



Teams fare well at state hoop tournament

B1 | A8

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THE OKANOGAN COUNTY CHRONICLE

March 9, 2022

Essential Reading for Okanogan and Ferry counties • Year 112 No. 72

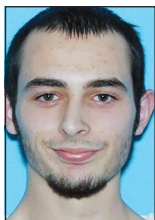
\$1.25

Man charged with murder in couple's deaths

By DEE CAMP
The Chronicle

OKANOGAN — A Chesaw man was charged Feb. 25 in Okanogan County Superior Court with killing an Omak couple who had gone to check on property they owned south of Chesaw.

David O. Covey Sr., 80, and his wife, GERALYN, 66, were the subjects of an extensive search



Harrington

Feb. 15-16 after they did not return from a Feb. 13 trip to their property on Nealey Road. Their bodies were found on Feb. 16.

Dylan Jay Harrington, 25, is charged with two counts of first-degree murder with a firearm enhancement, two counts of unauthorized removal or concealment of body and two counts of theft of a motor vehicle. The murder charges are considered "most serious offenses" under the state's three strikes law.

Harrington remains at large. An arrest warrant, with nationwide extradition, has been issued.

According to a report by Okanogan County Sheriff's Office Det. Kreg Sloan, the sheriff's office received a report Feb. 13 that a woman found a locked truck parked at Nealey Road and Mountain View Drive with a dog under the vehicle. The woman reported seeing tracks going up the hill; she took the dog for safekeeping and left a note for the owners.

Attempts to contact the truck's owner were unsuccessful, said the report, which was filed with the charging document as an affidavit of probable cause.

Two days later, Deborah Springer,

Omak, reported her father and stepmother, the Coveys, missing since Feb. 13.

A search of the area and the Coveys' home on Miller Road ensued. Three or four feet of snow were on the ground at the Chesaw property; the Coveys' fifth-wheel trailer was parked on the property, but no one was inside, the report said.

Footprints led to a nearby property with a broken-down cabin/house. While sheriff's searchers, Springer and her husband were there, her husband reported seeing a man in a camouflage jacket and dark pants at the back

of the cabin, according to the report. The man ran from the area and could not be located.

David Covey's phone was later located at his Omak home, and nothing appeared to be out of place, the report said.

On Feb. 16, the couple's other two dogs were found at the broken-down house. A motorcycle registered to the Coveys was found at the house; family members indicated it should not have been there, the report said.

Permission was obtained to search

See **CHARGED**, page A5

Taking flight



BROCK HIREN | Special to The Chronicle

Balloons fly high above the Methow Valley on March 4 during the Winthrop Balloon Roundup. The three-day event ran through Sunday.

Governors update mask mandates

Most indoor masking rules go off March 11 in Washington, Oregon and California

OLYMPIA — Indoor COVID-19 mask mandates implemented almost two years ago will be lifted for the most part late March 11.

"With declining case rates and hospitalizations across the west, California, Oregon and Washington are moving together to update their masking guidance," said a joint statement from the three states' governors. "After 11:59 p.m. on March 11, California, Oregon and Washington will be adopting new indoor mask policies and move from mask requirements to mask recommendations in schools."

State policies do not change federal requirements, which still include masks on public transit.

"We've continued to monitor data from our state Department of Health, and have determined we are able to adjust the timing of our statewide mask requirement," said Gov. Jay Inslee. "While this represents another step forward for Washingtonians, we must still be mindful that many within our communities remain vulnerable."

"Many businesses and families will continue choosing to wear masks, because we've learned how effective they are at keeping one another safe. As we transition to this next phase, we will continue to move forward together carefully and cautiously."

The new date does not change any other aspect of the updated mask requirements Inslee announced in late February, he said.

Masks will still be required in certain settings including health care, corrections facilities and long-term care facilities. The state State Department of Health will issue new guidance for kindergarten through 12th grade schools this week, said Inslee.

As of March 2, with data current through March 1, Okanogan County had 110 new cases of COVID-19 reported from Feb. 23 to March 1 and 91 cases the previous week. The incidence rate — number of cases per 100,000 population per rolling 14-day period — was 466.

There have been 80 COVID deaths attributed to Okanogan County since the pandemic began two years ago,

See **MASKS**, page A5

Update: Weed in Okanogan County

County commissioners extend moratorium on weed farms

By JOSEPH CLAYPOOLE
The Chronicle

OKANOGAN — High growth for cannabis in Okanogan and other counties may soon be undermined by anticipated lows from shipping, manufacturing and licensing issues.

Cannabis sales in Okanogan, and across the state, reached new highs this past year alongside alcohol consumption, according to data from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board.

Data for Okanogan County show \$161,865 in excise tax revenue for November 2019, just a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world. By April 2021, revenue had more than doubled for Okanogan County and has since settled into



the high \$200,000 range, all spurred by an increase in retail sales during the pandemic.

"We saw a definite increase in foot traffic," said Haila Hubbard, store manager for Fire Cannabis Co., Omak.

"We started to offer curbside service as well to help with demand."

Fire Cannabis Co. is the leading retailer for cannabis in Okanogan County, according to retail sales data from 502data, an online data portal for statewide and county cannabis sales.

The name for 502data hails from Initiative 502, passed in 2012, which defined and legalized small amounts of marijuana products for adults 21 and over, taxes for those products and where revenue from the taxes should go.

For the most recent fiscal year on record — July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021 — total income from cannabis taxes and license fees across Washington totaled \$559.5 million, a 41.4 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. Okanogan County has seen an increase of 64 percent in retail sales alone.

Northeast Tri-County Health District

See **WEED**, page A7

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WEED

from page A1

provided an update on marijuana sales for Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille counties, showing an estimated combined average increase of 54 percent from 2019, based on figures from 502data.

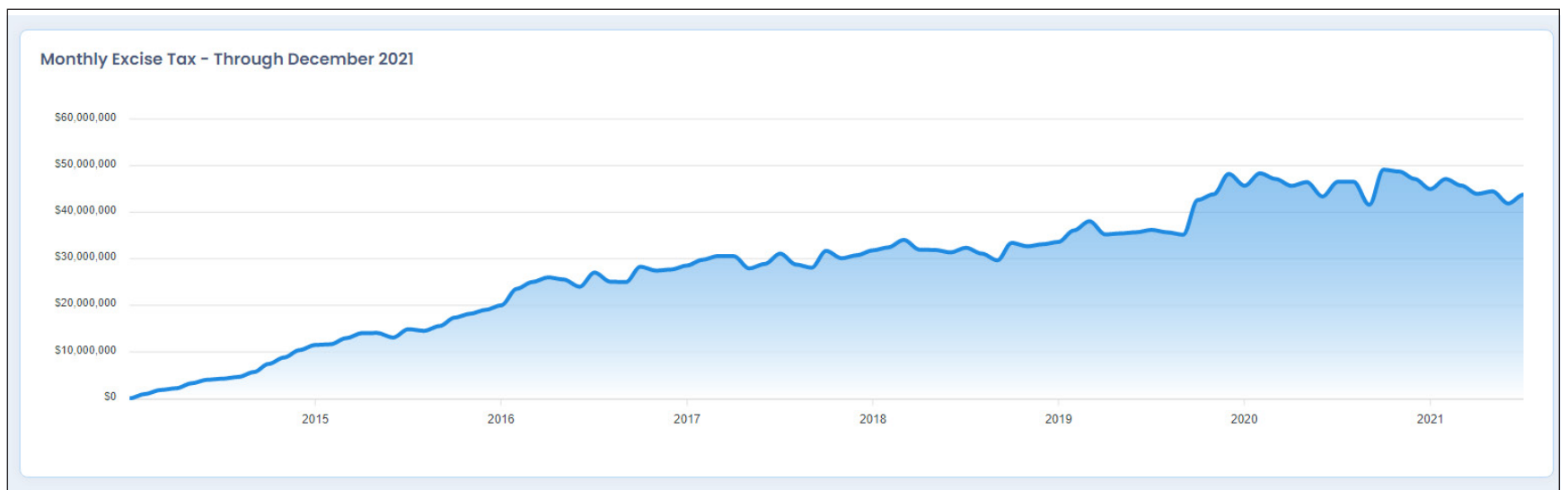
Ferry County had an increase of 46 percent in 2020-21 from 2019, while Pend Oreille and Stevens saw a 58 percent increase.

Hubbard said the increases in sales were most likely due to stimulus checks allowing individuals to splurge, along with a fear of store shutdowns prompting people to stock up on product. That pattern was reported in multiple other counties by a February Seattle Times story.

Since then, whether it's because of the slowdown that commonly occurs in winter or that things are moving back toward normal, sales have slowed.

Highs and lows

Okanogan County's excise tax revenue was on a steady decline from September 2021 through the new year, mirroring statewide trends. Data specific to Okanogan County isn't yet available, but the statewide data



Excise tax revenue for Washington State cannabis sales, from June 2014 to Dec. 2021. Excise tax amounts nearly reached \$44 million this past December.

shows a small pickup into February before dropping, for the first time since at least the 2019 fiscal year, below \$40 million.

Kevin Heidrich, owner and founder of the House of Cannabis stores in Twisp, Tonasket and Tacoma, said some of that revenue slowdown is attributable to the end of the pandemic, a sentiment shared by Hubbard.

"We had a really nice sugar high during the pandemic," Heidrich said. "With everyone working from home, cannabis sales started to really increase.

As we started to return to the workplace, we watched sales drop a little."

Another issue with sales dropping may stem from supply chain issues. Industries across the world have seen revenue drops due to shortages in products like semiconductor chips, an item used in essentially every electronic product.

These issues are starting to spread to the cannabis industry, even though it's been mostly insulated in the past due to the hyperlocal nature of the industry.

Cannabis itself isn't the issue, as raw marijuana flower has actually seen slightly decreasing prices, but rather the raw materials like ceramics, steel and tin for specialty containers that come in from China and other countries. That country has been hit recently by power outages, among other issues, affecting many of the components sold for cannabis related devices, like grow lights and vape products.

Arnaud Dumas de Raully, the CEO of a business development company for vape devices called Blinc Group, said supply chain issues, from manufacturing to shipping, are instigating this new problem within the cannabis industry, though an end may be in sight.

"I believe this issue will go on until the end of May," Dumas de Raully said in an interview with Bloomberg. "It's not just vape devices. The raw materials for the equipment that fills them with cannabis, the LEDs for grow houses - all of it comes from China."

Some insulation from within the industry has prevented costs, for the most part, from being passed on to consumers, a sentiment that Heidrich shares with Dumas de Raully.

"It was definitely a topic of conversation for us starting in the late summer up to now," Heidrich said. "Sourcing glass, semiconductors for those small vape devices, it's all caused some problems. But we've done a great job insulating against that as a company and industry."

For the smaller cost units that are generally sold individually, retail stores tend to

preorder and do so in bulk, cutting back on delays and lowering single unit costs. The fact that many of these products are also nonperishable helps the stores order ahead of time and gives them the ability to sit on product without it going to waste as well.

"Producers and processors though I think have been hit the hardest," Heidrich mentioned. "Wholesale prices for flower have dropped a bit, which means less revenue for the farmers, but that's not everything."

One of Heidrich's main suppliers locally, High Country Horticulture in Twisp, hasn't dropped any of its prices when selling out to retailers, though it has seen all the other costs associated with cannabis go up.

"Prices are still the same for my product to the stores, but all the costs of goods have gone up," said Alex Adriance, operations manager. "Packaging, plastics, everything we need to grow the product has increased in price and we haven't been able to mark up our prices to cover that."

Adriance touched on the booming market of cannabis in the US, especially seen in Washington, which has led the way in legislation for legalization along with Colorado. The boom has led to an oversaturation of flower and product in the U.S., which has led to an industry issue of revenue crashes every few years, according to Adriance and Heidrich.

When the market starts to become saturated with flower, the fallout for that goes back to the farmers, especially those on smaller farms. Heidrich described his experiences with new suppliers and growers offering their products to sell on Heidrich's shelves, he said he's had to turn a lot of them away because they're being undercut by larger operations or from direct wholesales from the farms themselves.

An issue similar to this occurred in 2018 in Oregon, when growers and farms logged 1.1 million pounds of cannabis into the states cannabis database, though smokers in the state consumed just

under 340,000 pounds. That following year, the number of Oregon weed farmers nearly doubled.

Heidrich believes this is a phenomenon that occurs every few years. Sales go up, and the number of farms follows suit. Within a year or two, prices drop, the market becomes oversaturated again and net sales figures fall again, taking the number of farms with it.

Okanogan cannabis

The boom of farmers, along with increased attention to marijuana-related legislation, has led to new wave of farmers and growers across the state. Okanogan County has had at least 11 new producers and processors spring up since 2020, according to 502data.

That data is not regularly updated, as there are around 80 total producers, processors and retailers that are on the county's radar, while 502data covers only about 60 of them.

The recording of active and closed licenses muddies the waters of 502data as well, listing 142 total producers/processors along with 14 retailers. However, many of those have permanently closed licenses or have zero reported sales.

The growth, and its symptoms, spurred the county commissioners to institute a moratorium on the permitting of new cannabis grows and the expansion of existing cannabis grows within the county, effective Aug. 24, 2021. That moratorium was set for six months and was extended for another six on Feb. 28.

County Commissioner Andy Hover said last year that the moratorium was put in place because the state was not checking with the county on permit and zone requirements or the addresses on some of the farms.

Though the state Liquor and Cannabis Board issues licenses with three tiers, meant to govern the size of the farms, it doesn't check parcel information from the county when looking at addresses. That has led to property owners instituting subleases to multiple growers, all on a single parcel, according to Hover.

The moratorium is meant to

correct that, along with concurrent meetings between Pete Palmer, executive director of the planning department, and the various cannabis stakeholders in the county.

Palmer said that though communications started slowly, as more meetings took place, more growers started opening up to the idea of the meetings. After 50 or so meetings, Palmer said they only have about 30 left.

The meetings aren't for disciplinary action, rather, they're for an open discussion between different plot and farm owners regarding compliance, subleasing and invalid addresses. In an effort of cooperation, Palmer said they're charging the farms only the cost of a single site analysis, even though the subleased parcels, multiple buildings and other items generally would require multiple site analysis purchases.

"We're doing our best to work with applicants," Palmer said. "We want (the farms) to feel comfortable coming to the country with improvements and operations changes."

Applicants who agree to a meeting, Palmer says, will leave with an actionable checklist to help the entirety of their operation come into compliance. As of March 4, Palmer said only three applicants who have come to a meeting so far were fully compliant.

Onward and upward

All aspects of the cannabis industry, both in county and statewide, are being hit with a multitude of obstacles and hurdles that are lowering sales and causing some businesses to shut down around the state.

For Okanogan County, there's not much fear of losing out. Hubbard says it's because of the people.

"It's been harder to restock the stores," Hubbard said. "Getting deliveries to the store has been a struggle throughout, and after, the pandemic."

"But we really, really appreciate the support from the community throughout the pandemic and now still. We have an amazing loyalty base here and we truly appreciate that."

OBITUARIES

Edwin Charles Wells

Edwin Charles Wells, 72, of Okanogan, Wash., passed March 4, 2022, at home surrounded by family, friends, and pets.

Edwin was born to George Wells and Ann Wells (Erbezniak). He attended the single-room Duley Lake Schoolhouse. Ed also studied at Christ the King in Omak, Wash., and graduated Okanogan High School in 1967.



Upon graduation Ed embarked on his first of many adventures skipping the pond to London. He traveled through Europe and crossed to Africa via ferry to Morocco. Edwin hitch-hiked through Algeria to Tunisia and then flew to Cairo. As he happened to be traveling during the 6-Days War he found next-to-private tours of the empty temples, pyramids, and sites.

Edwin attended Gonzaga University in the late 1960's studying biology and pre-medicine. Duty called him home to help his father run the Wells Cattle Ranch. He moved to his home overlooking the Columbia River where he spent the majority of his life.

Around 1975 Edwin met his wife Ann Minor. In October of 1985 they were engaged in Istanbul, Turkey. They married in October 1986 and remained so for the next 36 years until Ed's death.

Edwin never retired from cattle ranching. Even through chemotherapy he helped brand cattle and worked on fence. Ed enjoyed cigars, bridge, scotch, and Pink Floyd. He was generous and kind but would vehemently argue politics at any chance he could. Edwin was preceded in death by his parents, George and Ann; and siblings, Claudia, Dale and Janice. He is survived by his wife, Ann; twin sons, Phillip and Jordan; countless cousins; his cat, Persephone; and puppy, Stella.

A Rosary will be at 7:30 p.m., Friday March 11, 2022, at Our Lady of the Valley, 2511 Elmway St., Okanogan. His funeral will be at 11 a.m., Saturday, March 12, 2022, at St. Mary's Mission, Mission Rd., Omak. River Valley Funeral of Okanogan is caring for the arrangements.

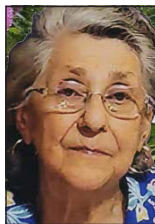
Mary Irey

1930-2022

Mary Irey passed away March 4, 2022. She was born Oct. 12, 1930, in Stenen, Saskatchewan. She married Gene Irey in 1951 and the two loved to travel and fished and camped all over the U.S. and Canada.

She was very energetic and artistic and loved to knit and made amazing quilts and had a beautiful garden. She was a kind and wonderful woman.

Mary was preceded in death by her husband; her parents, Steven and Martha Steranko; and six brothers and sisters. She is survived by sons, Bill and David, of Omak, Wash.; and many nieces and nephews in the U.S. and Canada.



A graveside service will be at 2 p.m., Monday, March 14, 2022, at the Omak City Cemetery, 2517 Elmway, Okanogan, WA 98840. River Valley Funeral & Cremation of Okanogan is caring for the arrangements.

Obituary policy: The Chronicle publishes both paid obituaries and death notices. Paid obituaries cost \$100 (prepaid) and include up to 250 words, one color photograph and submitted biographical information. Additional photos cost \$10 each. Obituaries may include the following information: decedent's full name, age, date of birth, date of death, hometown, time living in Okanogan or Ferry counties, career and family history, surviving family members and funeral home and arrangements. Paid death notices, with a photo, may be placed in the Wednesday paper for a \$40 charge. The deadline for submissions is 10 a.m. Thursday for the Saturday paper and 10 a.m. Monday for the Wednesday paper. For more information, call The Chronicle at 509-826-1110.

Entries sought from high school artists

DENVER, Colo. — Entries are sought for the Western Governors' Foundation Celebrate the West regional art competition for high school students.

The visual arts challenge is open to high school students in the 16 Western states and three U.S. territories whose governors participate in the bipartisan Western Governors' Association. Students in grades nine

through 12 can submit a digital copy of their entry via email, along with their entry form, to WGAart@westgov.org by April 30.

The unframed artwork submitted shall not be smaller than eight by 10 inches nor larger than 24 by 36 inches.

More information is at <https://westgov.org/celebrate-the-west/competition/2022-competition>.

Job Fair

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