



UPDATES

Officials unlikely to reinstate restrictions

By **BRYCE DOLE**
STAFF WRITER

UMATILLA COUNTY — Umatilla County continues to report some of the highest COVID-19 infection rates statewide, but county commissioners say they won't step in to reinstate pandemic restrictions.

"I think if we tried to implement any kind of restrictions, I don't think anybody would follow them," Commissioner John Shafer said Monday, July 26.

With almost 80,000 residents, the county saw 8% of Oregon's total COVID-19 cases over the past two weeks, despite accounting for less than 2% of the state's total population. During that same period, the county reported the second highest positive test rate statewide at 17.6%, as hospitals in Pendleton and Hermiston reported an uptick in patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

Only neighboring Morrow County had a higher rate at 17.9%. Wallowa County had the third highest rate, 14.8%.

The county in the past two weeks has averaged 32 cases per day, a sharp rise from the nearly 10 cases per day the county was reporting earlier this month. It's a total that tops several densely populated counties in Western Oregon and amounts to a case rate nearly seven times higher than Multnomah and Washington counties, according to the state.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said the county is expecting to report an especially high case count July 27. By noon July 26, the county added up more than 80 new COVID-19 cases from the weekend, and Fiumara expected that number to continue to rise.

According to the Oregon Health Authority as of 12:01 a.m. July 26, Umatilla County has the highest

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Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

First grader Sebastian Macias receives some help from teacher Yisel Amaya on Thursday, July 22, 2021, to log onto a laptop during summer school at Sunset Elementary, Hermiston.

Learning is fun Hermiston's summer school a hit



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Nona Buschke raises her hand Thursday, July 22, 2021, in Yisel Amaya's first grade summer school class at Sunset Elementary, Hermiston.

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston School District's wildly successful free summer camp program, running from June 21 to July 31, is reintroducing children to the fun of learning after a year of online and hybrid school.

The program, which is broken up into two sessions and open to all students grades K-12 enrolled in the Hermiston School District, has been a smash hit with both parents and students. Along with free meals and childcare, the program offered a more hands-on and experiential learning focus after a year disrupted by COVID-19.

The classes were centered on matter the students don't normally experience and tried to cover more subjects than the usual slate of academics, such as math and English. Some of their offerings included opportunities to learn about physics by building a rollercoaster or solving a crime scene for a forensic science class.

"So just lots of different activities and learning than the traditional classroom," said Tanya Kennedy, a summer program coordinator and dean of students at Desert View Elementary School.

Student built bridges and catapults for civil engineering and construction, had the chance to try different sports or even take an Ethiopian culture and history class. Some also learned how to code, build solar race cars and learn about history through simulations to give them a hands-on approach to learning.

One such hands-on activity for third grade had students excavate chocolate chips from soft cookies as if they were digging for fossils during their dinosaur-themed week.

On top of this, the district offered sports camps every other week that high school athletes and coaches run while first through third graders got two weeks of free swim lessons. Additionally, each elementary grade went on two field trips

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Cecili Longhorn/Contributed Photo

The Stanfield water tower has stood for more than 100 years, and while the city no longer uses it, it remains a local landmark. The water tower is undergoing the final stages of renovations, including fresh coats of paint.

Stanfield finishing water tower renovations

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
STAFF WRITER

STANFIELD — For a century the Stanfield water tower has stood over the town and provided a recognizable landmark for generations of locals, and now, after three years of work, the 50,000-gallon water tower nearly is complete with renovations.

With painters adding their finishing touches in the next two weeks, Stanfield residents will be able to see the completed tower with up-to-date metalwork, a fresh coat of paint and new lighting, according to Scott Morris, Stanfield's public works director.

Morris said an inspection

a few years ago of the out-of-use water tower had shown deficiencies in the structure, and they faced the choice of either tearing down the tower or fixing it up.

The price to tear it down, however, was the same price to fix it. With this in mind, the city manager put out a survey to gauge public support for the two options, and the consensus was to keep it.

"For a good portion of the people who have been here for a long time, they wanted to see it stay," Morris said.

Like for many in Stanfield, the tower is an important fixture for Morris and an important part of

the town's history.

According to historical city minutes, a special council meeting was held Oct. 2, 1919, to accept bids for the construction of the new city waterworks. Pittsburgh-Des Moines Steel Company won the bid to install the tower for \$9,410 and finished construction in 1920. The whole water system was approved with a 20-year loan of \$30,000 — or about \$470,000 in today's dollar value.

And, with the 150-foot tower visible from Interstate 84, it has been a marker for generations of families coming home.

Morris explained when he was a child and returning from trips to Portland

with his family, they'd see the tower and get excited they were almost home. He said the tower is a logo and a landmark for the town.

When Stanfield residents decided to refurbish the water tower, planners and city officials decided to split the \$180,000 budget into thirds. Construction began in October 2019, with the first year dedicated to fulfilling different Oregon Occupational Safety and Health requirements and fixing structural issues. The second year was focused on metalwork and finishing up the structural repairs, while the third year was focused completely on painting, which was done by

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