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THE OBSERVER SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896 **Weekend Edition**

SATURDAY-MONDAY • August 22, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Walter McKay of La Grande

Rasmussen investigated for 'moral fitness violation'

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Allegations of sketchy actions has Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen again under the microscope.



Rasmussen

The Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training's Police Policy Committee voted Thursday, Aug. 20, to initiate a professional standards investigation against Rasmussen. The committee's 13 members attending in person and online voted unanimously for the investigation.

Safety Standards and Training received a complaint in May about Rasmussen based on the Oregon Department of Justice investigation, which concluded in June. The Police Policy Committee considered two complaints during the meeting: whether Rasmussen inappropriately managed the sheriff's office reserve deputy fund and the pay he retained for providing law enforcement services for Elgin while working as sheriff and without the authorization of the county board of commissioners.

"I have a particular concern with the investigation," said Mark Rauch, the committee's public member. "There is a basically a finding of at least inappropriate billing if not theft with that amount of money."

The Department of Justice found Rasmussen received more than \$7,000 in pay from the Elgin contract, something he was not eligible for as a salaried county official, but he was beyond the reach of protection due to the statute of limitations.

Committee members Jill Thissell, an Independence Police officer, John Teague, chief of the Keizer Police Department, and Elizabeth Lawrence, sergeant at the Bend Police Department, agreed with Rauch and deemed the matter should go before DPSST as a professional standards case.

While the Police Policy Committee's primary concern was Rasmussen taking contract pay while on the county dime, committee member Chris Davis, assistant deputy chief with the Portland Police

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Staff photo by Ronald Bond

People line up Thursday, Aug. 20, outside the La Grande branch of Old West Federal Credit Union waiting to apply for a \$500 check from the state government for financial assistance. Those who have been severely financially impacted by the COVID-19 related shutdowns were eligible.

Funds come through

Hundreds in La Grande receive financial help

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Old West Federal Credit Union was busy Thursday, Aug. 20, with people lining up to acquire one of the thousands of \$500 checks the state government allocated to give to Oregon residents who have been financially impacted by COVID-19 related shutdowns. State legislators approved the \$35 million plan, and checks began to go out on Wednesday. The money was drawn from federal coronavirus relief funds, according to an Oregon Capital Bureau article, and provides the funding to the first 70,000 approved residents.

Bob Kavanaugh, Old West's business developer and media contact, said there likely were 150-200 people who came through the doors of the La Grande branch Thursday. "One time I looked out and there were 50 (people outside)," he said.

Individuals in La Grande waited in line for more than an hour Thursday to get inside and apply for the much sought after financial aid.

"It's going to help with rent. It's going to help financially.

COVID-19 by the numbers'

Worldwide cases: 22,536,278
Worldwide deaths: 789,197
U.S. cases: 5,551,793
U.S. deaths: 173,490
Total U.S. tests: 74,830,464 (8.86% positive)
Oregon cases: 24,421
Oregon active cases: 19,418
Oregon deaths: 414
Total Oregon tests: 510,056 (4.54% positive)
Union County cases: 407
Union County active cases: 359
Union County deaths: 2

Total Union County tests: 3,177 (11.80% positive)
Wallowa County cases: 21
Wallowa County active cases: 12
Wallowa County deaths: 1
Total Wallowa County tests: 804 (2.49% positive)
**As of 3:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 21. Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Johns Hopkins University, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Military Department.*

Some of us are in back pay on bills," said Courtney E. of La Grande. "And food. We're starving."

The La Grande woman, who said she's a single mom with three kids, has had her hours cut in half during the pandemic. She has received help from Community Connection of North-east Oregon, but still is in a tight place.

"We're just trying to hang on. Nobody is ahead. We're behind," she said. "We're all struggling." Erica G., also of La Grande,

also had her hours at work cut in half.

"All of my hours went down," she said. "You're down ... on everything, trying to survive."

She pointed to rent and utilities as bills the money would help cover. She added, though, that individuals who still are in a bind financially would greatly benefit from another stimulus check from the federal government.

"They need to get that \$1,200

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Photo contributed by Nancy Tarpy
Nancy and Cliff Tarpy moved to La Grande in 2002 to be with family. Nancy recalled surviving Hurricane Camille 51 years ago.

Surviving Hurricane Camille

La Grande woman reflects on harrowing experience

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The sky was falling 51 years ago where Nancy Tarpy hunkered down in Gulfport, Mississippi, and she feared the worst was yet to come.

It was 1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 17, 1969, and Tarpy, then 18, had just rushed to a bowling alley in Gulfport with seven others to escape Hurricane Camille, one of the worst tropical cyclones to ever strike the United States. The bowling center, on a Navy Seabee base, seemed like one of the safest places to shelter for it was made of steel and concrete.

"The bowling alley was also a bomb shelter," Tarpy said. Minutes after Tarpy and her companions arrived, Mother Nature rolled a cruel strike.

The hurricane ripped open a portion of the bowling center's roof, causing its ventilation system and a portion of its ceiling to crash into the interior. Suddenly torrential rain was falling into the building and water began rising up its bowling lanes. Tarpy and her party, who were in the center's snack shop, had nowhere to escape to, since going outside might mean being swept away by wind and floodwater.

"I really thought I might die," said Tarpy, who today lives in La

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Customer compliance an issue in Wallowa County

OSHA receives eight COVID-related complaints against seven Wallowa County businesses

By Bill Bradshaw
EO Media Group

WALLOWA COUNTY — Merchants saddled with coronavirus-related regulations are facing challenges in addition to keeping their businesses afloat as they cope with making sure customers comply with wearing face masks and social distancing.

Aaron Corvin, public information officer with the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration, said Thursday, Aug. 13, that eight complaints

against seven Wallowa County businesses had been filed with his office. All are currently under investigation and no citations have yet been issued or fines levied, he said.

Corvin said statewide there have been 8,300 complaints filed for COVID-19-related issues. For perspective, he said, in a normal, nonpandemic year, his agency receives about 2,000 complaints. OSHA is primarily concerned with worker safety, he said.

"Under our penalty rules, a serious violation that is not willful (i.e., intentional or purposeful disregard for requirements) carries a minimum penalty of \$100 and a maximum of \$12,675," Corvin said.

He said a willful violation

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Photo by Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

Customers at the Enterprise Safeway leave the store Thursday, Aug. 13, still wearing the masks the state requires people to wear in public places. Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration reported receiving eight complaints against seven businesses in Wallowa County for not enforcing the statewide mandate.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Statewide, OSHA has received 8,300 complaints related to COVID-19 issues so far this year. In a normal year, the agency gets about 2,000 complaints.
- In Wallowa County, eight complaints have been filed: four in Enterprise, three in Joseph and one in Wallowa.
- Penalties can range from a minimum of \$100 to a maximum of \$126,749 depending on the severity of the offense.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 50 Low
Clear

Sunday 92/57
Sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



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