

Vaccines:

Continued from Page A1

each of the 36 counties. Scholarships worth \$100,000 are also being offered to lucky vaccinated youth.

Brown and OHA officials said it was time to push past the current levels of inoculation as medical evidence and state statistics show the impact of the virus has separated residents into two groups with very different likely futures.

Those with vaccination are almost completely free of infections, severe illness and death.

But the pandemic is still “a shadow” across the state for those who are not inoculated. OHA said nine out of 10 deaths are currently among people who have no record of vaccination.

Umatilla County adds local incentives

Umatilla County organizations have the opportunity to receive funding if they assist COVID-19 vaccination efforts as part of a new program to drive up the county’s vaccination rates, which are among the lowest in the state. The county health department created the “Community Rewards Program,” which the county board of commissioners unanimously approved at its meeting June 2.

The program will work by ZIP code and will be available for not-for-profit organizations, including fraternal, civic and religious organizations, though specific criteria are in development, officials say. The county will be one of the first in the state to make such an effort using incentives, according to Commissioner John Shafer.

When 60% of residents over the age of 18 in a ZIP code are vaccinated, the county will divide \$10,000 worth of funds evenly between each organization that has assisted the county’s vaccination efforts, with additional funds based on population.

The ZIP code encompassing the city of Hermiston, for example, has the opportunity to receive \$113,000 from the program, Fiumara said. The ZIP code for a town like Helix would receive about \$11,000.

Some ZIP codes are nearing that mark, with Helix at approximately 50%, Meacham at 44% and Hermiston at 43%, according to Fiumara.

“We chose (60%) because we wanted something to be reasonably obtainable for the localities in our county,” said Joe Fiumara, the county’s public health director. “Our (vac-

TO GET VACCINATED...

Umatilla County residents looking to get vaccinated against COVID-19 can receive a free shot at Walmart, Safeway, BiMart, Rite Aid, Family Health Associates, Mirasol Family Health Center, Good Shepherd Medical Center or drive-thru vaccination events hosted by Umatilla County Public Health.

For details about walk-in times or how to schedule an appointment, visit ucohealth.net/covid-events-new or call 541-567-3113.

To schedule an opportunity to get the vaccine in Morrow County or ask questions about the vaccine, call 541-676-5649 or email COVID-Vaccine@co.morrow.or.us.

...cine) rates are lower than we would like. Obviously, our goal would be 100%. But we felt that 60% would be a reasonable accommodation that would provide a lot of additional protection within those communities.”

The commissioners agreed to make the program a direct effort to ramp up vaccinations in the county. Commissioner Dan Dorran brought up the idea of setting a target date to reach the 60% mark to expedite vaccinations, saying he “would like to see Umatilla County get as high a level as possible as quickly.”

Umatilla County has consistently reported some of the lowest vaccination rates per capita since February, according to state health data, and officials say demand for shots only has dwindled in recent months.

The funds come from the nearly \$510,000 the state sent in May as part of a \$25 million effort by the federal government to assist vaccination efforts in a variety of ways, including providing incentives, according to Fiumara.

To receive funds, organizations would need to describe what they have done to assist vaccinations. The county has yet to decide how this will work, but Fiumara said it likely will be a written description. The county also will use \$51,000 to reimburse participating organizations for their efforts and to fund organizations that lack the financial ability to participate. County organizations that receive the funds would be able to use them as they see fit, Fiumara said.

The 60% threshold for the county’s program will have to be met by December. All unused funds will be given to ZIP codes that achieved the 60% mark.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Families watch and take photos as their graduates cross the stage at Hermiston High School’s commencement ceremony on Thursday, June 3, 2021.

Graduates:

Continued from Page A1

Graduation this year kicked off with a gathering of all the seniors in the high school gym, where they listened to speeches while their parents and other family members waited outside. Afterward, district administrators brought each student’s six designated guests into the building to watch them walk across the stage in the commons area to receive their diploma. Graduates then proceeded out the front doors of the high school for the last time, greeted by a photographer, “swag bag” and the cheers of friends and family.

The livestream online had technical difficulties and did not include audio, but students seated inside were able to hear from Inle Gonzalez, Adamaryz Lopez Navarrete, Eleanor Ernst, Paige Palzinski and Ella Hagel.

“It feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders,” Gonzalez said after she exited the building. “This is the next step to making my parents proud.”

She said her favorite memory from high school was playing in the band at Hermiston’s state



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Graduates throw their caps after the conclusion of speeches at the Hermiston High School commencement ceremony at the high school on Thursday, June 3, 2021.

football championship game. Now she is headed to Portland State University, where she plans to double major in social work and community development with a minor in Chicano/Latino studies.

Lopez Navarrete said she is planning to major in computer science at University of Oregon.

“I’m excited and ready to take on the world,” she said of graduating.

As Hagel left the building, she said felt accomplished, and happy to have finished a hard

final year of school. She plans to go to University of Oregon, but is not sure of her major yet. She said she will miss the camaraderie with her friends from high school the most.

Cristina Cuevas, who served as the high school counselor to the Class of 2021, said there were 369 students in the class who walked at graduation. A few more still are finishing up, however, with another seven who have since qualified for their diploma or will within days.

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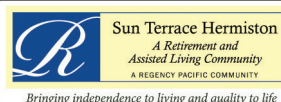
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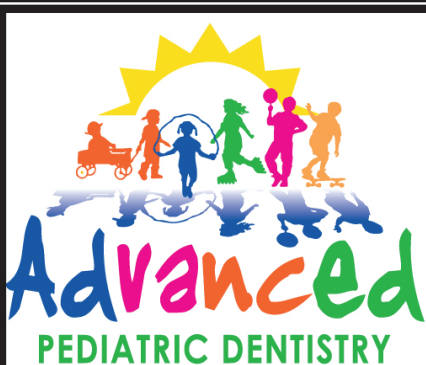
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