

HERMISTON



Staff photo by Kate Whittle

From left to right, Philip Lusted, Anne Lusted and friend Mykael Mannucci run on the Hermiston High School track during the annual Resolution Run. Mannucci and Lusted said they'd like to start exercising more in 2012. "After the race today I'm sure we'll know we need to," joked Anne Lusted.

New year brings health resolutions

By KATE WHITTLE
East Oregonian

On Saturday morning, runners and walkers got a head start on New Year's goals at the annual Resolution Run at Hermiston High School.

The fifth annual run, held a day early this year to accommodate Sunday churchgoers, raises funds for the Hermiston cross country team and motivates people to stick with exercise. About 150 participants came out to complete a two-mile course or 5K on the sunny, nearly 40-degree day.

"This is the best winter we've had in four years," cross country coach Jake Puzey said. "There's few excuses to totally hibernate."

If people are hoping to get off the couch and out the door more often in 2012, Puzey recommends making reasonable goals.

"Don't be overly ambitious. Consistency is more important," he said.

Getting healthy can mean more than just exercise, and many will resolve to kick bad habits in the coming year.

Anyone looking to take better care of themselves can find encouragement and

resources, said Janet Jones, Umatilla County Health Department Community Health Educator.

Jones said getting screened for cancer, drinking less alcohol and quitting smoking are important goals. She also emphasizes making reasonable expectations.

"We didn't become addicted to smoking or drinking overnight," she said. "If that's your New Year's resolution, wonderful, but don't give up if you have a slip."

Jones said Oregon Quit Line, at 1-800-QUIT-NOW, is

a great place to start for people who want to stop using tobacco.

It's also a good time of year to nudge friends and family to get screened for diseases like colon cancer, she said.

Jones helped coach St. Anthony employees during the hospital's push for a smoke-free campus. St. Anthony Environmental Services supervisor Justin Michael is proud he hasn't smoked a cigarette in two years, and plans to continue working on his weight in 2012.

"It's the best feeling I've ever had ... I don't wake up coughing up a lung anymore," he said.

Michael said having support from his coworkers, being determined and using the medication Chantix helped him finally quit after two previous tries.

"Look into the things that work best for you and do it," he advised.

PENDLETON

Decision baffles local dietitians

Medicare funds obesity counseling, but overlooks dietitians and psychologists

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

America is getting fatter — about a third of us are now obese.

This shocking statistic is getting some notice. Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that obesity is considered a disease and that obesity screening and counseling will now be reimbursed.

When St. Anthony Hospital dietitian Christine Poniewozik heard this, she did a mental fist pump.

"I was excited," said Poniewozik. "I thought, 'This is good — it will help so many people.'"

Her euphoria was short-lived, however. When Poniewozik investigated further, she realized the plan only reimbursed primary care physicians, not registered dietitians or behavioral psychologists. Confused, Poniewozik had a colleague down the hall read the official CMS memorandum of decision to make sure she had interpreted it correctly.

It makes no sense, she thought. Most doctors don't have the time or the training to help their patients with intensive obesity therapy.

In Hermiston, Good Shepherd Medical Center dietitian Nancy Gummer reacted with similar incredulity.

"Dietitians are uniquely qualified to help people make behavioral changes," Gummer said. "We study behavior modification — that's our realm of expertise."

Typically, Poniewozik and Gummer said, physicians do initial screening for obesity, but they refer

the patients on to comprehensive weight management programs.

"Obesity is a very complicated thing," Gummer said. "It's more than how much you eat ..."

"It's emotional," Poniewozik said. "Sometimes, it's helping them figure out better life habits."

"There's no formula for that," Gummer said. "There is not a right answer for each person. There are no tear-off sheets."

CMS received 195 comments as it finalized the new policy, many requesting that dietitians and mental health professionals who deal with obesity be included. CMS responded with the following:

"...we believe it is important that these preventive services should be furnished in a coordinated approach as part of a comprehensive prevention plan within the context of the patient's total health care ... Other provider specialties may provide patient care in other settings but do not offer care in the context of being the coordinator of the patient's healthcare needs, not limited by problem origin or diagnosis."

Poniewozik and Gummer hope CMS will reconsider. They joined with other dietitians in signing an American Dietetic Association petition that argues for the inclusion of registered dietitians in obesity treatment.

"The petition will be sent to the White House to urge CMS to rethink their decision," Poniewozik said. "It would be good to fix this before it goes any further."



Poniewozik

Adjusted unemployment lowers in Umatilla, Morrow counties

By ANNA WILLARD
East Oregonian

Umatilla and Morrow counties experienced a drop in jobs during the month of November, but the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate also lowered in Morrow County and stayed relatively the same in Umatilla County.

Morrow County's adjusted unemployment rate dropped from 8.5 percent in October to 7.9 percent in November. Umatilla County dropped from 9 percent to 8.7 percent, according to the Oregon Employment Department labor trends report.

The statewide unem-

ployment rate is also at its lowest point in three years at 9.1 percent.

"More people have been saying they're able to find jobs," said Nick Beleiciks, state employment economist.

Part of the survey is conducted by contacting households and the department found more people are reporting that they have a job and fewer are reporting that they are unemployed, Beleiciks said.

"Some people have quit looking for work because of the conditions, and some could have retired and left the workforce," he said.

Umatilla County lost 360

jobs in the month of November while Morrow County lost 30, which is mostly attributed to the end of the harvest season and associated industries tapering off as well, according to the department.

"The cuts are spread out across the entire private sector," Beleiciks said. "That could also be related to food manufacturing. As the plants slow down those support industries may be slowing down a bit also."

Government jobs have also contributed to the drop off. Morrow County lost 10 federal government jobs, while federal, state and local government jobs

totalled a loss of 50 jobs in Umatilla County. However, the county did gain 30 jobs in tribal government and local government education jobs rose by 40, according to the state labor trend report.

"Statewide we've had about a 5,000 job decrease in local government education — elementary, high school and middle school jobs," Beleiciks said.

That number of job losses is attributed to state budget cuts, he said.

But, whether or not a similar drop will be the case again this year is yet to be determined in the next legislative session, Beleiciks said.

HERMISTON

Man arrested for armed robbery at Short Stop

East Oregonian

A Umatilla man is in the county jail on a \$50,000 bond after being arrested on charges of armed robbery.

Timothy Corey Gray, 34, allegedly robbed the Short Stop in Hermiston, 32553 East Punkin Center Road, around 10:30 p.m. Friday and was arrested at 6:30 a.m. Saturday, said Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan.

Corey's charges beside robbery include criminal trespass with a firearm, carrying a dangerous weapon, menacing, recklessly endangering and failure to appear.

Rowan said no further details were available at press time. A Short Stop employee confirmed the robbery but said no supervisors were available to give more comment.

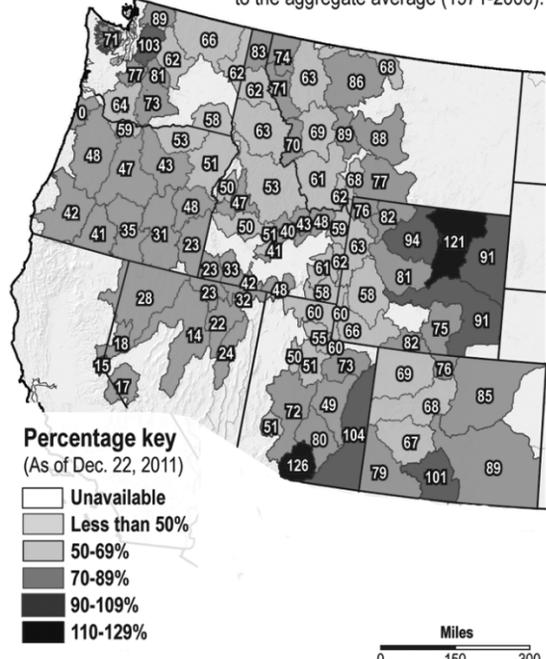


Gray

'Bubble of warm air' deflects precipitation north into Canada

December snow water equivalent

Basin-wide percent of 2011 snowpack compared to the aggregate average (1971-2000).



By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Snowpack levels across the Northwest are well below average at the end of 2011, but the outlook for irrigators seems likely to improve in the new year.

Experts say the weather pattern that kept the region largely free of storms in late autumn probably won't hold up in wintertime.

"The good news is our storm track is starting to change," said Jon Lea, snow survey supervisor for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

A ridge of high pressure — basically a "bubble of warm air" — had deflected storms northward into Canada, said Pete Parsons, meteorologist at the Oregon Department of Forestry.

As a result, by late December snowpack levels were more than 50 percent below average in Oregon, more than 40 percent below average in Idaho and about 20 percent below average in Washington, according to NRCS.

"It just won't let those storms come in," said Scott Pattee, NRCS water supply

specialist for Washington.

The Pacific Ocean is currently subject to La Niña, a recurrent climate cycle typically associated with lower temperatures in the Northwest.

High pressure ridges can form during such cycles but typically don't last, giving the region's overall snowpack time to build up, Parsons said.

With wind and rain returning in late December, it appears the ridge is shifting eastward, opening the way for more precipitation across the region, Lea said.

"We're hoping La Niña finally comes in and blows away this ridge of high pressure that's been blocking storms," said Ron Abramovich, NRCS water supply specialist for Idaho.

Statistics also provide some reason for optimism.

Historically, roughly 60 percent of the region's snowpack accumulates after Jan. 1, Lea said. "We certainly can catch up."

Leftover water supplies are promising as well. NRCS data indicate that reservoir levels in Oregon, Washington and Idaho were generally average or higher at the end of the

2011 irrigation season.

The cool, wet spring resulted in late snow melt and reduced the demand for irrigation, Abramovich said. "They didn't use very much reservoir water last year."

Water levels in key California reservoirs are also average or above, but the state's snowpack and rainfall was 30 percent below average as of early December, according to the state's Department of Water Resources.

Newer data aren't yet available, but the snowpack and precipitation levels are probably even more below average right now, said Frank Gehrke, chief of California's Cooperative Snow Surveys Program.

Gehrke said he's hopeful the snowpack outlook will improve by late winter.

"It's still very early in the season," he said.

Unlike the Northwest, California's snowpack levels traditionally do not benefit from La Niña cycles — the trend is toward drier winter weather in that state, Parsons said.

"There's definitely a disconnect there," he said.

That may have significance in the long term.

Since 2007, it appears the Pacific Ocean has been experiencing a longer-term shift known as Pacific Decadal Oscillation, in which La Niña climate cycles become more common over 30 years or so while El Niño climate cycles become less common, Parsons said.

Typically, El Niño is associated with milder winters in the Northwest and La Niña with harsher ones, with the opposite effect in California, he said.

Parsons' long range forecast for the Northwest in early 2012 calls for below normal temperatures and above average precipitation through March, with cooler conditions persisting into spring.

More likely under the current phase of Pacific Decadal Oscillation, he said it's unlikely the region will experience a spring quite as cold and wet as in 2011.

"That was an extreme anomaly," Parsons said. "Odds are that's not going to happen every spring. It's not the new norm."