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Cottage
Grove

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PM Showers

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Finding Community in Song Gem Tones shine in debut concerts



Gem Tones Choir Director Claire Savin (far right) and Piano Accompanist Evan Barrett (far left) began rehearsing with the 13-member choir last fall.

“Even in a group, singing for an audience takes courage. Carving out time to rehearse week after week takes dedication.”
Claire Savin,
Gem Tones Director

CINDY WEELDREYER
Cottage Grove Sentinel

When the Gem Tones stepped onto the Opal Center stage for their debut concert series January 16–18, they weren’t just presenting a program of choral music — they were introducing Cottage Grove to a

brand new community choir built on courage, connection, and the joy of singing together. The group, made up of 13 regular members ranging roughly from their mid 50s to mid 80s, is directed by Claire Savin, a longtime Grover and part time music teacher at Harrison Elementary. Savin, who has lived in Cottage Grove for 14 years, brings a lifetime of musical experience to the podium — from childhood flute lessons in New York to a full music scholarship at the University of Arkansas. But she is quick to emphasize that the Gem Tones began with someone else’s spark. “Maya Burton, the director of the Opal Center, is the driving force

behind the creation of the Gem Tones,” Savin said. “Everything we talked about in those early meetings was a direct reflection of Maya’s initiative.” Burton, who serves as the group’s administrator, successfully applied to the Fred W. Fields Fund of Oregon Community Foundation to begin the choir. She recruited members through flyers, community outreach, and a prominent display in the Opal Center window — a detail several singers mentioned when asked how they found the choir. An online sign up form on the Opal Center website helped the group gel quickly, and rehearsals were well attended from the start.

FINDING THEIR SOUND
Choosing repertoire for a brand new senior choir proved to be one of Savin’s biggest early challenges — and one of her biggest surprises. “I underestimated the expertise of this group,” she admitted. “From the start, I relied on suggestions from choir members and feedback from our pianist, Evan Barrett, and from Maya, who both have extensive choral experience.” Two of the programmed pieces came directly from choir member suggestions, and another member who is a retired music teacher arranged several public domain selections so the group wouldn’t have to purchase scores. The result was an eclectic, well rounded

program that blended folk songs, classical works, rounds, four part harmonies, and musical theater selections. One piece in particular held special meaning: “Dona Nobis Pacem.” “For most of them, this piece was synonymous with singing in a school choir,” Savin said. She used it as a warm up throughout the season, and it ultimately became the choir’s opening number.

A SEASON OF FIRSTS
The Gem Tones’ first public performance came in December at Magnolia Gardens — a short 20 minute program that gave the group a chance to test their more

See **GEM TONES** Page 6

Influenza season peaks as “Super Flu” circulates Vaccination rates hit new lows

CINDY WEELDREYER
Cottage Grove Sentinel

Flu season in Oregon has reached its traditional peak, but public health officials say this year’s picture carries a twist: a mid season shift to a more severe influenza strain and some of the lowest vaccination rates Lane County has seen in years. Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory tract infection caused by influenza viruses. Influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Symptoms of influenza generally include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, headache, and/or fatigue, according to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA).

BY THE NUMBERS

“During most influenza seasons, which typically run from November to April, between 10 percent and 20 percent of the population is infected with influenza viruses,” the OHA states on its website. “More than 200,000 people are hospitalized with influenza each year in the U.S. Certain groups of people, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions, are at higher risk for serious complications from influenza illness.” Statewide data suggests Oregon is tracking within normal seasonal patterns, but local health leaders warn the community is more vulnerable

than usual — not because the virus is behaving unpredictably, but because residents are entering the season with far less immunity than in the past. According to the Oregon Health Authority’s latest influenza report, flu activity has been rising steadily since December. Emergency department visits for influenza like illness increased through early January, and statewide test positivity has climbed. Hospitalizations remain within the expected range, but both influenza and COVID 19 are circulating at higher levels than last winter, with RSV also contributing to seasonal illness.

LANE COUNTY

Lane County’s experience mirrors the statewide trend. “Typically flu season peaks around January 20,” said Lane County Public Health spokesperson Jason Davis. “We’re right on schedule. We expect to see cases start to decline soon.” The county’s first confirmed flu cases of the 2025–26 season appeared in late September and early October, primarily involving the H1N1 strain. For the first half of the season, Lane County tracked closely with the last five years in both case numbers and severity. That changed in December, when H1N1 was overtaken by H3N2 — the strain some have dubbed the

“This year, with our low vaccination rate, we are just woefully unprepared for flu season.”

Jason Davis, Lane County
Public Health spokesperson

See **SUPER FLU** Page 6



Metro Creative Connection

Health leaders warn the community is more vulnerable than usual — not because the virus is behaving unpredictably, but because residents are entering the season with far less immunity than in the past.

CGPD launches homicide investigation

JEREMY C. RUARK
Cottage Grove Sentinel

Cottage Grove Police are investigating an incident in which one person was found shot along Highway 99. Cottage Grove Police Department (CGPD) officers responded at approximately 5:30 a.m. Jan. 20, to a report of a male who was found on the ground, unconscious and bleeding in the 1500 Block of Highway 99. “When officers arrived, they found an adult male with an apparent gunshot wound,” CGPD Chief Cory Chase stated in a release. “Officers attempted CPR but the male was pronounced deceased at the scene after medics arrived.” Witnesses in the area reported hearing gunshots and seeing an unknown person wearing dark clothing running from the area, according to Chase, who added that no suspects had been identified or located as of Tuesday morning, Jan. 20.

On Wednesday, Jan. 21, Chase issued a second release identifying the victim and classifying the incident as a homicide. The victim is identified as 50-year-old Eusebio Pablo Pablo, of Cottage Grove. “The death is being investigated as a homicide. There is no new suspect information to share at this time,” Chase said. No specific details have been released by CGPD about what led to the incident. Chase said the investigation is active and the Cottage Grove Police Department is being assisted by the Lane County Sheriff’s Office and the Lane County District Attorney’s Office. CGPD is asking anyone who may have any information about this investigation, to call the Cottage Grove Police Department at 541-942-9145. Follow developments online at cgsentinel.com and in the Wednesday print editions of The Sentinel.



Jeremy C. Ruark / Cottage Grove Sentinel

The gun shot victim was found in the 1500 Block of Highway 99 at Cottage Grove.

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NEWS@ cgsentinel.com



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Wilderness safety advisory issued

Lane County Sheriff's Search & Rescue (SAR) volunteers with the Special Vehicles Group responded to assist the driver of an SUV that was stuck in deep snow Jan. 7.

The vehicle was located on a national forest road south of Brice Creek Road. SAR volunteers located the vehicle and assisted the driver back down to the valley.

The SAR team urges anyone heading into the high county and wilderness areas, to plan accordingly if you choose to enjoy the snow off maintained roads.

Follow these tips to stay safe when you explore the outdoors in our county:

• Always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return.

- Know conditions before you leave - rain in the valley can mean ice up high!
- Be prepared to stay out overnight - even if you don't plan to get out of your car.
- Bring maps for offline navigation - cell service can be spotty!
- If you go on the water, ALWAYS wear a life jacket!
- If you become lost, STAY PUT! Find a way to signal or make your location visible. Always carry a whistle and flashlight in the outdoors - it just might save your life.

Nearly every week, Lane County Sheriff's Search & Rescue deputies and volunteers assist our residents and visitors in all types of environments.

Learn more about our Search & Rescue program or donate to their work at: http://www.lanecounty.org/.../volunteers/search_and_rescue



Photo courtesy of LCSO
The vehicle was located on a national forest road south of Brice Creek Road

POLICE BLOTTER

The police blotter relates to the public record of incidents as reported by law enforcement agencies.

All individuals arrested or charged with a crime are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Information printed is preliminary and subject to change.

For specific details about cases listed, contact the appropriate law enforcement agency.

COTTAGE GROVE POLICE

JANUARY 12

- 01:41: Trespass, 76000 block London Rd.
- 03:03: Agency assist, 32000 block Latham Rd.
- 03:29: Trespass, 1200 block Gateway Blvd.
- 08:00: Illegal camping, 200 block N. 12th St.
- 10:47: Theft, 700 block Hwy 99
- 10:49: Abandoned vehicle, 8th/Main
- 11:43: Business check, 900 block Main St.
- 11:48: Theft, 200 block N. 12th St.
- 11:58: Motor vehicle crash, N. River Rd/Main
- 12:15: Warrant service, 400 block E. Main St.
- 12:28: Drug activity, Cambria Pl/Hillside
- 13:16: Fraud, 900 block Row River Rd.

- 13:51: Abandoned vehicle, 2100 block W. Harrison Ave.
- 14:08: Theft, 900 block N. Douglas Ave.
- 15:16: Warrant service, 400 block E. Main St.
- 15:27: Trespass, 1100 block Hwy 99
- 15:44: Theft, 1100 block E. Madison Ave.
- 18:33: Motor vehicle crash, River Rd/Bennett Creek Rd.
- 20:11: Fire, 1100 block S. 4th St.
- 20:17: Reckless driving, 700 block South R St.
- 21:13: Reckless driving, 1600 block Fairview Pl.
- 21:45: Suspicious condition, 1300 block E. Main St.
- 22:37: Trespass, 76000 block London Rd.

JANUARY 13

- 01:41: Trespass, 1300 block E. Jefferson Ave.
- 06:55: Juvenile problem, 100 block N. 6th St.
- 09:51: Motor vehicle crash, Hwy 99/Longview Ln.
- 10:23: Welfare check, 500 block Patrick Lp.
- 11:59: Mental subject, 200 block S. 13th
- 12:08: Trespass, 200 block Gateway Blvd.
- 14:05: Animal info, 1100 block E. Harrison Ave.

- 16:19: Hit and run, Taylor Butte/Hillside
- 16:41: Fire, 80000 block Hwy 99
- 19:54: Trespass, 900 block E. Gibbs Ave.
- 20:28: Warrant service, 400 block E. Main St.
- 22:01: Juvenile trouble, 2700 block Row River Rd.
- 22:37: Suspicious condition, 2700 block Hillside Dr.

JANUARY 14

- 01:44: Disturbance, 2400 block Bennett Creek Rd.
- 05:58: Motor vehicle crash, Hwy 99/Latham
- 07:54: Illegal camping, 200 block N. 12th St.
- 09:36: Juvenile problem, 1000 block Taylor Ave.
- 10:32: Abandoned vehicle, 2000 block W. Harrison Ave.
- 11:05: Warrant service, 400 block E. Main St.
- 11:10: Assault, 1300 block S. River Rd.
- 11:25: Motor vehicle crash, Hwy 99/Abbott
- 13:27: Hit and run, 1200 block Gateway Blvd.
- 13:30: Agency assist, 200 block Gateway Blvd.
- 14:34: Abandoned vehicle, 1100 block S. 8th St.
- 16:35: Welfare check, 500 block N. 9th St.
- 19:34: Trespass, 100 block North J St.
- 23:01: Suspicious vehicle, 200 block N. 12th St.

JANUARY 15

- 09:26: Suspicious vehicle, 900 block Row River Rd.

- 11:01: Warrant service, 10th/Main
- 11:56: Repo, 100 block Palmer Ave.
- 14:30: Theft, 800 block N. 16th St.
- 15:37: Hit and run, 900 block Row River Rd.
- 16:25: Disturbance, M/ Birch
- 16:58: Fraud, 100 block Gateway Blvd.
- 18:02: Suspicious subject, 300 block Hwy 99
- 18:34: Found dog, 79000 block Hwy 99

JANUARY 16

- 02:45: Suspicious vehicle, 1700 block E. Main St.
- 10:03: Agency assist, 2000 block Bryant Ave.
- 10:13: Welfare check, 100 block Gateway Blvd.
- 15:09: Abandoned vehicle, 1200 block Meeker Dr.
- 16:01: Welfare check, 500 block Grant Ave.
- 16:17: Motor vehicle crash, 19th/Main
- 16:27: Fire, 1400 block W. Main St.
- 16:51: Nuisance, 300 block S. 1st St.
- 20:37: Illegal camping, 1400 block E. Washington Ave.
- 21:08: Suspicious vehicle, 15th/Washington
- 21:34: Alarm, 700 block N. River Rd.
- 22:31: Suspicious vehicle,



Courtesy of CGPD

- 100 block S. 10th St.
- 22:39: Trespass, 100 block N. 14th St.
- block N. Douglas St.
- 22:05: Illegal camping, 1100 block E. Main St.

JANUARY 18

- 03:50: Nuisance, 800 block E. Whiteaker Ave.
 - 10:38: Warrant service, 200 block Gateway Blvd.
 - 10:58: Unlawful entry into a motor vehicle, 500 block S. 8th St.
 - 11:55: Suicidal subject, 500 block Grant Ave.
 - 14:24: Welfare check, 500 block Patrick Lp.
 - 16:04: Agency assist, 100 block Blair Ct.
 - 18:06: Burglary, 1400 block E. Washington Ave.
 - 18:43: Death investigation, 700 block S. 8th St.
- JANUARY 17**
- 04:15: Suspicious condition, 100 block S. 10th St.
 - 04:33: Warrant service, 400 block E. Main St.
 - 10:21: Animal info, 1100 block W. Main St.
 - 13:02: Burglary, 2000 block S. 8th St.
 - 14:02: Trespass, 1400 block S. 11th St.
 - 14:12: Trespass, 700 block Gibbs Ave.
 - 16:57: Unlawful entry into motor vehicle, 1000 block S. 6th St.
 - 18:14: Illegal parking, 900

DEATH NOTICES

Frances Bocox, 95 of Cottage Grove, Oregon passed away on January 16, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Guillermo Avita Garcia, 58, of Oregon, passed away on January 13, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

Crystal Amanda Gray, 46, of Elmira Oregon, passed away on January 12, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

Jeffery Patterson Cach, 58, of Oregon, passed away on January 14th, 2026.

Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

June Marie Steffen, 85 of Cottage Grove, Oregon passed away January 10, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Marjorie Ann Tonole, 87 of Clackamas, Oregon passed away January 6, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Darren Miller, 59, of Eugene, Oregon, passed away on January 12, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

Frank H. Niderkorn, 91, of Eugene, Oregon, passed away on January 15, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

Norma Jean Mabie, 87 of Eugene, Oregon passed away January 18, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Norman Mendes, 68, of Eugene, Oregon, passed away on January 16, 2025. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.


Ronald "Ron" Scott Hober, 62 of Cottage Grove, Oregon passed away January 18, 2026. Arrangements are in the care

of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Syble Sue Anderson, 89 of Bend, Oregon passed away January 6, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Smith-Lund-Mills Funeral Chapel and Crematorium.

Toney Plunk, 62, of Eugene, Oregon, passed away on January 14, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.

William Scott Seaberry, 64, of Eugene Oregon, passed away on January 9, 2026. Arrangements are in the care of Sunset Hills Funeral Home, Crematorium & Cemetery.



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Warming shelter set to open

CINDY WEELDREYER
Cottage Grove Sentinel

When temperatures fall below 29 degrees in Cottage Grove, Community Sharing’s Emergency Warming Shelter becomes a vital refuge for people with nowhere else to go — and the agency is preparing to open its doors again this winter.

Executive Director Mike Fleck, who has led Community Sharing since 2011, says the shelter is ready to activate whenever the weather demands it, thanks to a core group of dedicated volunteers who return each season.

“We have about 30 volunteers right now and always need more,” Fleck said. “Activations can run long, and people take vacations, so we’re constantly recruiting.”

A full activation requires 14 volunteers to cover setup, three overnight shifts, and morning cleanup and laundry. Fleck serves as the on site supervisor and can operate the shelter with a bare minimum crew of two volunteers per shift, though he welcomes more hands whenever possible.

This year the shelter will be located in a two room building behind the Community Sharing pantry a congregate setup —one room

for food, intake, and bathrooms, and another for sleeping, located at 1440 Birch Avenue in Cottage Grove.

It’s a significant improvement from the cramped administrative offices used last winter, according to Fleck.

The warming shelter activates when temperatures fall to 29 degrees or below, typically between November 1 and March 31. Doors open from 7 to 10 p.m., with checkout at 8 a.m. If no one arrives by 10 p.m., the site closes for the night. The challenge of having enough volunteers, especially for multiple night activations, the activation temperature is set at 29 degrees to reduce the number of activations each winter.

One notable change this year stems from a shift in insurance carriers: the new policy allows service animals only, not emotional support animals — a distinction that affects intake procedures and guest expectations.

Community Sharing held one volunteer training earlier this season and plans another as new volunteers come on board. The agency also partners with the Egan Warming Center in Eugene, allowing local volunteers to attend Egan’s established training sessions.



Courtesy photo from Community Sharing
On nights when the temperature plunges to below 29 degrees, Community Sharing opens an emergency warming shelter for unhoused individuals who want to come inside on a freezing night.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

Funding remains one of the shelter’s biggest hurdles.

“We use our agency funds and programs we offer,” Fleck said. “We launder bedding on site and use food and supplies from our pantry when the shelter is activated.”

This year, the challenge is even sharper: Lane County has announced there will be no warming shelter funding for the 2024–25 winter season. Fleck continues to serve as shelter supervisor as part of his executive director role, absorbing staffing costs into the agency’s existing budget.

A LONG HISTORY OF WINTER RESPONSE

In the mid 2000s, several community groups were exploring how to create a local winter warming shelter. Those efforts coalesced after the tragic 2008 hypothermia death of Major Thomas Egan, which galvanized communities across Lane County.

Local leaders met in 2009 to explore options, eventually leading to the creation of Beds for Freezing Nights (BFN) in 2010. For a decade, BFN operated shelters alternating between the Catholic and Presbyterian churches, relying entirely on volunteers and donations.

During the pandemic, Community Sharing received

“Out of the Cold” funding and used Lane County’s pallet shelters to provide safe, distanced sleeping spaces on city owned property on 12th Street behind Dari Mart. In 2022–23, the nonprofit Carry It Forward operated the Highway 99 shelter and made room for Cottage Grove residents seeking warmth.

By 2023–24, BFN volunteers had transitioned under Community Sharing’s umbrella, and the agency operated the shelter between the two churches. In 2024–25, after BFN formally dissolved, Community Sharing moved operations to its own campus — first in the administrative offices, and now in the dedicated two room building behind the pantry.

LOW-BARRIER, LIFE-SAVING SUPPORT

The shelter remains a low barrier program, welcoming anyone seeking warmth as long as they follow basic agreements and policies. Guests have access to hot food and essential supplies such as blankets, hats, socks, hygiene items, and first aid materials, depending on donations. Community Sharing maintains strict confidentiality and does not disclose information about guests without written consent, except in emergencies.

HOW THE COMMUNITY CAN HELP

Donations can be made on the agency’s website: www.communitysharing.org or in person 1440 Birch Ave. and can be earmarked specifically for the warming shelter. Items may be dropped off at the pantry on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

HIGH NEED ITEMS INCLUDE:

- Raingear, warm hats, gloves
- Tents, sleeping bags, hand warmers
- Hygiene supplies (toothbrushes, deodorant, soap, shampoo)
- First aid kits
- Cleaning supplies (vinyl gloves, disinfectant, wipes)
- Instant soups, oatmeal packets, tea, sugar

“Community Sharing is blessed to have the support of many volunteers to help us provide the many services we offer,” Fleck said. “We could not operate the pantry, have a garden or provide a warming shelter without the dedicated volunteers that serve at our agency. The shelter exists because the community shows up — volunteers, donors, and neighbors who understand that a warm, safe place on a freezing night can be the difference between life and death.”

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

- JANUARY 28**
- CG Public Library Hours Today. 11 a.m. –7 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
 - Cottage Grove Lions Club. Noon. Axe & Fiddle, 657 E. Main St.
 - Senior Center Pinochle Games. 1 p.m. Senior Center. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Craft Tutor. 2:30 p.m. Cottage Grove Public Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. Make a fun craft to take home.
 - Open Bowling. 3-5:30 p.m. Cottage Bowl. 740 Row River Road. Info: 541-767-2695 or www.thecottagebowl.com
 - Elks Bingo. 5 p.m. Elks Lodge. 775 N. River Rd. Doors and lounge open at 5 p.m. Early Bird Bingo begins at 6:30 p.m.
 - Regular games begin at 7 p.m. Food and beverages available for purchase.
 - Acoustic Jam with Gregg Biller. 6-7:30 p.m. Coast Fork Brewing. 106 S. 6th St.
 - AWANA. 6:30-8 p.m. Cottage Grove Bible Church. 1200 E. Quincy Ave. A mid-week discipleship ministry for youth from Age 3 thru 8th grade that meets during the school year.
 - Axe and Fiddle Game Night w/Ayla. 6:30 – 10 p.m. Axe and Fiddle. 657 E. Main St. (Free)

- JANUARY 29**
- CCG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541.942.3828
 - Oregon Aviation Museum Open. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. 2475 Jim Wright Way (donation)
 - Baby Laptine (birth to 2 yrs). 11:30 a.m. Cottage Grove Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Chamber of Commerce Annual Luncheon. Noon–1:30pm. Elks Lodge. 755 N. River Rd. Program: Outgoing President Cameron Reiten highlights of 2025 Chamber events. Mayor Candace Solesbee installs new board members. Introduction of Chamber Health Plan. Fee: \$25/person.

- Bohemia Gold Mining Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. 308 South 10th St. (across from Bohemia Park).
- Community Center Table Tennis. 4-6 p.m. Reception Hall. 700 E. Gibbs Avenue. Tables, paddles, and balls provided.
- Celebrate Recovery. Soup dinner 5:15 p.m. Meeting 6 p.m. Calvary Chapel. 1447 Hwy 99N. CR is a Christian-based recovery program for any hurt, habit, or hang up that is based on 8 Principles & 12 Steps for more information call 541.554.8135.
- Pilates/Yoga Class, 5:30-6:30 p.m. Row River Grange. 34360 Row River Rd. Build strength, improve flexibility and balance in warm & welcoming class taught by Courtney. To register before the first class: alignyourlifecoach@gmail.com Fee: Five class passes \$60
- Bradley Shepherd & Friends (Americana) 5:30-8 p.m. Coast Fork Brewery. 106 South 6th St.
- Karaoke Night. 9 p.m. to Midnight. Bohemian Tavern. 48 N. 9th St.

- JANUARY 30**
- CCG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. –6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541.942.3828
 - American Legion Post 32 Bingo. 5-7 p.m. 826 W. Main St. Cards: 50-cents. Payout is 75% per game. Proceeds support veterans in our community.
 - Last Friday Art Walk. 6-8 p.m. Historic Downtown District
 - The Huckleberrys. (Americana) 6-9 p.m. Coast Fork Brewery. 106 S. 6th St.
 - Weekly Pool Tournament 7 p.m. Bohemian Tavern. 48 N. 9th St. (Entry Fee: \$5 and BCA Rules).
 - Leo Moon (Indie Folk). 8 p.m. Axe and Fiddle. 657 E. Main St. \$10.8 p.m. (\$10 Cover).
 - “Shortcutterie” 8-10pm. Opal Center. 513 E. Main St. Suggested donation: \$10/at door. Showcase of emerging filmmakers with

DIY shorts from global festivals and Lane County creators.

- JANUARY 31**
- SShare Fair USA 9 a.m. 1133 E. Main St. (covered parking area next to Urban Kitchen) Reserve a space and share from your abundance with neighbors who are in need. Load up your unwanted items to give away for free (no bartering). Details about the weekly event is on Share Fair USA Facebook page or send email to eventsbyananda@gmail.com
 - CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
 - Storytime (all ages welcome). 11:30 a.m. Cottage Grove Public Library, 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Bradley Shepherd’s Perfect Flavor. (Americana) 1-3 p.m. Coast Fork Brewery. 106 S. 6th St.
 - Bohemia Gold Mining Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. 308 South 10th St. (across from Bohemia Park).
 - Cottage Grove Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. Corner Birch Avenue and H Street
 - AlAnon Meeting. 7 p.m. Sinclair Room. Cottage Grove City Hall. 400 East Main St. A 12-step group for family members and friends of alcoholics/addicts offering mutual support and a design for living in spite of what the alcoholic may or may not do. For more information call Saunders at 541-255-7648.
 - Matt Martin and the 45’s (Country) 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. Axe and Fiddle. 657 E. Main St. \$10.8 p.m. (\$5 Cover).
- FEBUARY 1**
- Coast Fork Brewery Sunday Brunch with Bradley Shepherd. 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. 106 S. 6th St.
 - Cottage Grove Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. Corner Birch



Cindy Weeldreyer / Cottage Grove Sentinel
Foggy evening in Bohemia Park

- Avenue and H St.
- VFW Bingo. 2-4 p.m. VFW Post 3473.3160 Hillside Dr. Cards: 50-cents. Free coffee & popcorn. Payout is 75% per game. Proceeds supports veterans in our community.

- FEBRUARY 2**
- CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m.—6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
 - CG Senior Center Bingo. 12:30 p.m. Community Center, 700 E. Gibbs Ave. (senior center members only)
 - South Lane School Board Meeting. 5:30 p.m. District Service Center. 455 Adams Ave.

- FEBRUARY 3**
- CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m.—6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
 - Bilingual Story Time. 5 p.m. Cottage Grove Public Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Trivia, Chess and Games

- with Gerald. 6-8 p.m. (Up to 7 trivia players on a team) Coast Fork Brewing. 106 S. 6th St.

- FEBRUARY 4**
- CG Public Library Hours Today. 11 a.m. –7 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
 - Coast Fork Kiwanis Club. Noon My Boys Pizza. 96 N. Mill St. Creswell.
 - Senior Center Pinochle Games. 1 p.m. Senior Center. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Lego Club for Kids. 2:30 p.m. Cottage Grove Public Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Open Bowling. 3-5:30 p.m. Cottage Bowl. 740 Row River Road. Info: 541-767-2695 or www.thecottagebowl.com
 - Elks Bingo. 5 p.m. Elks Lodge. 775 N. River Rd. Doors and lounge open at

- 5 p.m. Early Bird Bingo begins at 6:30 p.m. Regular games begin at 7 p.m. Food and beverages available for purchase.
- Rotary Club of Cottage Grove. Social at 5 p.m. Meeting at 5:30 p.m. El Tapatio Restaurant. 725 E. Gibbs Ave.
 - Acoustic Jam with Gregg Biller. 6-7:30 p.m. Coast Fork Brewing. 106 S. 6th St.
 - AWANA. 6:30-8 p.m. Cottage Grove Bible Church. 1200 E. Quincy Ave. A midweek discipleship ministry for youth from Age 3 thru 8th grade that meets during the school year.
 - Axe and Fiddle Game Night w/Ayla. 6:30 – 10 p.m. Axe and Fiddle. 657 E. Main St. (Free),

See more **CALENDAR**, Page 4

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Oregon legislation poised to tackle ‘fishing expedition’ searches of license plate data



Quentin Young / Colorado Newsline
A Flock Safety license plate-reading camera is seen at Colfax Avenue and Franklin Street in Denver on Aug. 5, 2025.

SHAANTH NANGUNERI
Oregon Capital Chronicle

A powerful Oregon legislative committee chair is calling for increased “safeguards and protections” on the use of data collected by a controversial crime-fighting technology scanning license plates that critics fear the Trump administration will weaponize.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, a Eugene Democrat who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, helped convene a group of law enforcement stakeholders, privacy advocates and legislative leaders, which met in December to tackle the issue as cities across the state have debated whether to turn off their cameras employing the technology. One vendor in particular, the Atlanta-based Flock Safety, has drawn condemnation from U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who previously said the company is “unable and uninterested” in addressing abuses of its products.

But views among workgroup stakeholders were diverse, including law enforcement who have defended license plate readers as a valuable tool for intercepting crime to progressive activists who say such

Fast Fact

The idea comes as a result of a legislative workgroup convened last year to study the issue of inappropriate usage of automated license plate recognition software employed by law enforcement agencies in Oregon and nationwide.

technology itself is far too vulnerable for abuse by the federal government. Critics of some license plate reading technology have pointed to instances where the software’s data has been accessed by federal immigration enforcement agencies or used to target out-of-state abortion seekers.

“At this point, Prozanski is leaning more towards putting up some guardrails that will make it safe,” Ky Fireside, an Oregon House candidate and Springfield-based progressive organizer who is part of the workgroup, told the Capital Chronicle in December. “But the fact of the matter is, there’s not anything you can do to make this kind of technology safe. It’s just designed to be abused.”

Prozanski, however, said in an interview that he values the technology for “legitimate, lawful enforcement purposes,” pointing to its use

in the arrests of suspected criminals tied to a Pacific Northwest burglary ring targeting Asian American households, including in the Eugene-Springfield area.

He said he was also concerned about inappropriate data-sharing with the federal government or other states, as well as data brokers who are mining and selling such data for unlawful use. He added that law enforcement agencies across the state may be entering into contracts for the software without adequate data privacy protections, calling for similar protections employed by other Oregon state agencies for safeguarding information.

“They have protocols in place already on the duration of the length that can be held, (to) cross check for if someone’s making inquiries, to ensure that there has been something assigned to it, like a case number, and someone’s not going on what some people would call a fishing expedition and just picking out this request or that request,” Prozanski said. “That’s the type of stuff that we’re working on.”

New funding formula
Key to the debate over the license plate readers have

been Oregon’s sanctuary laws, which prevent state and local law enforcement from assisting federal immigration enforcement without a court order. U.S. Border Patrol employed automated license plate reading technology in the 1990s, and it spread to police departments across the country in the next decade.

A November state court ruling in Washington found that the images captured by Flock’s license plate readers are not exempt from disclosure under public records law. Prozanski confirmed he is still considering a public records exemption for such information as well as increased audits, a pathway to allow individuals whose data is improperly accessed to receive redress and certification requirements for license plate reading software vendors.

A Flock company spokesperson did not respond to requests for comment about legislative efforts in Oregon, but company leadership have previously accused opponents of spreading misinformation, pointing to improved filters for sanctuary states.

“We’re working under state law of Oregon, and if someone is making queries for something that happened or potentially could be actionable in a different state, it’s not what their state law provides, it’s what Oregon provides,” Prozanski said. “So we’re going to maintain safeguards and protections for those within this state.”

The state has already funded the proliferation of the technology’s use across Oregon, though in cities such as Eugene, police have backed away from their contracts with Flock. In that instance, local authorities confirmed that a license plate reading camera in the area was turned on without the city’s consent.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of dollars in

funding for law enforcement agencies across the state has gone toward the technology, drawing from an Oregon organized retail theft grant program, according to the state’s Criminal Justice Commission. As of December, however, there have been no instances where the agency has needed to investigate reports of state law violations involving the use of state funds for license plate reading technology, according to Ryan Keck, the commission’s director.

He said that his agency uses quarterly reports from recipients and can also conduct information audits within the scope of its grant agreements. If there were a reported violation, Keck said the agency would forward the matter for investigation.

For new grants issued after Dec. 1, 2025, however, the agency has tightened its purse strings. New contracts include additional language for returning any funds that have been spent outside the scope of the agreement, which includes requirements to comply with state laws, Keck said. The commission in October also agreed to establish a new methodology for determining how the retail theft grant money would be awarded.

“The Commission’s methodology prioritized applications to support local programs specific to organized retail theft (to include equipment) over applications solely requesting equipment with no specified support (ex: personnel, operations) to address organized retail theft,” he wrote in a statement.

“Moving forward, CJC will continue to monitor its grants in accordance with the terms of executed grant agreements, and remain responsive to any legislative changes,” he added.

Future legislation, continued debate likely

In an interview Friday, Fireside said that while they appreciate the work the legislative workgroup has done, the deck felt stacked in favor of law enforcement.

The line in the sand they and other privacy advocates are drawing has to do with support for end-to-end encryption, the process by which secure data is encoded before it is transferred to its destination and decoded. Having such a safeguard would make it difficult for federal authorities to subpoena vendors for information stored securely by a law enforcement agency, Fireside said.

“They are trying to push for like, ‘Oh, well, it’s, it’s encrypted in transit, and it’s encrypted at rest’, and that just doesn’t mean anything,” they said. “It doesn’t provide any protection.”

Prozanski, in the meantime, suggested there would be more than one proposal in the works, potentially for future sessions. Some ideas involve allocating additional funding, which is not feasible given the state’s current financial outlook, he told the Capital Chronicle, but could be in the future.

“This is probably the first beginning of more than one session dealing with this,” he said. “We’re not going to get everything done the first time.”

<https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2026/01/20/oregon-legislation-poised-to-tackle-fishing-expedition-searches-of-license-plate-data/>

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Tax season: Here’s how to get your refund and kicker sooner

With the start of tax season less than one week away, the Oregon Department of Revenue is providing guidance to help taxpayers file their return and claim their share of Oregon’s \$1.41 billion kicker. Oregon was to begin processing e-filed 2025 state income tax returns on January 26, the same day the IRS will begin processing federal returns.

You have to file a return to get your kicker

The kicker is a refundable credit that will either increase a taxpayer’s Oregon state income tax refund or decrease the amount of state taxes they owe. It is not sent to taxpayers separately as a check.

Only taxpayers who filed a tax year 2024 return and also file a tax year 2025 return can receive a kicker. The credit is a percentage of

Oregon personal income tax liability for the 2024 tax year.

Electronic filing is faster—especially in 2026

On average, taxpayers who e-file their returns and request their refund via direct deposit receive their refund within two weeks. E-filed returns will be processed in the order they are received, with the first refunds expected to be issued February 17. For paper filed returns, refunds will not start being issued until early April.

Due to the late receipt of tax forms and information from the IRS in late 2025, processing of paper-filed Oregon personal income tax returns is expected to be delayed until late March, a process that has historically begun in February.

The delay in paper return processing will mean that the department won’t be able to tell taxpayers

who file paper returns that their return has been received until paper return processing starts at the end of March and their specific return enters processing. That also means information on paper-filed returns won’t be available in the “Where’s My Refund?” tool until that time.

Free e-filing options open

Oregon residents who normally mail their paper tax return to the department should consider using Direct File Oregon, a free filing option available through Revenue Online, or other online tax preparation software, to e-file and receive their refund—and their kicker—sooner.

In addition to Direct File Oregon, other free filing options are also available. Free guided tax preparation is available from several companies for taxpayers that meet income requirements. Using links

from the department’s website ensures that both taxpayers’ federal and state return will be filed for free.

All electronic filing software options approved for filing Oregon personal income tax returns can be found on the Electronic filing page of the agency’s website. Taxpayers seeking to hire a professional to prepare their taxes can find helpful tips in the department’s “How to Choose a Tax Practitioner” video.

Free and low-cost tax help

Free tax preparation services are available for low- to moderate-income taxpayers through AARP Tax Aide, VITA, and CASH Oregon. United Way also offers free tax help through their MyFreeTaxes program. Visit the Department of Revenue website to take advantage of the software and free offers and

get more information about free tax preparation services.

How will U.S. Postal Service changes affect filing?

Taxpayers who choose to file a paper return, should mail it early. Due to changes at the U.S. Postal Service, returns mailed in after April 9 may not receive a postmark on time. Taxpayers who still want to mail their paper returns can take them to a local USPS office and request a postmark no later than April 15, 2026.

Paper returns can also be physically deposited in drop boxes available on both the east and west sides of the Department of Revenue Building in Salem, or outside the DOR offices in Portland, Eugene, Medford, and Bend. A drop box at DOR’s Gresham office is available during business hours.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR CONT.

FEBRUARY 5

- CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
- Oregon Aviation Museum

- Open. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. 2475 Jim Wright Way. (Donation).
- Baby Laptime (birth to 2 yrs). 11:30 a.m. Cottage Grove Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
- Bohemia Gold Mining Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. 308

- South 10th St. (across from Bohemia Park).
- Community Center Table Tennis. 4-6 p.m. Reception Hall. 700 E. Gibbs Avenue. Tables, paddles, and balls provided.
- Celebrate Recovery. Soup dinner 5:15 p.m. Meeting 6 p.m. Calvary Chapel. 1447 Hwy 99N. CR is a Christian-based recovery program for any hurt, habit, or hang up that is based on 8 Principles & 12 Steps for more information call 541-554-8135.
- Pilates/Yoga Class. 5:30-6:30 p.m. Row River Grange. 34360 Row River Rd. Build strength, improve flexibility and balance in warm & welcoming class taught by Courtney. To register before the first class: alignyourlifecoach@gmail.com Fee: Five class passes \$60
- Karaoke Night. 9 p.m. to Midnight. Bohemian Tavern. 48 N. 9th St.

FEBRUARY 6

- CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.

- Oregon Aviation Museum Open. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. 2475 Jim Wright Way. (Donation).
- Baby Laptime (birth to 2 yrs). 11:30 a.m. Cottage Grove Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
- Bohemia Gold Mining Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. 308 South 10th St. (Across from Bohemia Park)>
- Community Center Table Tennis. 4-6 p.m. Reception Hall. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. Tables, paddles, and balls provided.
- Hi-Fi Friday. 4:30 p.m. Cottage Grove Public Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
- Celebrate Recovery. Soup dinner 5:15 p.m. Meeting 6 p.m. Calvary Chapel. 1447 Hwy 99N. CR is a Christian-based recovery program for any hurt, habit, or hang up that is based on 8 Principles & 12 Steps for more information call 541-554-8135.
- Pilates/Yoga Class. 5:30-6:30 p.m. Row River Grange. 34360 Row River Rd. Build strength, improve flexibility and balance in warm and welcoming

- class taught by Courtney. To register before the first class: alignyourlifecoach@gmail.com Fee: Five class passes \$60
- LB and Company (country/rock/blues). 6-9 p.m. Coast Fork Brewery. 106 S. 6th St.
- Weekly Pool Tournament 7 p.m. Bohemian Tavern. 48 N. 9th St. (Entry Fee: \$5 and BCA Rules).
- Cottage Theatre Play: A Piece of My Heart. 7:30 p.m. 700 Village Dr. More info: www.cottagetheatre.org A drama about six women who served in Vietnam, tracing their experiences before, during, and after the war.
- Black Box Burlesque. 7:30 p.m. Opal Center. 513 E. Main St. More info: www.opalcentercg.org “Lovesick Discotheque” a scintillating night of seduction, silliness, sparkles, and surprises.

FEBRUARY 7

- Share Fair USA 9 a.m. 1133 E. Main St. (Covered parking area next to Urban Kitchen). Reserve a space and share from your abundance with

- neighbors who are in need. Load up your unwanted items to give away for free (no bartering). Details about the weekly event is on Share Fair USA Facebook page or send email to eventsbyananda@gmail.com
- CG Public Library Hours Today. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. 700 E. Gibbs Ave. For information call: 541-942-3828.
- Storytime (all ages welcome). 11:30 a.m. Cottage Grove Public Library. 700 E. Gibbs Ave.
- American Legion Post 32 Monthly Meeting. Noon. 826 W. Main St. All veterans are invited.
- Bohemia Gold Mining Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. 308 South 10th St. (Across from Bohemia Park).
- Cottage Grove Museum Open. 1-4 p.m. Corner Birch Avenue and H St.
- Historic Rodeo Royalty Coronation. 5:30pm. Cottage Grove Armory. 628 E. Washington Ave. Oregon’s first Little Miss Rodeo Oregon, Lynlee Jo Perini, will be celebrated with food, drinks, and silent and live auctions supporting her inaugural year wardrobe and travel.

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COMMENTARY

CANDACE SOLESBEE
Sentinel Guest Column

Most folks don't pay much attention to local government until something feels off. When a decision hits close to home, when opinions clash, or when change feels uncomfortable— that's usually when we look up.

Funny enough, that's a lot like life. You don't really notice the highs without knowing the lows. Contrast teaches us what matters. I've found that to be true in public service.

In towns like ours, city council and mayoral positions are not paid. Still, many times they are viewed through the same lens as larger levels of government— from a distance, as if they're something other than regular

people who live here, shop here, and raise families here.

Running for office wasn't an easy decision for me. As a business owner, staying neutral often feels necessary. When you serve everyone, politics can feel like a line you don't want to cross. I knew stepping forward would bring opinions, criticism, and disagreement— but I also knew my city mattered too much not to try.

Right now, the world feels heavy. There are strong opinions everywhere, and people are exercising their right to speak out— and that's important. Civic engagement matters.

But in a small town like Cottage Grove, I want to remind everyone— We're still neighbors first.

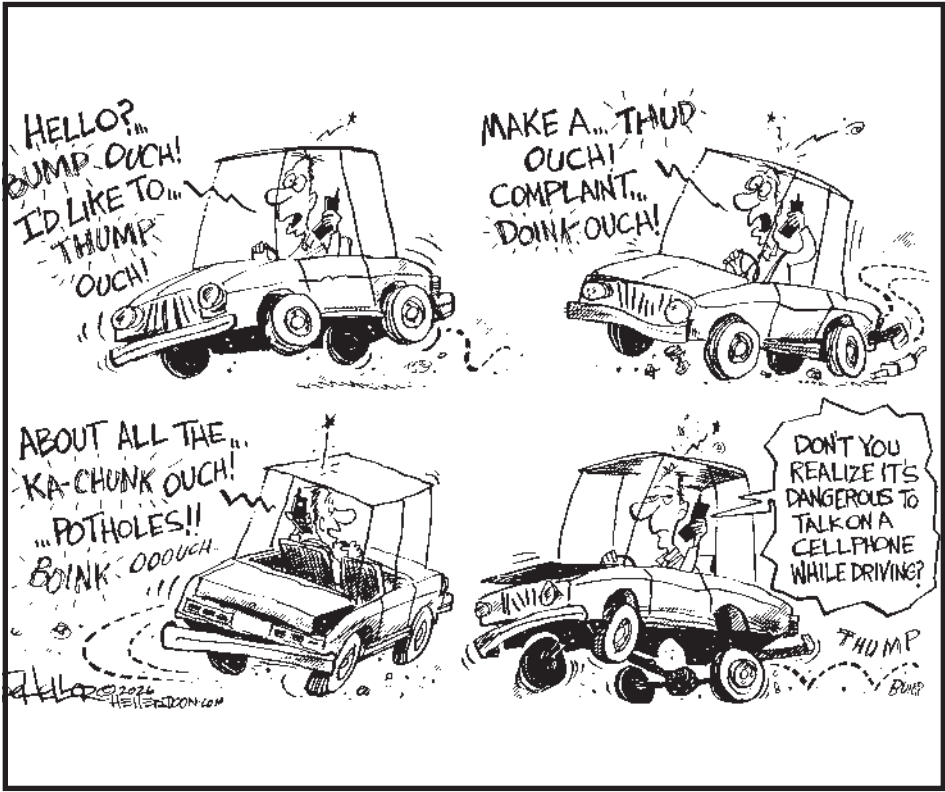
Disagreeing doesn't make someone the enemy. A different view doesn't make someone bad. The person across the table or across the street is still part of this community. We do best when we talk with each other, not at each other, and when we remember kindness still counts here... not because we put a sign in our yard, we walk the walk.

Local government isn't about politics as much as it is about people— streets, parks, safety, and the everyday work of caring for a place we love. It's imperfect and human, sometimes hard, but deeply meaningful.

This work has been, and remains, a labor of love.

Candace Solesbee is Mayor of Cottage Grove.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



COMMENTARY

Is Oregon turning a population corner? *Maybe*

RANDY STAPILUS
Oregon Capital Chronicle

If you've become accustomed to headlines about Oregon losing population as people flee the state, be prepared for something different. Not massively different. Just another way of looking at the state's trajectory.

Depending on the statistic judging it, Oregon's population growth early in this decade was soft, at times nonexistent, maybe even falling off slightly; Conventional wisdom began to develop that, for example, the state may lose its newly-acquired 6th Congressional District after the 2030 census as a result of not keeping up with the national average.

We're still some distance from that next census, so hard predictions are risky. But the most recent indicators are that Oregon's growth patterns are kicking in again as they weren't three and four years ago.

The most distinctive data point, especially for anyone in the Oregon-in-decline mindset, came days ago from United Van Lines. Its 2025 national movers study ranked Oregon highest in the nation among the 50 states for net inbound moves — 1,188 inbound (from other states) to 654 outbound. The next five ranked states were West Virginia, South Carolina,

Delaware, Minnesota and Idaho, states that don't fall on any easy ideological line. (New Jersey, New York and California brought up the end of the list.)

The company also tracked reasons for the moves, and while Oregon didn't rank especially high for purposes of retirement, moving closer to family or better cost of living, it did rank high for "life-style change" and "new job or company transfer." That suggests Oregon is looking better to people around the country. The company seems not to have tracked political or cultural reasons, though those might be hard to reliably obtain.

In the most recent study from U-Haul, the other large industry evaluator, Oregon ranked lower. But it still did much better than in previous years; U-Haul noted, "Oregon enjoys the largest year-over-year climb on the index, ranking 11th as a net-gain state in 2025 after ranking 34th as a net-loss state in 2024 — a jump of 23 positions."

These company reports are, of course, more in the area of anecdotal information than comprehensive statistics. So let's take a little wider view.

State population growth comes in two ways, either natural growth (births exceeding deaths) or arrivals

from other places exceeding departures. Oregon's natural growth long has been soft, so much of the picture hinges on moves to and from other states.

In the last decade, from 2010 to 2020, Oregon grew by about 11.9%, more than the overall national growth rate of 9.6%. The COVID-19 year of 2020 slowed that, as the state still grew but very slightly (about 0.7%), this time less than the nation overall.

In the next couple of years population growth hit the brakes even more, and seemed to stall almost completely in 2022.

Since then, clearer growth has returned, albeit modestly.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census and Portland State University are the main comprehensive analysts of population statistics. The Census said that Oregon lost population in 2022, but has since resumed growth. PSU has reported somewhat higher numbers.

In overview, the statistics site NCH Stats said "As of 2025, Oregon's population is estimated at 4,227,340, reflecting a steady growth rate of 0.89%, which ranks it as the 22nd fastest-growing state in the country according to the World Population Review. This places Oregon among the states experiencing

moderate population increases, aligning with its reputation as an attractive destination for residents."

Of course, such growth as Oregon has seen hasn't been evenly distributed.

The Portland metro area has seen growth light enough to drop it from 25 to 26 in size among the nation's largest metro areas. Portland and to some degree Multnomah County have had mostly sluggish growth in this decade. But neighboring Washington and Clackamas Counties have had plenty of activity.

And the heaviest growth has turned up in the region around Bend, in Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson Counties.

The counties which have seen the highest proportional

growth have been Crook and Sherman Counties, east of the Cascades — places where growth in data centers has been especially large.

Apart from psychological and economic considerations, the level of population in Oregon matters because the 6th congressional district seat, which the state added in 2022, could remain here or go somewhere else, to a faster-growing state.

If Oregon's numbers held at the 2022 and 2023 levels, that seat might well vanish. But if some of the newer indicators hold up in the next few years, so might the state's congressional representation.

Not to mention the state's overall state of mind.

Randy Stapilus has researched and written about Northwest politics and issues since 1976 for a long list of newspapers and other publications. A former newspaper reporter and editor, and more recently an author and book publisher, he lives in Carlton.

<https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2026/01/15/is-oregon-turning-a-population-corner-maybe/>

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Weekly Online Poll

What is your favorite 'Wake Up' beverage each morning?

☐ Coffee ☐ Tea ☐ Juice ☐ Soda Pop ☐ Water ☐ Other

Previous Poll Results

Are you changing your eating habits because of the increasing cost of food?

71% - Yes 28.6% - No

THE COTTAGE GROVE Sentinel

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SUPER FLU
From Page 1

“super flu.” Davis is quick to clarify that the nickname is more dramatic than the science warrants, but the strain does behave differently.

“H3N2 is a slight variation of influenza A, but that difference is enough that our bodies don’t recognize it,” he said. “Our immune systems have seen H1N1 for more than 20 years. H3N2 is newer, which is why it causes more severe illness, higher hospitalizations, and a longer duration of symptoms.”

The strain shift alone would be manageable, Davis said, if Lane County weren’t entering the season with what he calls “abysmally low” vaccination rates. Only 26 percent of adults received this year’s flu shot — far below pre pandemic levels. Most of those vaccinated are adults 65 and older, leaving younger

adults with especially low coverage.

LOW VACCINATION RATE

“The main difference between now and five years ago is our vaccination rate,” Davis said. “This year, with our low vaccination rate, we are just woefully unprepared for flu season.”

Public health officials emphasize that this is not about blame. Many people forget to get vaccinated, can’t find the time, or simply haven’t had the flu in years and assume they’re not at risk. But Davis stresses that vaccination plays a critical role in preventing severe illness, protecting vulnerable residents, and reducing strain on hospitals and schools.

“When people get the shot and keep themselves healthy, it has a tremendously positive impact on our community,” he said.

Even though this year’s vaccine is not a perfect match

for H3N2, it still offers meaningful protection. The N1 and N2 components share enough similarity to help the immune system respond.

“No matter what, the vaccine will still help you to some extent,” Davis said. “It reduces symptoms, shortens the duration of illness, and lowers your viral load so you’re less likely to pass it on.”

Influenza also carries a significant economic cost. A 2013 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study estimated Lane County’s annual flu related financial impact at roughly \$13 million. More than a decade later, Davis said, the cost is likely well over \$20 million.

Lane County Public Health monitors flu activity through a weekly call with local healthcare providers, a long-standing system that gives officials real time insight into what clinics and emergency rooms are seeing.

“We convene as many providers as we can

every Monday during the lunch hour,” Davis said. “Participation is high because they can get Continuing Medical Education credit, and it gives us boots on the ground information.”

RSV and COVID 19 have also been strongly represented in recent weeks, and both local and state data show rising positivity for influenza and COVID.

For residents wondering what to do now, Davis offers straightforward guidance: start with a conversation with your primary care provider. Lane County Public Health continues to recommend flu shots for all healthy adults, COVID boosters for those eligible, and RSV vaccination for adults 65 and older.

“We believe people should only make health decisions based on conversations with a licensed and trained healthcare provider,” Davis said. “These decisions should be based on real evidence, not political motivations.”

Lane County follows the recommendations of the West Coast Healthcare Alliance, which align with the CDC’s emphasis on individualized medical guidance. Despite shifting national conversations about respiratory virus protocols, Davis said the county’s core message has remained consistent: vaccination is the most effective way to prevent harmful illness and protect the broader community.

POSITIVE APPROACH

And despite the challenges of this year’s season, Davis is not sounding alarms.

“After COVID, people have gotten really sick of Public Health crying chicken little and claiming the sky is falling,” he said. “We’re not saying the sky is falling. There’s a very good chance we’re going to get through this flu season just fine, since we’re likely now on the downward trend.”

Still, he hopes residents will take the opportunity to protect themselves and others — especially the elderly, the immunocompromised, and those with heart or lung conditions who face the highest risk of complications.

“The lowest vaccinated age group is 20 to 30 year olds,” he said. “The reason they should get vaccinated is to prevent spreading the virus to someone for whom the flu could be fatal.”

As Lane County moves past the seasonal peak, public health officials say the community’s choices in the coming weeks will help determine how smoothly the rest of the season unfolds. The virus may be predictable, but its impact depends on the people it encounters.

See more details about influenza at the Oregon Health Authority’s website and follow developments online at cgsentinel.com and in the Wednesday print editions of The Sentinel.



Courtesy photo from Maximillian Arnold
Claire Savin directing the new Gem Tones Senior Choir during a December performance at Magnolia Gardens.



Courtesy photo from Maximillian Arnold
The Gem Tones, a new grant funded community senior choir, made its debut concerts at the Opal Center on Jan17-18. It first public performance was for the enjoyment of Magnolia Gardens Senior Living residents in December.

GEM TONES
From Page 1

challenging pieces. The residents’ warm reception helped calm nerves and build confidence ahead of the January concert series.

Among the singers were Mary Margaret and Hal

Hurst, a couple who first met decades ago while singing in a church choir in San Diego. Their shared musical history made joining the Gem Tones feel like a natural next chapter.

“The concerts were a bit of a blur for me,” Savin said with a laugh. “But that first sense of accomplishment

— getting through the entire program from start to finish with an audience — made opening night stand out.”

Mary Margaret said “Dona Nobis Pacem” was a highlight — a song her family used to sing while washing dishes or on car trips. Hal gravitated toward Mozart’s “Ave Verum,” drawn to its layered harmonies and classical structure.

“I enjoy the complex structure of Mozart’s Ave Verum,” he said. “There is nothing

more inspiring than being in the midst of a performance by a good choir that knows their music, with the harmonies flowing around you. I hope we might achieve that someday.”

MORE THAN MUSIC

For many members, the Gem Tones offer more than a chance to sing — they offer connection.

“I just really like the singing and trying to hit the right note to make our voices

blend,” Mary Margaret said. “And I know a lot more people now than I used to.”

Hal described the choir as “a chance for a creative outlet that will make me a more complete person.”

Savin sees that impact every week.

“Our vocal cords are connected to a nerve that plays a role in emotional regulation,” she explained. “Singing helps soothe that nerve. While singing is not a replacement for therapy, it is therapeutic.”

She hopes the Gem Tones will continue to provide a welcoming, low pressure space for adults who love to sing — especially those who may not want to audition for a musical or perform solo.

“It is good at any age to get out, be around other people, and work toward a common goal,” she said. “In Gem Tones, we do this through choir music.”

LOOKING AHEAD

The choir plans to resume weekly rehearsals in August, with the exact day still to be determined. Savin expects to approach the next season with a deeper understanding of the group’s abilities, vocal ranges, and interests — and with an openness to member suggestions.

Prospective singers can sign up through the Opal Center website or contact the center directly for updates.

Savin hopes many of this year’s singers will return — and that new voices will join them.

“Even in a group, singing for an audience takes courage,” Savin said. “Carving out time to rehearse week after week takes dedication. I’m really proud of the Gem Tones for what they accomplished this season. Their voices and their presence are valued, whether they’re used to singing in a choir or not.”

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Answers

1. 1916.
2. New Delhi.
3. Tennis elbow.
4. 2015.
5. Red.
6. 50.
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SPORTS

Lions hit the mats at Nick Lutz Memorial

WILL LOHRE
Cottage Grove Sentinel

The Siuslaw High School gym was abuzz with activity Jan. 16-17 as more than 30 boys, girls, and JV wrestling teams headed out to the coast for the annual Nick Lutz Memorial Invitational.

Cottage Grove was represented in all three competitions, and the Lions came away with plenty to show for their efforts.

The girls’ varsity team placed 3rd, the boys’ varsity team placed 4th, and the JV boys placed 11th. Some gritty standout performances headlined the meet for the Lions, and 15 Cottage Grove wrestlers grabbed podium placements, including two tournament champions.

Varsity Boys

For the second time this month, Jeffery Conklin finished atop the podium at a travel tournament, adding another gold medal to the mantle in Siuslaw to hang beside his hardware from Junction City. Conklin was dominant at 132 pounds, pinning all four of his opponents, to snatch the title. Conklin took down North Bend’s Nicholas Campbell in the final, achieving victory in just 1:06.

In addition to Conklin, there were five other wrestlers who placed for the

Lions, scoring critical points to earn Cottage Grove its fourth-place finish in a 31-team field. It was all the more impressive a team performance, given the Lions were missing some of the program’s key figures.

Jayden Davis put together an impressive day wrestling at 150 pounds, finishing second, but only barely. Davis won three matches to reach the final and gave North Bend’s Jackson Swanson all he could handle in the Championship bout. Davis was beaten, but only just. The match came down to an 8-6 decision in Swanson’s favor, leaving Davis with a 3-1 record on the weekend.

The final top three placement for the boys team came from Michael Hoye, who finished third at 106 pounds. After losing to the #1-seed Kevin Dollarhyde in the first round, Hoye rolled up his sleeves and dominated the rest of the way, winning three consecutive matches to earn third place.

Mason Barnett, Jake Palluck, and Ben Stewart were the final placers for Cottage Grove. Barnett took home fifth place at 190 pounds with a 2-2 record. Palluck finished 6th at 165 pounds. After starting 2-0, Palluck took a tough loss in the semifinal, losing to Waldport’s Logan Thomas by pin. Palluck finished in

sixth after losing his next two matches, but it should be noted that they were forfeits, and Palluck wasn’t able to compete. Finally, Stewart placed sixth at 285 pounds with a 3-3 record.

Girls Varsity

The Cottage Grove girls also flourished in Florence, taking third place in a tournament they were close to winning with 100 points. North Eugene and Dayton were the only teams to finish higher: North Eugene with 107 and Dayton with 103. The Lions were just seven points off the top team finish at the tournament.

Alexis Woody turned in the highest placement for Cottage Grove, taking second in the 130-pound weight class. Woody went 2-1 in the tournament, with impressive wins against her first two matches, both by fall. In the final, Woody ended up losing to Pleasant Hill’s Zaira Duarte.

Aliyah Urenda also notched a top-three performance, finishing third at 110 pounds. It was almost a top-two finish; however, Urenda was oh-so-close to wrestling in the final. After pinning her opponent in the quarterfinal, Urenda had an all-out scrap against North Eugene’s Lisseth Monzon. Though Urenda ended up on the losing side, it was a



Courtesy from photo the Cottage Grove Wrestling Facebook page

Jeffery Conklin won the Nick Lutz Memorial wrestling at 132 pounds.



Courtesy photo from the Cottage Grove Wrestling Facebook page

Alexis Woody finished second, wrestling at 130 pounds.

back-and-forth battle between the two, with Monzon grabbing the win with a 15-14 decision. Urenda bounced back with aplomb, winning her final two matches to secure the bronze.

Taylor Blank and Baylee Robinson both took fourth and fifth place, wrestling at 125 and 120 pounds, respectively. Blank started hot with a pin in the first round before being knocked out of the championship bracket in the quarterfinals. Fighting through the back door, Blank won three matches in a row to make the third-place match, two by pin, one by major decision. Clashing for

bronze, Blank came up a fraction short, losing a 5-1 decision, but ending the tournament with an impressive 4-2 record. Robinson also came out with back-to-back pins to start her tournament, beating her first two opponents in 1:42 combined. After losing in the semifinals, Robinson fell in the consolation semifinals into the fifth-place match, and she won on a forfeit to place fifth. Emma Adair was the final Lion to place at Siuslaw School, and she grabbed a sixth-place finish at 125 pounds, going 3-3 at the tournament.

JV Results

The JV Boys finished 11th overall out of 32 teams, and four wrestlers completed the weekend with hardware on their necks.

- Notable results included:
- Finnegan Kent (120 lbs) – 1st place
- Easton Horner (106 lbs) – 2nd place
- Logan Hall (113 lbs) – 3rd place
- Braxton Nowak (190 lbs) – 3rd place

Follow meet results at osaa.org and see Cottage Grove High School sports features online at cgsentinel.com and in the Wednesday print editions of The Sentinel.

Overhaul of Oregon school funding formula, goals of public education

Lawmakers will have a month to debate a bill that would get rid of the state’s 27-year-old education funding model and change standards for schools’ receiving funding.

ALEX BAUMHARDT
Oregon Capital Chronicle

There’s an ambitious effort underway at the Capitol to overhaul how the state determines funding levels for schools, but lawmakers are torn over the timing and larger questions about the goals of Oregon’s public education system.

Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, and Rep. Ricki Ruiz, D-Gresham, co-chairs of the six-member Joint Public Education Appropriation Committee, are spearheading the overhaul of Oregon’s school funding process, including what schools must demonstrate to receive funding.

On Thursday, the two shared with the committee a proposal that would entirely do away with Oregon’s 27-year-old Quality Education Model, the 11-member Quality Education Commission that produces recommended school funding levels every two years, and the education appropriation committee the two lawmakers lead. Lawmakers would have one month to debate and pass

the bill that has generational impact during the legislative session beginning Feb. 2.

“I think the job of our committee is really to dig in and do a lot of this work and look at the issues,” Sollman explained, adding that Oregon’s system is outdated and that “no other state has a QEM-type model.”

Since 1999, the Quality Education Commission, staffed by the Oregon Department of Education, has researched best practices and determined how much money is needed for a successful public education system, with the main target of reaching a 90% statewide graduation rate. The commission gives its findings, presented as the Quality Education Model, to the education appropriation committee and governor every two years to guide budget decisions.

Notably, in the history of the model and commission, the Legislature has only fully funded schools to the recommended level once, when they passed in 2025 a record \$11.4 billion for schools during the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years.

Under Sollman’s and Ruiz’s bill, the task of researching and determining how much money schools need would instead go to the Legislative Policy and Research Office, which would contract and work with a public or private firm that undertakes school finance analysis. As part of the analysis, researchers would have to hold panels with educators across the state about school needs.

The policy and research office would then present recommendations for school funding levels to the Legislature’s budget-writing Joint Ways and Means Committee every eight years. During intervening two-year budget cycles, the Department of Administrative Services would adjust the recommended spending levels to account for inflation and other costs.

Split over standards

The bill would also modify what the state’s “quality goals for public education” are. Sollman and Ruiz explained to lawmakers. It would define a “standard school district,” able to receive state and

federal funding, as one where all teachers are licensed.

Schools would be expected not just to meet a 90% graduation rate but to hit goals and standards established in a 2024 education accountability law.

That law requires school districts to set goals with the Oregon Department of Education for improving third grade reading scores, eighth grade math scores, ninth grade on-track rates, four- and five-year graduation rates, and regular attendance rates.

But lawmakers said the state education department is still working out some of the goals and standards discussed in the education accountability bill and how they’ll be reported.

Rep. Emily McIntire, R-Eagle Point, said schools have been begging lawmakers to stop passing legislative changes that cost them more time and money in reporting.

“I think that our schools are saying, ‘please stop. Please leave us alone. Please don’t do anything else. Please halt.’ And this, to me, is such a ginormous change, especially when we don’t have the

overhaul of (the 2024 law) done yet,” she said. “It feels like one of these things that we’re going to do, and then we’re going to find out what actually is required.”

Rep. Susan McLain, D-Forest Grove and a 40-year teacher who has played a large role in state education policy in the Legislature, told her colleagues on the committee that “there’s a lot in this bill that shocked me.”

The group had been discussing for years doing away with the old school funding model and the commission in charge of it, she said, but she was not prepared to completely change what schools have to demonstrate in order to receive funding.

“This bill is not just about doing away with the quality education model, or doing away with the appropriation committee. It also has to do with responsibilities for other parts of our system, and it has standards for other parts of our system,” she said.

Ruiz said enforcing more nuanced targets and standards that schools need to demonstrate in receiving funding would bring greater public trust in the schools and in

the Legislature’s ability to ensure schools are improving and meeting the Legislature’s expectations.

“I’m just sick and tired that we put so much money into the education system and we’re seeing little to no progress,” Ruiz said.

The committee ultimately agreed to advance the bill and debate it during the legislative session.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been in a committee where I’ve had to say: ‘OK, I’m going to give a courtesy yes,’ and think, ‘oh my gosh, what would happen if it passed?’ And that’s where I’m at,” McLain said.


<https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2026/01/16/overhaul-of-oregon-school-funding-formula-goals-of-public-education-has-lawmakers-at-odds/>

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Alex Baumhardt / Oregon Capital Chronicle

Chiloquin Elementary School is part of the Klamath County School District in southern Oregon. Lawmakers are proposing an overhaul to the state’s 27-year-old school funding model.