



WHITMAN COUNTY GAZETTE

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COLFAX, WA 99111

Whitman County keeps the teachers

Vaccine mandate deadline passes

BY BILL STEVENSON
GAZETTE EDITOR

COLFAX — The governor's ultimatum for teachers and school staff to have COVID vaccinations by Oct. 18 has passed and Whitman County didn't lose anyone.

Gov. Jay Inslee required all school employees to be vaccinated against COVID or have their employment terminated. There were terms to grant exemptions to be vaccinated for medical or religious reasons.

Colfax is the largest school district and employs 95 people, according to Superintendent Jerry Pugh. Seventeen employees received exemptions. No employees were terminated or resigned.

Colton School District Superintendent Paul Clark said they have 27 employees and four received exemptions. No employees resigned or were fired.

"I had colleagues that weren't excited about get-

ting their shots," said Clark. "But we want what's best for our kids and our community."

St. John-Endicott School Districts Superintendent Suzanne Schmick said Endicott schools have 43 employees and 19 were granted exemptions. No one resigned or was terminated. St. John schools have 59 paid employees and 25 were granted exemptions. No one resigned and no one was fired.

"I am delighted. I need my staff. Our children need our staff and I am delighted at keeping everyone," said Schmick.

LaCrosse School District had eight exemptions, according to Superintendent Doug Curtis. The district has about 40 employees, according to the district website. No employees resigned or were terminated.

Oakesdale has 46 paid employees and 19 were granted exemptions. No one resigned and no one was terminated, said Superintendent Jake Dingman.

Palouse School District Superintendent Mike Jones said, "We didn't lose

Continued on Page 2



GARTH MEYER | THE GAZETTE

The St. Ignatius Hospital was built in 1893 and closed in 1968.

Colfax's haunted hospital

Past and future of St. Ignatius

BY BILL STEVENSON
AND JULLENE SAGER
GAZETTE STAFF

COLFAX — Ghosts are the only tenants of the St. Ignatius Hospital and their home is getting renovated.

The hospital was built in 1893.

The first patient had pneumonia and was joined ten more patients in a month. Only three were released, according to the Colfax Haunted Hospital website.

The first death was F. E. Martin in June of 1893. He succumbed to his injuries after being crushed between two railroad cars.

"He is just one of the ghosts known to walk the halls."

He has company in Sister Johanna. She died in 1929 and remained to comfort dying patients. The people reporting to see her were patients that would die soon after their encounter, according to the legend.

To learn more about the ghosts and have a chance to experience them, you can take a three-hour walking tour when they are not sold out. The tours provide people with the history of the hospital and pos-

sible paranormal activity, depending on if you believe.

The hospital was sold in 1968 and became housing for developmentally disabled adults until 2003. Now the owners are making renovations to keep the hospital's past and prepare it for a better future.

Val Gregory is recognized as a ghost enthusiast and runs the Colfax Haunted Hospital tours.

"I never thought I was going to be a ghost hunter, but I love it. It's fun and every night's different," said Gregory. "My favorite thing is to see the people that come to Colfax, and then the next day I'll see them because they come into my store."

Gregory was hired by Colfax to promote tourism and she keyed in on St. Ignatius. Before the tours could start, there was an issue of cleaning out items left behind by Rory McDonald after he finished renting the building as apartments to disabled adults in 2003.

When she took over, she learned a lot. Former nurses and nursing assistants who worked at St. Ignatius when it was a hospital would share stories about the ghosts and the hospital's history.

The hospital was once a nursing academy.



VAL GREGORY | SUBMITTED

The interior of the former hospital makes a perfect setting for ghost tours of the Colfax Haunted Hospital.

In 1941, the academy had its first two male nurse graduates.

Today it makes a perfect setting for ghost tours. Tours of the hospital took place throughout October and often hosted guests from out of state, such as a group from Alaska and RV drivers from California.

On Halloween, a game of hide-and-seek is planned at the former hospital. The idea came from a group of Microsoft employees on a tour.

While taking the tour, people can rent "ghost detection" equipment. They built one piece using an Xbox Kinect motion-sensing camera and a tablet. Gregory said people are "very good" with handling the equipment and returning them.

Not all tours get to experience the paranormal. Sometimes the building is quiet. But

the ghosts are responsive to familiar people.

"I've had tours that have come and they're like 'We're not getting anything.' I go 'Oh, I'll come with you' and then (activity) goes up," said Gregory.

A group from the Seattle Underground Tour visited the hospital when there wasn't any sign of ghost activity. They weren't deterred and said they would be back.

The tours gathered attention from a wide variety of media from YouTube celebrity Garrett Watts to Travel Channel's show Ghost Adventures. Gregory was interviewed by Good Morning America, The Today Show, ABC News, and the Whitman County Gazette.

After a segment about the ghost tours aired on The Today Show, two extra days

Continued on Page 7

Cases against 15 WSU frat members done

Seven may have cases dismissed

BY BILL STEVENSON
GAZETTE EDITOR

COLFAX — Fifteen members of Washington State University (WSU) fraternity Alpha Tau Omega are finished facing charges for providing alcohol to minors.

Nineteen-year-old Samuel Martinez died of alcohol poisoning in the basement of their frat house on Nov. 12, 2019, after he was provided alcohol.

Pullman police investigated the death and Whitman County prosecutors filed charges against 15 members.

"This case involving such a tragic death serves (as) a stark reminder of the dangers of binge drinking — especially by minors," stated Whitman County Deputy Prosecutor Lindsy Alcantar.

The final resolved case was against Wesley Oswald, 22, of Bellevue. He pleaded guilty to furnishing alcohol to minors and was sentenced to 19 days in jail and fined \$500, according to Alcantar.

Seven members were charged with furnishing liquor to minors and pleaded guilty. They were

each sentenced to one day in jail and a fine of \$500.

"The remaining (seven) defendants have continued their cases until April 2022 and are under contract with the state to complete several requirements, if these requirements are met, their cases will be dismissed ... if not, they will face an expedited prosecution and sentencing," wrote Alcantar.

The following are the 15 fraternity members were charged:

- Finn W. Anderson, 21, of Pullman
- Joshua C. Entriken, 20, of Snoqualmie
- Griffin T. Fish, 21, of Bellevue
- Luke R. Hawksford, 22, of Sammamish
- Tyler T. W. Kim, 20, of Snoqualmie Pass
- Jack D. Kuske, 21, of East Wenatchee
- Jacob M. Lewis, 21, Liberty Lake
- Jeremy M. McAteer, 22, of Pullman, two counts
- Wesley O. Oswald, 22, of Bellevue, two counts
- Cole Z. Peterson, 22, of Sammamish
- Maxwell D. Rovegno, 21, of Snoqualmie
- Jaron C. Selset, 23, of Renton
- Garrett M. Smith, 21, of Pullman
- Cameron R. Thomas, 21, of Pullman
- Nolan J. Valcik, 20, of Pullman, two counts

Happy Halloween happenings

COLFAX — Halloween returns after the pandemic with chances to trick-or-treat at events throughout Whitman County.

ALBION
Pumpkin kits are available at the Albion Library. Kits include ingredients to make a pumpkin cake. All folks

need to do is provide the pumpkin. Due to a limit of supplies, kits are one per family.

COLFAX
The Colfax Chamber of Commerce is hosting trick-or-treating along Main Street on Friday, Oct. 29.

The family friendly event provides a safe

place for children to wear costumes and trick-or-treat Colfax businesses. Participating businesses have a flier in the window and are giving out candy.

The event runs from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Colfax library is participating in the chamber's trick-or-treat

on Main Street. "Come dressed in your costume (or not) for a treat," stated a library spokesperson.

ELBERTON HIKING TRAIL

Spooky Trail Tales continues for the rest of the month at the Elberton Hiking Trail. Selected

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Front Page

Colfax's haunted hospital

of tours were added and within eight hours of the TV show, a month was booked.

A possible future event is to have a convention at St. Ignatius about the paranormal. It would be educational and combine tours with classes on how to build paranormal detecting equipment, how the equipment works, how to investigate, how to listen for electronic voice phenomenon (EVP), etc.

"We would fill up hotels in Pullman, Moscow, Spokane, and here no problem and sell out," Gregory said.

Changes are occurring at the former hospital to restore it to its former glory. Owners Austin and Laura Storm are removing walls that were added when the hospital was apartments. Some peeling paint was

removed and floors repaired.

The work is getting attention. Ghosts have become more active since the renovation started.

"So we've noticed it ... as soon as they started the renovation, it got super active," said Gregory. "They tore down some walls ... and then the fourth floor just kind of went crazy. When they do things it seems to stir things up."

Askeptical contractor is now vigilant for signs of ghosts after working in the building alone.

Now, he sends texts to Gregory when something happens he can't explain.

"Oh! I don't know what that is!"

Austin and Laura Storm are members of the Whitman County Historical Society. As the owners of the building,

they help coordinate donations and handle the tax credits when money is given to help restore the building.

"The first thing the historical society said is 'We'll help you to be your fiscal sponsor, but you have to promise us you'll keep doing ghost hunts,'" said Gregory. "I think a part of it will always be ghost hunts."

Plans are to make space for artists, possibly Airbnb rentals, and more with the renovation. But repair work needs to come first.

"The big thing is to get the floors jacked up and get a roof on it," said Gregory. "(It would) definitely be a multi-use space ... we would be big enough for like 10 Airbnb (rental units). The photographers would love it. The ghost hunters would love it. (Washington

State University) would love it."

To make a reservation for a tour, visit the hospital website www.colfaxhauntedhospital.com.



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