

**Wolverines in the 'Great Outdoors'**

**U-12 tourney at rink**

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**Longtime employee takes over**

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# Methow Valley News

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\$1

## County appoints acting prosecutor in special procedure

BY MARCY STAMPER

Okanogan County has a new acting prosecuting attorney, after a complex series of appointments, resignations and hirings at a special meeting on Friday (Feb. 4).

Sue Baur, who retired in November as deputy prosecuting attorney for Wahkiakum County, stepped into the acting role on Monday (Feb. 7) to fill the spot left by the resignation of Okanogan County's elected prosecutor Melanie Bailey. Bailey's last day was Jan. 27.



Sue Baur

As acting prosecutor, Baur will oversee the office until the county commissioners appoint an interim prosecutor. In accordance with the state constitution, since Bailey was a Republican, the Okanogan County Republican Party will submit up to three nominees to the county commissioners to fill out her term.

Since the party hadn't yet provided any names to the commissioners, the county had to come up with a solution to keep the office functioning.

It was a fairly unprecedented situation. Okanogan County Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney David Gecas researched state laws and consulted with other attorneys, Okanogan County Superior Court Judge Chris Culp, and the state Attorney General's office to determine how to handle the vacancy, which necessitated multiple steps under different sections of state law.

On Monday Jan. 31, Culp appointed Gecas and the county's other four deputy prosecuting attorneys as deputy prosecutors, giving them the authority to serve during the hiatus.

Although the appointment of Gecas and the other four deputies lasted just five days, it was necessary to ensure the functioning of the office. There were many cases scheduled in District Court last week, Gecas said.

When there's a vacancy in a partisan elected office, state law allows the county legislative authority to appoint a deputy or assistant employee as an acting official to perform all necessary duties to continue normal office operations. But that individual does have to be a county employee. That meant Baur couldn't be appointed directly.

So, on Friday (Feb. 4), Culp administered the oath of office to Loreva Preuss, one of the

See ACTING, A2

## Cannabis grower sues county over requirements

**Argues violation of 5th Amendment**

BY MARCY STAMPER

An Omak cannabis grower has sued Okanogan County over the county's new requirement that growers meet with planning

staff to show their license and a detailed site plan. The grower argues that the county already has that information and that being asked to furnish it violates their Constitutional rights.

Ladyhelm Farm sued the county, the three county commissioners, and the planning director over a moratorium

on new or expanded cannabis grows that includes the meeting requirement. The suit was filed in Okanogan County Superior Court on Jan. 21.

Ordering the growers to provide this information violates their Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination, the suit alleges. "The County

has taken cannabis producer permits and approvals hostage for the ransom of self-incriminating information in violation of the 5th Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I, §9 of the Washington State Constitution," it says.

The suit also argues that the requirement also violates

the equal-protection clause in the 14th Amendment by singling out cannabis producers, whereas other businesses haven't been asked to provide proof that they're in compliance with regulations for things like zoning and shorelines. Even cannabis

See CANNABIS, A2

## Students learn the art of ski fabrication at LBHS design class

BY MARCY STAMPER

Imagine carving graceful turns in deep powder as you glide down the slopes – on skis you designed and made yourself.

For four Liberty Bell High School Design and Construction II students, that vision will become a reality when they finish fabricating custom skis – complete with an original logo design – later this year.

The project had its roots in class last year, when the students entertained a dream of creating their own skis. Construction/Design and Outdoor Recreation teacher Wyatt Southworth, who, despite being a skier, has never made skis before, was enthused about the opportunity for them all to learn together. "It's a deep dive into the manufacturing and design process," he said.

After some initial research, the class took a field trip in October to Lithic Skis in Peshastin, which designs and creates custom, handcrafted skis. The owners were generous in sharing their time and expertise with the students, Southworth said.

The folks at Lithic taught them about the various stages of the design/build process – not only for the skis, but also for the tools to make them. "We saw



Photo by Marcy Stamper

Liberty Bell High School senior Kieren Quigley, center, positions a ski core in the template the class built.

cool tools that they'd designed themselves," senior Eli Neitlich said.

At Lithic, they walked through the process of building skis from start to finish, and

picked up tips and insights to inform their own building process. Back in class, the students

designed their own ski press and profile sled. They've also built a

See DESIGN, A2

## Kiwanis ready to awaken 'Family Activity Park' dream

**Plans to launch first phase this spring**

BY DON NELSON

The Winthrop Kiwanis Club's ambitious "Fund a Dream" project for improvements to the town's pump track and ball field has been in hibernation for the past couple of years, thanks to COVID.

But with the help of seed money from the town, Kiwanis is reviving plans that include estimated expenditures of more than \$200,000 for various projects over a four-year period, intended to increase recreation opportunities for all ages at what the club is calling a "Family Activity Park."

The Winthrop Town Council recently agreed to include \$10,000 funds in the town's 2022 budget to help advance the Kiwanis project to improve the town-owned pump track and adjacent ball field on Highway 20. The funds are earmarked for the town's participation in providing water and power to the site this year, the Kiwanis Club's first priority.

The project was first detailed in 2020 as a Kiwanis



Graphic courtesy of Winthrop Kiwanis

Winthrop Kiwanis envisions a multi-purpose complex with outdoor activities for all ages and a wide variety of interests.

"Fund A Dream" effort, which is largely supported by the organization's annual Bite of the Methow event. But COVID has prevented the Bite from being staged for the past couple of years.

Kiwanis President Rick Jones said the project is being

developed in partnership with other local organizations. He said Kiwanis will also be asking for funds through the town's Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC), which determines how locally collected hotel and motel taxes will be used to support and

promote tourism-based activities.

Kiwanis will also be seeking grants from the state Recreation and Conservation Office, which has helped fund many local projects including the Winthrop Rink and the Susie

See KIWANIS, A3

## Reactions to coach's suspension include campus protest

**Coach's wife asked to leave game**

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

In the weeks since the Methow Valley School District suspended the varsity boys' basketball coach, community reaction has included incidents that district staff say are a distraction from education and from the success of student athletes.

The incidents included a protest on the district campus by as many as 25 people during school hours, and a parent — the wife of the suspended coach — being removed by an Okanogan County Sheriff's Deputy from a basketball game at the Liberty Bell High School gym on Feb. 1.

"I won't comment on a particular individual situation or

See PROTEST, A3

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
Feb. 10	Feb. 11	Feb. 12	Feb. 13	Feb. 14	Feb. 15
45°	42°	43°	38°	42°	41°
30°	27°	27°	29°	23°	21°
Partly cloudy	Some clouds	Mostly sunny	Partly sunny	Rain or snow	Mostly sunny

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

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# PROTEST

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continue to allow focus to be on the wrong part of the basketball game," wrote Methow Valley Supt. Tom Venable, in response to questions from the Methow Valley News. "The attention should be on our student-athletes — particularly our seniors."

Nate Chrastina, in his first year as Liberty Bell's head boys' basketball coach, was placed on paid leave in mid-January after the district reportedly received an anonymous complaint that he allegedly violated the school's COVID-19 mask policy.

Chrastina earlier told the Methow Valley News that a person reported that he and some boys on the team were not wearing masks properly in the school's weight room on Jan. 15. According to the school district, the suspension with pay started on Jan. 16 and is effective through the end of the basketball season. District staff are investigating the report. The district is not commenting on the ongoing investigation or giving a timeline for its completion.

Assistant coach Ryan Surface has since assumed head coaching responsibilities. Some Liberty Bell basketball players who are still on the team, and some who are not, have been wearing black T-shirts with the inscription "Free coach," referring to Chrastina's suspension.

On Jan. 27, Nate Chrastina reportedly addressed the Methow Valley School District Board of Directors about the suspension. The board's meetings are not recorded and minutes of the Jan. 27 meeting will not be available until after the board's Feb. 17 meeting, according to the district. It is not known how complete the minutes will be.

Chrastina did not respond to a request for information and comments on his remarks to the board, or to other issues related to this article.

## Protest on campus

Rumors have circulated in the community reflecting frustration over the suspension, particularly the details leading up to the district's action related to the coach and its subsequent silence on the investigation process. Some of that frustration apparently came to a head at about 11 a.m. Wednesday (Feb. 2) when a group of protesters gathered at the school district's buildings.

Venable sent an email to parents soon after the protest, saying that staff became aware of the situation and met the protesters outside the school.

Venable told the Methow Valley News that Liberty Bell High School staff directed the group to an area in the "northwestern corner" of the parking lot and asked them to stay in that location. Liberty Bell Principal Crosby Carpenter told the group that they were not to come into the buildings, or the school would "call the authorities," Venable said.

In videos posted to social media, the group of adults and children can be seen gathering in one of the district's parking lots chanting "We support the Chrastinas," and carrying a variety of signs, some critical of mask mandates.

At about 11:45 a.m., the group reportedly left the designated area and walked from the high school to the elementary school and toward the district office, eventually returning to the high school parking lot. They never entered a building, Venable said.

The district operates on an early release schedule on Wednesdays, and protesters were still on campus when students were released.

"The protesters were reported to be waving the American flag, holding up signs and chanting while students were released," Venable wrote to the Methow Valley News. "Given the presence of the protesters, many students and parents expressed confusion and frustration by their presence in front of the school. ... One student reported a young man holding a sign, 'hurling obscenities at a student.'"

Some students requested escorts to their vehicles, and other students were escorted by staff to their buses.

"As a public school that, like its community, reflects a wide and diverse range of beliefs and honors action-oriented citizenship, we also take the responsibility of ensuring the safety and welfare of our students, as well as the academic integrity of the instructional day seriously," Venable wrote to parents. "We ask that others, parents, community members, and action-oriented groups alike, assist us in doing the same. As such, we strongly encourage individuals and groups seeking changes to the current mandates required of public schools to direct your comments and feedback to your state leaders and legislative representatives."

## 911 call

On Jan. 18, two days after Nate Chrastina was suspended, his wife, Sarah Chrastina, called the county's 911 line to complain of her husband's suspension for alleged mask violations and asked about "constitutional issues."

The 911 line is intended to be used only for emergency reports about medical problems or the need for a quick law enforcement response.

"She said her husband was 'protesting' his suspension by not honoring or accepting pay with suspension," according to the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office report. "She wanted to know what the sheriff's stand was on 4th Amendment rights."

Chrastina was directed to Okanogan County Sheriff Tony Hawley on questions about Sheriff's Office policy.

The 4th Amendment prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures.

The next in the series of incidents occurred at a home basketball game on Tuesday (Feb. 1).

According to 911 logs, at about 7 p.m. that evening the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office responded to the Liberty Bell High School gym after receiving a report of a woman "with a history of intimidation and bullying and harassment" being "verbally combative" and refusing to leave after she was asked.

The woman involved was identified as Sarah Chrastina in the Sheriff's Office's report on the incident, obtained by the Methow Valley News through a public records request.

The report gives an account of the incident from the responding deputy's point of view.

Deputy Ted Shook wrote that he arrived about 10 minutes after the initial 911 call and met the caller — Liberty Bell High School Principal Crosby Carpenter — who asked that Chrastina be removed from the building.

Shook's report also notes that Sheriff's Office files included a note from Chief Criminal Deputy Laura Wright that Sarah Chrastina had been "suspended" by the district from attending home athletic competitions for "not following rules."

A few minutes later, Shook approached Chrastina and asked her to come down from the stands and talk with him. He wrote in his report that he recorded his involvement on his body-worn camera, which he turned on after Chras-

tina began recording the incident on her phone.

"I then informed her she was being asked to leave and if she refused she could be charged with trespassing," Shook wrote. He added that she began arguing with him about whether or not she could be charged.

That particular exchange, lasting about 30 seconds, was posted in a video to Facebook later in the week. In that video, in which the camera is facing Shook, the deputy can be seen asking Chrastina to walk out of the gym with him.

At one point, she can be heard saying, "You're harassing me right now and violating my rights by telling me I need to leave a public place without any proof."

Shook offered to call Wright, the chief deputy, and have her talk with Chrastina, and Chrastina agreed to exit the building to talk with Wright. Wright confirmed the district had barred Sarah Chrastina from the gym and that she needed to leave.

Venable said he couldn't comment on the specific incident, but said the district follows a process for responding to noncompliance with COVID-guidelines applying to everyone.

"Generally speaking, in the unfortunate event that an individual acts egregiously or repeatedly fails to comply with the district's policies and COVID guidelines, placing the health and wellness of others in attendance at risk, the district responds to such incidents using a progression of action, much in the way we do with students," Venable wrote to the Methow Valley News. "This may include law enforcement."

Eventually Chrastina agreed to leave after Shook provided her with copies of the state laws in question, the deputy reported. The next morning, Sarah Chrastina called 911 to report that Carpenter had "harassed" her by asking her to leave the gym, and she accused the district of "false reporting."

## DISTRICT GUIDELINES

The Methow Valley School District follows guidelines from the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association and the state Department of Health, which is required for all public school districts in the state. For more information on these requirements, go to <https://waa.com> or <https://tinyurl.com/5n97rxmv>.

# COVID cases reach new high in county

BY MARCY STAMPER

Recent COVID case counts in Okanogan County are stark proof that the Omicron variant is significantly more contagious than earlier strains — in the 14 days most recently reported, the number of new cases accounted for almost 17% of all cases in the county in the entire two years of the virus.

There were 1,248 cases recorded by Okanogan County Public Health from Jan. 19 to Feb. 1, out of a cumulative total of 7,498.

Still, there's some indication that the surge may be leveling off, since during the second week of that period, Public Health reported 590 cases, 68 fewer than the week before. Because Public Health is reporting new cases every Wednesday, more recent numbers weren't available by press time.

New cases, while still at their highest numbers ever, have started to drop in Washington overall, but most counties in eastern Washington — including Okanogan — probably won't see a significant decrease in new infections for another week or two, according to numbers from the state Department of Health. Neighboring Douglas County had the third-highest rate per 100,000 population over the most recent seven days reported by the

state. Omicron cases tend to be milder than other strains, according to health officials. The number of patients hospitalized for COVID at Central Washington Hospital has dropped almost by half in the past week, from 32 to 18.

## FREE TESTS AND VACCINES

- Order at-home tests at [www.sayyescovidhometest.org](http://www.sayyescovidhometest.org) or [COVIDtests.gov](http://COVIDtests.gov).
- Okanogan County Public Health has changed the location of its Friday vaccine clinics from the Agriplex to Legion Park in Okanogan. First, second and booster doses of Pfizer (adult and pediatric), Moderna, and J&J. Feb. 11 and 25, March 11 and 25, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Register: <https://okanogan-countycovid19.org/covid-19-vaccine>.
- Ulrich's Valley Pharmacy. Moderna vaccine and booster. Register: [healthmartcovidvaccine.com](http://healthmartcovidvaccine.com)
- Confluence Health. Pfizer vaccine and booster. Call for appointment: (509) 826-1800
- Family Health Centers. Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J. Call for appointment: 1-800-660-2129

# 911 blotter

## Okanogan County Sheriff's Office

- At 1:45 p.m. on Feb. 1, a domestic dispute was reported on Highway 153 in Carlton.
- At 5:19 p.m. on Feb. 2, a vehicle rollover was reported on Twisp River Road.
- At 8:40 a.m. on Feb. 3, trespassing was reported on Vinton Road in Carlton.
- At 9:08 a.m. on Feb. 4, a violation of a court order was reported on Highway 153 in Carlton.

## Twisp Police Department

- At 1:16 p.m. on Feb. 2, a hit-and-run collision was reported in

- Twisp.
- At 2:48 p.m. on Feb. 4, a theft was reported on East Methow Valley Highway in Twisp.
- At 3:06 p.m. on Feb. 4, malicious mischief was reported on East Methow Valley Highway in Twisp.

## Winthrop Marshal's Office

- At 2:12 p.m. on Jan. 31, a hit-and-run was reported on Riverside Avenue in Winthrop.
- At 3:15 p.m. on Jan. 31, fraud was reported on Castle Avenue in Winthrop.
- At 7:12 p.m. on Feb. 1, a burglary was reported to a storage unit on Highway 20 in Winthrop.

# KIWANIS

From Page A1

Stephens Trail. Those grants typically require a local match

of money or in-kind contributions such as labor and materials. To that end, Jones said the organization will also be seeking help from various nonprofit foundations. Winthrop Kiwanis is

also now part of the annual Give Methow campaign, which Jones said is a promising source for funding the club's local projects.

And, Kiwanis International also provides support for worthy local projects, Jones said, so the Winthrop club will be seeking funding through that source as well.

In a letter to the Town Council, Jones said Kiwanis hopes to begin its work this spring and continue through the fall. He outlined four phases for the project:

- Phase 1, estimated costs of \$26,000, to include water and power service, painting the ball field's outfield fence and a water fountain at the ball field.
- Phase 2, estimated costs of \$58,000, to include dugouts, a fence around the grandstand, landscaping, foul ball fencing
- Phase 3, estimated costs of \$42,500, to include a center field gate to new batting cages, basketball court improvements, a water fountain for the activity park, more pump track improvements such as a bike rack, fitness stations, additional landscaping, a kids' play area with climbing

to prevent balls from flying onto Highway 20, a walking path, pump track upgrades, a dog waste station and a music station. (The Wikipedia definition of a pump track is "a circuit of rollers, banked turns and features designed to be ridden completely by riders 'pumping' — generating momentum by up and down body movements, instead of pedaling or pushing. It was originally designed for the mountain bike and BMX scene.")

features, and extension of a trail to West Chewuch road.

• Phase 4, estimated costs of \$90,000, to include a pavilion, picnic area, parking lot improvements, lighting for the ball field and the activity park, and additional signage.

All told, the cost estimates — which likely will change over time — come to about \$216,500. Jones described the Kiwanis dream as "a plan, a vision ... it is all contingent on finances."

Jones said Kiwanis will seek input from local students, residents and organizations about their priorities and additional ideas for the activity park. "It could be modified as we go along," he said.

The park's improvements are aimed not just at expand-

ing opportunities for residents, but also at attracting more visitors, Jones said. The ball field already hosts softball tournaments (summer and winter), and the pump track complex is adjacent to Highway 20 at the western entrance to town, a highly visible site. LTAC fund grants are dependent on making the case that the expenditures will enhance tourism.

Jones noted that the town, which owns the ball field and pump track properties, doesn't have the resources to take on all the improvements Kiwanis envisions.

"We're going to need the community's support," Jones said. "We'll be providing spaces for families and tourists. We can make it happen."

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