

# THE NEWPORT MINER

THE VOICE OF PEND OREILLE COUNTY SINCE 1901

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## County COVID-19 death count rises

BY DON GRONNING  
OF THE MINER

NEWPORT - The number of people who have died from COVID-19 in Pend Oreille County has more than doubled in the last month, with 14 total county deaths since the pandemic started, according to Sept. 21 numbers by Northeast Tri County Health District.

NETCHD Administrator Matt Schanz told reporters in last Friday's media call that Pend Oreille County had six deaths reported in the previous 30 days, with another suspected of being COVID-19 related. That and another death was subsequently confirmed as COVID-19.

Schanz said hospitalization numbers appear to be stabilizing, but Newport Hospital and Health Services spokesperson Jenny Smith said Tuesday, Sept. 21 that hospitalizations at Newport hospital had not decreased. She said there were six COVID

SEE COVID, 2A

## COVID hitting local schools

BY DON GRONNING  
OF THE MINER

NEWPORT - Schools aren't being spared the affects of the highly contagious delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, with a number of students and staff testing positive. Some sports contests have been postponed because of COVID, but no schools have had to close down. In person learning has continued and the majority of school staff in Washington appear to be on track to meet the governor's mandate regarding vaccinations. They will either have vaccinations or valid exemptions, officials say.

The Miner sent questions to all four public school districts in our coverage area - Selkirk, Cusick, Newport and West Bonner County.

SEE SCHOOLS, 2A



MINER PHOTO|DON GRONNING

### Waiting to run

Participants in the 2021 Autumn Bloom Run wait for the race to get underway last Saturday in Newport. There were more than 100 runners participating. See the story and results on page 1B.

## Newport hires city administrator

BY MICHELLE NEDVED  
OF THE MINER

NEWPORT - A new city administrator comes on board in Newport Wednesday, Oct. 27, with the hiring of Abby Gribi. Gribi, 42, has been the city administrator for the city of Eatonville in Pierce County, Wash., since 2016. She had served on the city council there starting in 2011.

Newport Mayor Shirley Sands made the announcement at Monday night's city council meeting. Gribi's annual salary will be \$85,000.

Sands told the council Monday that she and a panel of five others interviewed four candidates, three on Sept. 7 and one local person on

Sept. 8.

The panel included Sands, Mayor Pro Tem Keith Campbell, longest serving council member Ken Smith, Public Works Director Dave Smith, Waste-Water Treatment Supervisor Josh Howard and City Clerk Nickole North.

Sands said everyone had their opinion on who was the best fit and two candidates rose to the top.

She checked backgrounds and references, finishing that process up on Wednesday, Sept. 15. She contacted city attorney Laura McAloon to make some tweaks to the contract and the job was

offered to Gribi, who signed the contract Monday, Sept. 20.

Sands said Gribi gave notice to the town of Eatonville, needs to sell her house and find one here. Her first day on the job in Newport is Wednesday, Oct. 27.

Gribi replaces Russ Pelleberg, who resigned his position in June during an employment investigation in which he was placed on paid administrative leave. When he resigned, the investigation ended.

City attorney McAloon said at a council meeting earlier this month that Pelleberg can speak to the council at any time about the allegations made against him. Pelleberg has declined to speak with The Miner.



Gribi

# Man arrested for Priest River rape

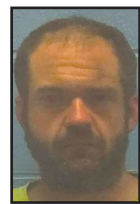
BY SOPHIA ALDOUS  
OF THE MINER

PRIEST RIVER - A man charged with the rape of a Priest River woman in the summer of 2020 has been arrested and awaits extradition from Montana to Bonner County, according to a press release from the Bonner County Sheriff's Office dated Sept. 8.

Shane Bryan Johnson, 35, of Kalispell, Mont., is being held on a \$500,000 bond, according to the press release. Johnson is being held on unrelated charges while awaiting extradition to Bonner County where he will be charged with rape, burglary, kidnapping and aggravated battery.

According to Bonner County Detec-

tive Barry Reinink, the victim identified Johnson from both a voice identification lineup and an in-person lineup that occurred in Bonner County this past summer. Reinink said DNA samples from the crime also matched with Johnson.



Shane B. Johnson

not let Johnson in. According to a press release, Johnson eventually forced the victim to the back of her home before

allegedly battering and sexually assaulting her. He fled the scene in an unknown direction using an unknown method of travel, detectives said at the time.

In a separate incident on July 12, 2020, Johnson was arrested in the 4400 block of Old Priest River Road in Oldtown around 9:06 p.m. on charges of possession of stolen property, possession of methamphetamine, possession of paraphernalia and resisting and obstructing. Several key fobs were also found in Johnson's possession that linked him to stolen vehicles throughout the Inland Northwest.

According to a story that ran in the Flathead Beacon Newspaper on June 29, 2021, Johnson was one of four men indicted by federal prosecutors earlier

in the year for their roles in a consistent crime spree that included the theft and transport of campers, vehicles and more from Kalispell, Mont. to a home in eastern Washington.

The newspaper article said Johnson, Leif Peter Larsen, Kevin John Audett and Daniel Forrest Haslage were part of an alleged conspiracy that generated more than \$375,000 worth of stolen vehicles and another \$21,000 in other stolen property for the four men. The Flathead Beacon said Johnson reached an agreement with prosecutors on June 16, 2021, and pleaded guilty to a single count of interstate transportation of stolen vehicles. He was supposed to be sentenced later this year.

SEE ARREST, 2A

### BRIEFLY

#### Fall Festival this Saturday

NEWPORT - The Newport Farmers Market holds its Fall Festival Saturday, Sept. 25, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. There will be live music, food, raffles, art, children's activities and kids' kernel bucks, as well as door prizes. The public is encouraged to attend and participate in the festivities as well as shop local vendors. This is an

outdoors event.

The farmers market is located at 236 S. Union Street.

#### Museum yard sale fundraiser Oct. 2

PRIEST RIVER - The Priest River Museum will have a yard sale Saturday, Oct. 2, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. This

is to support the museum and add to the building fund for future maintenance projects. The organization is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit that houses local Priest River history and lore.

The Priest River Museum and Timber Education Center is located at the end of 3rd Street in the Keyser House.



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LIFE	3B	POLICE REPORTS	6A, 5B	SPORTS	1B-2B
OBITUARIES	5B	PUBLIC NOTICES	7B-8B	BOOSTER	4B

SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING  
LIFESTYLE PAGE ON 3B