

Nychal Gritz recovering after motorcycle crash

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

A Hermiston man who was in a motorcycle crash on May 3 is still in the hospital recovering from a brain injury.

Nychal Gritz, 22, was injured in a single-vehicle crash outside of Stanfield. His father Jeff Gritz said in an email over the weekend that Nychal spent 12 days in Oregon Health & Science University Hospital's intensive care unit in Portland before being transferred to the hospital's trauma unit, where he remains.

Jeff said Nychal was "pretty unresponsive" the first few days due to swelling and bleeding in his brain (the *Hermiston Herald* originally reported he was awake during that time based on incorrect information released by the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office). He is now walking and eating with assistance and his short-term memory is unpredictable but improving, Jeff said. He should be moving to a rehab facility soon.

"He has multiple facial

fractures and skull fractures that are non-operable and will heal on their own," he wrote on Saturday. "His biggest threat now is a small blood clot in his brain that is being medically treated, that could take up to several months. He should be discharged from the hospital early next week if he continues to improve over the weekend."

Nychal was a star baseball pitcher for Hermiston High School and played for Blue Mountain Community College last year. Jeff said community members have inquired about being able to send letters or donations to help cover medical bills. Letters to Nychal can be sent to P.O. Box 356, Hermiston, OR 97838. People can donate to an account in Nychal's name at Columbia Bank or search for "Nychal's Medical Fundraiser" on Facebook.

"Nychal and our family are very thankful for family, friends and our Eastern Oregon communities that have reached out and sent prayers our way," Jeff said. "We truly appreciate it."

Heavy traffic expected for Memorial Day weekend

BY HERMISTON HERALD

Experts at AAA are predicting the second-highest number of Memorial Day travelers on record this year.

The automobile club is estimating 43 million Americans will be traveling this weekend, a 3.6 percent increase over 2018. More than 37 million of them will be traveling by car.

Average gas prices last week were recorded at \$2.86, according to a AAA news release.

"Americans are eagerly anticipating the start of summer, and expensive gas prices won't keep them home this Memorial Day weekend," Paula Twidale, vice president AAA Travel, said in a statement. "Consumer spending remains strong, helped by solid job and income growth. Families continue to prioritize spending their disposable incomes on travel, and near-record numbers of them are looking forward to doing just that for Memorial Day."

Based on the company's travel bookings, the most popular destination of the weekend will be Orlando, Florida, followed by New York, Las Vegas, Honolulu and Anaheim, California.

One of the main services AAA provides to its members is roadside assistance. The auto club estimates it will rescue about 353,000 motorists over Memorial Day weekend.

AAA recommends drivers take their vehicle to a trusted service provider to check the tires, brakes, fluid levels and other potential sources of trouble before heading out on a long trip. Drivers should be prepared for emergencies by keeping snacks, water, flashlight, cell phone charger, batteries, first aid kit and a basic toolkit in their car.

Travelers should also factor in heavier traffic and longer drive times over the holiday weekend, along with busier hotels and restaurants. Air travelers should budget more time than usual to get through security lines.

Forecast: Water supplies across Oregon mixed

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
CAPITAL PRESS

PORTLAND — Oregon farmers and ranchers can expect mixed irrigation supplies heading into summer after months of fast-changing weather.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service released its statewide water outlook report for May, predicting near- to above-average stream flows in eastern and southern Oregon, and near- to below-average stream flows in central and western Oregon.

Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for the NRCS in Portland, said reservoir levels are faring well across the state, averaging from 93% to 140% of normal storage.

"Water users that have access to reservoir storage will likely have adequate water supplies this summer, while those dependent upon in-stream flows will need to continually monitor conditions due to rapidly changing weather patterns," Oviatt said.

Conditions have been feast or fam-

ine through most of the water year dating back to October, Oviatt said. The year got off to a slow start until record-breaking snowfall in February, which dramatically changed the agency's forecast.

Then came early April, bringing heavy rains that mixed with rapid snowmelt to cause widespread flooding and record-high stream flows. More than half of river gauging stations around the state measured record-high stream flows, including 300% to 500% of normal in the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow Creek basins of northeast Oregon.

Flooding also occurred in the Willamette Basin, which received 186% of its normal April precipitation. Now, as temperatures rise into the upper 80s and much of the in-stream flow has already passed, Oviatt said the concern will begin shifting toward parched rangeland and the possibility of wildfires.

Overall, basins in eastern and southern Oregon have received 100% to 120% of normal precipitation dating

back to October, while those in western and central Oregon have received 85% to 100%.

Snowpack continues to linger at higher elevations in Eastern Oregon, while dwindling to about half of normal in the Klamath, Willamette and Upper Deschutes basins, and as low as 40% in the Hood, Sandy and Lower Deschutes basins.

Thanks to a wet February and April, the U.S. Drought Monitor lists just 17% of Oregon as "abnormally dry," as opposed to 81% of the state a year ago.

That said, the National Climate Prediction Center is calling for increased chances of higher temperatures and a roughly equal chance of above- or below-normal precipitation over the next three months.

"In an optimum world, we would cool down here and still get some spring precipitation carrying through the early part of June," Oviatt said. "As we know, by that point in time, we just don't receive that much precipitation after that."

Preservation agreement moves depot closer to transfer

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

A memorandum of agreement between the Columbia Development Authority and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation puts the former Umatilla Chemical Depot one step closer to local control.

The agreement lays out plans to preserve areas of cultural, historical and religious significance within the former depot. After months of negotiations it was approved by the CDA board in April and approved by the CTUIR board last week.

Chuck Sams, communications director for the CTUIR, said the board of directors was pleased to move forward with the memorandum and was looking forward to working with the CDA to preserve those significant areas.

The agreement lays out agreements for the CTUIR to manage the wildlife habitat portion of the property,



HH file photo

A line of storage igloos in G block at the former Umatilla Chemical Depot.

including access to needed water rights and roads.

It states that the CTUIR and CDA will work together to preserve a site of religious importance to the tribes and preserve historically significant areas such as sections of the Oregon Trail.

Greg Smith, executive director of the CDA, said having the local partners come to an agreement is a "major step" in wrapping up transfer of the land.

The final barrier is getting the State Historical Preservation Office to approve the terms of the agreement, after which attorneys will draw up the final transfer papers.

"After the SHPO issue there's nothing left for (the CDA) to complete," he said.

Smith said both sides' attorneys have been involved in the process and there hasn't been an indication that SHPO or the attorney will hold things up.

Smith, who serves as CDA director as part of his private economic development business but is also a state legislator, said he plans to have the Army work with SHPO to avoid any conflicts of interest.

The Army finished incinerating the depot's chemical weapons and closed the depot in 2012, with plans to transfer the depot to local control by 2015. Negotiations about issues such as water rights, along with the Army's slow-moving bureaucracy, have delayed the transfer ever since. A 7,500-acre portion of the former depot has already been turned over to the Oregon Military Department for use as a National Guard training facility. Once the transfer papers are signed, the rest will be split between a 5,700-acre wildlife refuge managed by the CTUIR and nearly 4,000 acres of industrial, commercial and agricultural land managed by the CDA.

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