

## Umatilla County OKs site to take on homelessness

County, local cities work to establish a regional homeless shelter

By ERICK PETERSON AND  
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The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners on Sept. 8 agreed to allow a warming station and temporary living huts to go on 10 acres the county owns.

The site is at the intersection of Lind and Bessel roads, Hermiston. Umatilla County acquired the land in 1935, and the county Public Works Department has used the site to store aggregate storage, and Granite Construction leases part of the site for equipment, rock and gravel storage.

Commissioner George Murdock said the county has been working with Umatilla, Hermiston, Echo and Stanfield on a site for temporary shelters to help take on homelessness. Commissioner Dan Doran at the meeting said the land is flat and usable and near Highway 395, which makes it good for transportation to towns as far away as Milton-Freewater.

Umatilla County would own the shelter and continue to own the land.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said the project is largely a response to a new law the Oregon Legislature passed in June that mandates cities codify ordinances that would protect people from fines and fees for sleeping on public lands if a local government fails to provide other viable alternatives. Cities have two years to comply with the law.

The local plan at this stage calls for a modular building to act as a warming station that also would provide showers, restrooms and meeting areas. The site would need to connect to infrastructure for water and power, and a pumping truck would provide sewage services.

Funding for the project could come from grants but also local cities.

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# Area veterans enjoy Umatilla fishing event



Randy Hurley, Danny Jacobson, Shaley Larson, Travis Larson, Chris Hurley and Mike Larson were among the participants and volunteers Saturday, Sept. 11, 2021, on the Columbia River near Umatilla for the annual Fish'n the Brave.

## Fish'n the Brave attracts more than a hundred anglers

By ERICK PETERSON  
Editor/Senior Reporter

More than 100 area veterans and fishing guides converged Saturday, Sept. 11, on the Columbia River for the sixth annual Fish'n the Brave.

Tony Fisher of Fishers Catch Outfitters founded the angling event and once again organized Fish'n, with the help of volunteers and sponsoring organizations.

Early in the morning, he was directing volunteers at the start point, the Umatilla Marina & RV

Park, when he spoke of his feelings as they pertain to veterans. Not a veteran himself, Fisher still values veterans. He said his father was a veteran of the Vietnam War.

"I honor him and appreciate him," Fisher said. "This (event) is a simple way for us to give back. A lot of these guys and gals have had some experiences. This gives them a way to get away for the day, go out, have a good day and clear their thoughts."

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## Driver of 2019 fatal hit-and-run remains a mystery

By ERICK PETERSON  
Editor/Senior Reporter

A hit-and-run driver more than two years ago in Hermiston killed Antonia "Toni" Minne Cobarubias. Oregon State Patrol Sgt. Seth Cooney said, to date, authorities have not found the person responsible.

"There have been no further developments," Cooney said. "We have received no information, despite a reward offered by the family."

Cobarubias, 41, was a Hermiston resident, born in Nampa, Idaho. She was pushing a grocery cart on Highway 395, near Sherrell Chevrolet, when she was hit from behind by a red car. The driver did not stop at the scene of the crime.

"That's pretty cold," Cooney said. He added, he does not often see cases like this. For a person to hit a pedestrian and then drive away is not commonplace.

He said he doubts the crime was intentional. When traveling up the hill, the lights of the dealership and other businesses limits visibility at night, he said. It is possible the driver could not see Cobarubias. Another possibility is the driver was impaired, he added. Such impairment would reduce the reaction time of a driver, leading to a potential accident.

Not knowing the condition of the driver, Cooney does not know all of what might have happened.

It seems clear, he said, the driver knew, at some point, he had struck a person. The driver stopped at the nearby Rocket Mart gas station, where he checked his vehicle. If he did not, at the time, see signs he struck a person, he would have seen those signs later, in the light of day.

"There would be something left on that vehicle, considering the damage," he said.

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Fish'n the Brave organizer Tony Fisher, left, instructs a volunteer Saturday, Sept. 11, 2021, at the annual angling event on the Columbia River near Umatilla.

# Eastern Oregon sheriffs won't enforce mask mandate

By ALEX WITTMER  
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LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon sheriff's offices reaffirmed they would not enforce the mask mandates Gov. Kate Brown set in place. As well, a number of sheriffs across Eastern Oregon, including in Baker and Union counties, have addressed the matter in letters to the governor stating they will not be enforcing any mask mandates.

But the governor never asked them to do so.

The enforcement of mask mandates falls under the supervision of the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration, not local law enforcement, according to the governor's office.



Rowan



Matlack

"The mandates don't provide authority to me to do anything," Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said in a previous interview with the East Oregonian.

There is one exception — the sheriffs said they would continue to handle issues of trespassing wherein a patron of a business refuses to wear a mask after being asked to by the business — but that is the ultimate extent to which the law enforcement agencies have said they would intervene.

"Business and property owners have a right to set ground rules for how people behave in their businesses," Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack said. "When a person becomes disruptive because of this issue, in that situation, it's not really a mask mandate. It becomes an issue of trespassing or harassment, and we would get involved in those situations as a matter of law."

The first sheriff to pen a letter opposing the new mask mandate

was Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen, who took office at the beginning of 2021.

"I believe that as Americans, we have a right to choose," Bowen said in a previous interview. "This isn't a law, and it hasn't been voted on by the people."

Bowen's letter urged residents to "stand up" against the rules passed down amid the worst surge of COVID-19 infections in Eastern Oregon and across the state, owing largely to the delta variant and far surpassing previous infection rates, according to Oregon Health Authority data.

### Chorus against masking up grows

Bowen told The Observer on Sept. 1, that when the mask mandate arrived in Union County, he had felt a personal responsibility to respond against it — for himself and for the majority of Union County residents — so he penned the letter addressing the governor and sent it via registered mail to her office.

"We haven't really had a voice in this. It's not really our fight, if you will. And then when it became the homefront of our children, and my own child in school having to wear masks, it put that fight right in my living room," Bowen said. "I wanted to stand up and be a voice and let folks know that I supported the majority of Union County residents — the strong majority of Union County residents — that it should be an individual's choice and we shouldn't be masking our children."

Soon after, nearly a dozen sheriffs across the state — including those in Douglas, Lake, Malheur, Columbia and Tillamook counties — joined in a cacophony of open letters stating their offices would not enforce mask mandates even though no government agency asked them to do so.

"I've not had any contacts with the governor's office asking us to do anything. We've not had any requests or demands," Matlack said.

Matlack emphasized he is asking his officers to mask up and sanitize while at work and properly adhere to guidelines set by the OHA. Across the nation, COVID-19 was the cause of more than half of all officer line-of-duty related deaths in 2020, according to a study by National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

"It's actually a civil issue and we play no role in enforcing civil penalties," Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley said. That's an OHA rule, so OSHA has the ability to enforce the OHA mask rule. It's not our role."

McKinley further said the belief that sheriffs' offices would be responsible for enforcement of mask mandates is a "misnomer."

"What's great about this country is everybody gets a chance to make a choice, so make your choice," he said. "If you're sick, stay home. Don't make others be exposed. If you're sick just stay home until you're better. It's a health issue, treat it as such."