

Tracking COVID
County Public Health offers
more free testing
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New ice age
Winthrop Rink opens
under coronavirus rules
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Photo by Marcy Stamper

Naturopathic physician Sierra Breitbeil recently drew a blood sample from a patient at her Winthrop office.

Okanogan County residents have more health insurance options in 2021

State exchange offers 31 plans through three companies

BY MARCY STAMPER

There's good news this year for Okanogan County residents who buy their own health insurance through the state exchange, the only place where people can get subsidies to reduce the cost of coverage. There are many more options — 31 plans from three companies, compared to five plans from just one company last year, with minimal premium increases.

Unfortunately, all those options can be confusing, making it hard to find the coverage that best suits your needs.

Plans are still classified by three metal colors — bronze, silver and gold — with bronze plans having the lowest monthly premiums but also the highest deductibles and out-of-pocket costs; and gold having higher premiums but lower deductibles and lower out-of-pocket maximums.

This year, there are three types of plans — regular qualified health plans, plus two new types called Cascade and Cascade Select, which must provide identical benefits to help consumers compare. Any insurer that wants to sell insurance through the Washington Health Benefit Exchange must also sell a Cascade plan, said Jeff Lindstrom, a health insurance broker with One Digital Health & Benefits.

See **HEALTH, A3**

MV schools continue COVID protocols but remain wary of outbreak potential

Holiday season poses possible risks

BY MARCY STAMPER

Methow Valley schools were the first in the county — and among the first in the state — to bring students into the classroom after months of shutdown

during the COVID pandemic.

The school year started in such unfamiliar territory that people were understandably nervous about COVID, but rigorous precautions and small class sizes helped everyone feel comfortable, Methow Valley School District Nurse Adriana Vanbianchi said. "The happiness and joy — to be back together — felt palpable among teach-

ers and students," she said.

But Vanbianchi is concerned that in-person learning could be jeopardized if people let down their guard as we go into colder weather and the holiday season — and as cases break daily records across the country. COVID infections are rising across the state

See **COVID, A3**

Give Methow's fundraising tops \$500,000

Crowdfunding campaign helps 36 organizations

The Community Foundation of NCW's Give Methow campaign has raised \$522,204 for 36 Methow Valley nonprofits, topping last year's contributions by more than \$200,000.

Give Methow is an annual crowdfunding campaign hosted by the Community Foundation during the month of October to build awareness of nonprofit work that benefits the Methow Valley and provides an easy way for anyone to support their work.

"We are blown away by the incredible support of Give Methow this year" said Beth Stipe, the foundation's executive director, in a press release.

"It's been a challenging year for our region's nonprofits, and the people who love the Methow Valley have stepped up to give these organizations some sustainability and hope."

Any 501(c)(3) public charity in the Methow Valley is eligible to participate in Give Methow to raise funds for a specific program or general

See **FUNDRAISING, A2**

FIRST LIGHT



Photo by Ashley Lodato

The rising sun backlit frosted foliage on a recent morning near Patterson Lake.



Photo by Ashley Lodato

Mara Zepeda, left, helped her nieces Maeve Belsby and Ayla Belsby set up Mind Buffet on Riverside Avenue in Winthrop.

Satisfy your shopping appetite at the Mind Buffet

Local kids create tasty retail experience

BY ASHLEY LODATO

It had been a long spring of social distancing and 14-year-old Ayla Belsby and her 11-year-old sister, Maeve, were trying to figure out what to do with their summer, since many of their usual activities and outlets were unavailable during the pandemic.

"We were just at home or at the lake all the time," Ayla said. "We had all this time and freedom to mess around and experiment. It seemed like we should do something with it."

One hot day the girls were floating on Pearygin Lake with their aunt, Mara Zepeda, and the creative wheels began spinning. "Mara kept throwing ideas at us," Maeve said. "She asked us, 'What if we had a business?' So then we just had to figure out what to do."

Ayla continued: "Mara said, 'What if we had a maker space where people

could create things and we could teach people things that they want to know how to do?'"

This idea sat well with Ayla, who had begun selling her homemade lip glosses on Etsy earlier in the year, and Maeve, who had discovered a simple way to create homemade stickers. Not long after, Winthrop's Riverside Avenue welcomed The Mind Buffet: a new retail shop and maker space on Riverside Avenue in Winthrop showcasing the artistic creativity of Methow Valley youth.

Riverside Avenue real estate isn't easy to come by, but serendipitously, the French Quail boutique had recently remodeled, separating a section of the store into an additional retail space with a workshop area. "It was a great space for us," Maeve said, "but it was really hard to understand the lease. It was long. Just too many words on too many pieces of paper."

Zepeda signed the lease for her nieces, helped them open a bank account across the street at Farmers State Bank, and guided them through

the process of completing the seemingly endless paperwork involved in starting a business. Said Ayla, "We had to get a business license and insurance. We had to create a website and email accounts. We had to find a Square cash register and search for an iPad that would work with it."

Brainstorming a name

The Mind Buffet got its name on a drive over the Loup. "We were just brainstorming business names in the car," Ayla said. "We had ideas like 'The Golden Door.'" Maeve said, "I was hungry. And I was thinking about those all-you-can-eat buffets, like in Las Vegas. And then my brain wandered to learning, and using your brain to learn things."

Maeve quickly rejected her first thought: The Brain Buffet. "Gross," she said. "But then I thought, 'Well, your brain is kind of like your mind, and I thought of 'The Mind Buffet. It's like all-you-can-eat, but instead it's all-you-can-learn.'"

See **MIND BUFFET, A2**

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
Nov 12	Nov 13	Nov 14	Nov 15	Nov 16	Nov 17
33°	38°	43°	36°	40°	40°
27°	31°	18°	29°	32°	26°
Afternoon Snow	Heavy rain and snow	Rain and snow	Possible snow	Cloudy	Ditto

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

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