878.



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