

Runaway win

Liberty Bell football team cleans up at Soap Lake

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Your nickel's worth

'Bag it Forward' is back at Hank's Harvest Foods

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Prosecutor: Caseload is now 'manageable'

Bailey cites staff's positive attitude

BY MARCY STAMPER

After two months as Okanogan County's newly appointed prosecutor, Melanie Bailey delivered a preliminary assessment: "Everything is going really well and running smoothly" and the caseload is "manageable."

Bailey was appointed in January as prosecutor by the Okanogan County commissioners after elected prosecutor Arian Noma resigned halfway through his four-year term. Bailey takes the helm after two years of higher-than-usual staff turnover.

The former chief criminal deputy prosecutor, David Stevens — the other contender for the top job — resigned the day after Bailey was selected, according to Okanogan County Risk Manager Tanya Craig.

Bailey promoted former juvenile deputy prosecuting attorney Felecia Chandler to chief criminal deputy, where she'll also continue to handle juvenile cases and some District Court cases, along with administrative tasks and law-enforcement calls, Bailey said. Chandler is one of the longest-tenured employees in the office, having handled felonies, juvenile cases and drug court cases in almost 17 years with the county, Craig said. Bailey is handling the fel-

ony cases formerly assigned to Noma and Stevens.

One of the reasons Noma gave for resigning was insufficient funding to handle what he described as an overwhelming number of cases. Noma said the Prosecutor's Office needed at least seven more attorneys and three more support staff to carry out their duties.

But Bailey called caseloads in the office "high, but manageable." She's still reviewing the case list, a process delayed during her first few weeks on the job because computer access was shut down after the cyber attack on the county.

Since then, whenever she has a chance, Bailey has been going through the list of open cases to verify their status. So far, she's filed paperwork for dispositions on about 170 cases. These are cases that, for example, have been dismissed, resolved by a plea bargain, or switched to warrant status, she said.

Normally, a disposition would be documented right away, but not all information had been updated in the internal tracking system, so cases appeared open even when they were no longer active, she said.

In her application for the job, Bailey listed the county's historic caseloads, as tracked by Washington Courts over the past six years. In 2020, there were fewer cases than in

See PROSECUTOR, A2



File photo by Don Nelson

Sadie Maubet Bjornsen was greeted by enthusiastic young fans when she returned to the Methow Valley in 2018 after competing for the United States in the Winter Olympic Games in South Korea.

Bjornsen retires from pro Nordic skiing career

Two-time Olympian a World Cup star for U.S. Ski Team

BY DON NELSON

After a legendary career as one of America's top Nordic skiers, Methow Valley native

and two-time Olympian Sadie Maubet Bjornsen is retiring from the professional circuit.

Bjornsen, who grew up in Mazama and whose brother Erik also represented the United States in two winter Olympics, announced last week that she was ending her decade-long pro career.

And what a career it's

been. According to an article last week in the Anchorage, Alaska, Daily News, Bjornsen's legacy includes nearly 200 World Cup starts, the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics, competing in seven World Championships, 11 World Cup medals, one World Championship medal and five consecutive seasons as one of

the world's top-16 skiers.

Bjornsen is returning to Anchorage, which has been her home base for many years. She will take advantage of her degree in accounting to launch her next career. Bjornsen holds degrees in accounting and nonprofit

See BJORNSEN, A3

DIRTY WORDS



Photo by Don Nelson

Boy, is it ever. As daytime temperatures venture into the 50s, snow melt is creating gritty driving conditions around the valley, especially in areas such as the Rendezvous.

Okanogan County now offers centralized vaccination registry

Local pharmacies also provide shots

BY ANN MCCREARY

All residents of Okanogan County can now register for a COVID-19 vaccination, even if they are not yet eligible to get vaccinated under state guidelines.

Okanogan County Public Health has launched a new centralized vaccination registration system to streamline the process of signing up for a vaccine and to reduce confusion among the public. The new registration system replaces individual registrations at each hospital or clinic in the county, a process used since vaccinations began

about three months ago.

The registration system went into effect Monday (March 15). Residents can sign up for a vaccination on the county's Public Health COVID-19 webpage, and hospital and clinic websites now direct people to the new centralized registration site. The site instructs people to create an account, and the process is available in multiple languages through a translation function.

Anyone interested in getting vaccinated should register, whether or not they are currently eligible to receive the vaccine, according to information from Okanogan Public Health. People who are registered will be notified when they become eligible and there are vaccine doses available.

People who are already on a vaccine waitlist at a hospital or clinic will be transferred to the centralized system without losing their place in line. They will be sent a link to access the system and review their information, according to Public Health.

"This centralized system will enhance the efficiency of our vaccine distribution process in Okanogan County," said John McReynolds, CEO of North Valley Hospital in Tonasket. "Because all vaccinating clinics and hospitals will now be scheduling from one master list, we can quickly match eligible people to available vaccine doses throughout the county."

"This will absolutely provide

See VACCINE, A2

State moves to Phase 3 in COVID recovery plan

Some restrictions loosened, counties will be evaluated separately

BY MARCY STAMPER

Restaurants, movie theaters and spectator sports can reopen — at 50% capacity — starting this week, after Gov. Jay Inslee announced that all Washington counties will move to COVID recovery Phase

3 starting Monday (March 22).

The plan catapults all counties across the state to the next phase for at least three weeks, unless a serious COVID outbreak prompts the Washington Department of Health (DOH) to move a county back to a more restrictive phase.

Under the latest update to Healthy Washington: Roadmap to Recovery, each county will be evaluated on its own, rather than being grouped with others in its region. That means that Okanogan County, which has had lower infection and hospitaliza-

tion rates than other counties in the north-central region, won't be affected by COVID rates in Chelan, Douglas or Grant counties.

DOH is also using different criteria for small and large counties because a small number of cases in a low-population county could result in disproportionately high rates, making it difficult for them to ease restrictions.

To stay in Phase 3, counties with a population below 50,000 (including Okanogan) must have fewer than 100 COVID cases

over 14 days, and a new seven-day hospitalization average of three or below.

Large counties will be evaluated on rates of infection and hospitalization per 100,000 population. They can remain in Phase 3 as long as the 14-day average of new COVID cases is below 200 per 100,000 residents, and hospitalizations five or below.

Counties will be evaluated every three weeks, on Mondays, with possible changes tak-

See COVID, A3



Photo by Marcy Stamper

Facilities such as Winthrop Physical Therapy & Fitness will be able to allow more people to work out under Phase 3.

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.
March 18
55°
32°
Cloudy & Showers

FRI.
March 19
52°
31°
Ditto

SAT.
March 20
51°
30°
Clouds & Sun

SUN.
March 21
50°
36°
Cloudy

MON.
March 22
57°
33°
Showers Possible

TUES.
March 23
56°
30°
Sunshine

INSIDE ...

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HARTS PASS	A4
SPORTS	B1
CLASSIFIEDS	B2
COMMUNITY	B5
VALLEY LIFE	B6

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP