

Recovery

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hol is allowed in Oxford Houses. Residents pay rent, and those who don't work are required to do a minimum of 20 hours per week of community service.

There are more than 250 Oxford Houses in Oregon. The first in Baker City, at 3065 B St., opened last spring. Seven men live there.

Baker City's second Oxford House, which has space for seven women, opened in August 2023 at F and Grove streets.

(Oxford Houses are not co-ed.)

New Directions Northwest bought both houses with money from \$1.4 million state grant for housing, said Shari Selander, New Directions CEO.

New Directions, the Baker City agency that among other things offers addiction counseling, paid \$255,000 for the B Street house, and \$364,000 for the Grove Street home, according to Baker County Assessor's Office records.

Balthazar, who moved to Baker City in late 2017, said that although she had finished the treatment program at New Direction's Baker House 90-day program, she had no confidence in her ability to remain sober.

Balthazar was on probation after pleading guilty, in June 2023, to fraudulent use of a credit card, second-degree theft and identity theft after using someone else's credit card.

As part of her plea agreement, charges of possessing fentanyl and methamphetamine, were dismissed.

Balthazar, who said she struggled after her husband was murdered, said she didn't trust herself to stay away from drugs once she left the Baker House treatment program.

She was especially frightened of being alone.

"The big killer in recovery is isolation," Balthazar said. "In early recovery you're still crawling, you're not walking yet. It's a dangerous time."

But then Balthazar learned about the Oxford House.

She applied and was accepted. She moved into the house. She was not alone.

But perhaps more important, she shared a space with six other women who knew, as only other people in recovery could know, the challenges that Balthazar dealt with every day.

"They understand my apprehension," Balthazar said. "Without the Oxford House I don't think I would be alive. It would not have gone well."

But instead of continuing her recovery alone, fighting the urge to seek out the places where she once felt comfortable, places where she knew drugs would be available, Balthazar was part of a family.

She calls it a "rebirth." At the Oxford House she has found "love, support, family, unity."

Less than a year after pleading guilty, Balthazar is working as a waitress.

She has goals that would have seemed unattainable not long ago.

"I couldn't imagine even renting an apartment, and now I want to own my own home," Balthazar said.

But she feels no pressure. Oxford Houses have no time



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

The home at 3065 B St., behind the fence, opened in 2023 as Baker City's first Oxford House. Seven men who are recovering from drug and alcohol addiction live in the home.

limits for residents, said Jess Wise, an outreach worker for the organization who helps oversee Oxford Houses in Eastern Oregon and who has lived in a house in La Grande for almost a decade. (There are four Oxford Houses in La Grande, three for men and one for women; four in Pendleton, three for men and one for women; and one, for men, in Ontario.)

The lack of a deadline is comforting, Balthazar said.

She is in no hurry to leave a setting that has proved so instrumental in helping her change her life for the better.

"I have a beautiful home with beautiful people," Balthazar said.

Other Oxford House residents extoll the virtues

Devan League, 33, grew up in Elgin.

Like Balthazar, he is in treatment for addiction.

League said he has tried multiple programs.

"They didn't work out for me," he said.

But then, last year, he moved into the Oxford House in Baker City.

"It saved my life," League said. "Having a safe place to go, and sober people around me."

Like Balthazar, League said he didn't trust his own judgment as he continues to recover from addiction.

"I wasn't responsible enough to do things on my own," League said.

But as a resident of the Oxford House, he doesn't have to.

Instead, League said, he's part of a team.

The seven residents meet every week, and sometimes more often, to parcel out chores and discuss other matters of mutual interest.

"We all are equal in the house," he said. "We work together."

League said the camaraderie is essential to his recovery.

"I knew when somebody's having a rough time because I can relate to it," he said.

League said he has also embraced what Wise said is a focus for Oxford Houses nationwide — community service.

League said he and other residents of the Baker City houses strive to help neighbors, even with things as simple as carrying groceries from car to house.

"We have a chance to give back," he said.

League is also contributing in a way that more directly relates to his own experience — he's a peer support worker at New Directions Northwest, helping others who have trod the same troubled ground that he did.

Darion Grove, 29, has lived in the Baker City Oxford House for women since it opened last August.

She also helped to bring in other residents.

Grove said the stability and

reliability of the house, and the women she shares it with, including Balthazar, are vital elements as she continues her recovery from addiction, a journey that she started about two and a half years ago.

"This is a good place for me," Grove said. "I love being where I'm at. I'm building a foundation."

Although Oxford Houses don't require residents to leave after a certain period, Wise said they do have occasional openings as someone decides he or she is

ready to live either on their own or, perhaps, to return to a family they lost due to their addiction.

Grove said she talks with a former housemate in Baker City who moved out but continues to thrive in her recovery.

League said a former resident of the Oxford House where he lives has left but is "doing amazing."

"It's because of what you learn in the house," he said.

The need for housing remains

Selander, the New Directions Northwest CEO, said the opening of the two Oxford Houses in Baker City has provided a "missing component" in the system that helps people recover from addiction and become productive citizens.

But the need remains, Selander said.

There are waiting lists for both Baker City houses.

The shortage of affordable housing is not limited to people in recovery, of course.

But Selander said people who have just completed treatment confront challenges beyond the purely financial.

Without a place to live where drugs and alcohol are not allowed, Selander said recovering addicts can struggle to resist their cravings.

"It makes it very difficult to maintain their recovery," she said.

David Fry, program manager for addiction services at New Directions, said he has seen people struggle for that very reason.

"When they don't have housing, things fall apart," Fry said.

He said he met recently with residents at the Oxford House men's house in Baker City. Fry called the house the "biggest blessing."

He said people who have not maintained their sobriety are succeeding now because they have a supporting place to live.

Bob Forsyth, who is a recovering addict who also works at New Directions, agreed.

He called the opening of the two Oxford Houses in Baker City a "huge step forward" in the effort to help people maintain their sobriety.

Baker City Police Chief Ty Duby said his department hasn't had any problems related to the two Oxford Houses.

Books

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president of the Baker City club.

"Each area of focus leads to peace," he said. Those areas are:

- Promoting peace
- Fighting disease
- Providing clean water
- Saving mothers and children
- Supporting education
- Growing local economies
- Protecting the environment

Krohn said the club still has copies of the book, and would like to connect with homeschool families. For information, send a message through the club's Facebook page.

Support

The Baker City Rotary Club has several fundraisers that fund projects such as these books, as well as scholarships, the annual Easter egg hunt, literacy programs and the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards.

The club has two main fundraisers. One is coming up in July, when the club sells buffalo burgers at Geiser-Pollman Park during Miners Jubilee.

The other fundraiser is the flag program. Individuals or businesses can purchase a subscription for \$45 a year and Rotarians will place a flag on



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

The book "Andy and Elmer's Apple Dumpling Adventure" teaches children about Rotary Club and its four-way test. The Baker City Rotary Club bought books for fourth graders in the Baker School District.

seven days throughout the year. For information, or to participate, send a message through the club's Facebook page.

Birthday

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Updates to the weekend's schedule will be posted on the event's social media pages — search for Baker City 150 on Facebook, and #BakerCity150 on Instagram or check Travel Baker County posts.

History

The Oregon Legislature created Baker County on Sept. 22, 1862, carving the new county out of Wasco County. At that time, with Oregon itself just three years old, Wasco County covered the entire state east of the Cascades.

Auburn, the town near where Henry Griffin discovered gold on Oct. 23, 1861, kicking off the Eastern Oregon gold rush, was the first Baker County seat.

But when the easily mined placer gold around Auburn

Baker City population

Baker City's population has been unusually steady, among Oregon cities with more than 5,000 residents. Most of those cities have grown over the past several decades, at varying rates, but Baker City's population has stayed between 9,134 and 10,099 since the 1940 Census. The city's population, at each U.S. Census:

1880 — 1,258	1930 — 7,858	1980 — 9,471
1890 — 2,604	1940 — 9,342	1990 — 9,140
1900 — 6,663	1950 — 9,471	2000 — 9,860
1910 — 6,742	1960 — 9,986	2010 — 9,828
1920 — 7,729	1970 — 9,354	2020 — 10,099

played out, and the town's population quickly dwindled, a new town, at the southern end of the Powder River Valley several miles northeast of Auburn, began to grow. Baker City was platted in 1865, its first post office opened in 1866, and the city supplanted Auburn as county seat in 1868. But Baker City wasn't officially incorporated until 1874.

The city was named for Col. Edward Dickinson Baker, Oregon's U.S. senator who was killed during the Civil War Battle of Ball's Bluff on Oct. 21, 1861 — just four days before Griffin found gold. Voters decided in 1911 to change the city's name to Baker. Then, in 1989 voters chose to return to the original name starting in 1990.

Rates

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The combined increase, for a customer who doesn't exceed three units of water per month, is \$5.15 per month.

The water and sewer departments are separate from the city's general fund, which includes the police and fire departments.

Revenue from water and sewer bills goes to those departments to maintain the water and sewer systems. Those departments don't receive property tax revenue. Property taxes go instead to the general fund.

Water department revenue from customers totaled about \$3.2 million in fiscal year 2022-23. Sewer department revenue totaled about \$1.8 million.

Franchise fee

The city council voted earlier this year to negotiate an increase in franchise fees from 5% to 7%. The city charges franchise fees to utilities, such as Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and Cascade Natural Gas, that use public rights-of-way.

But the city also charges residents an "in lieu of" franchise fee for water and sewer lines. Unlike the rest of the revenue from water and sewer bills, the franchise fee — about \$245,000 per year in fiscal 2022-23 — goes to the general fund, which includes the police and fire departments.

The increase in franchise fees for other utilities will take effect when new contracts are negotiated.

The increase for the in lieu of fee, which city residents pay, takes effect July 1.

For a customer who has a monthly water/sewer bill of \$100, the increase is \$2 per month.

Water billing averaging

One other change this year, which doesn't affect water and sewer rates, is that the city will update customers' average monthly water usage once per year rather than four times per year as in the past.

Murphy said the city checks water usage, by water meters, three times per year. Some bills are based on expected water usage, with the amount for other bills adjusted to reflect the customer's actual water use.

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June is National PTSD Awareness Month

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common mental health condition caused by events that can impact physical and mental health. Yet, a series of events can lead to increased symptoms. Call us to discuss your health.

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