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More farmworkers get vaccinated

Pediatric COVID-19 cases spike

Dora Totoian Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

When Arismel Cardenas walked into a Gervais vaccination clinic in July, her nerves made her stomach turn. She'd heard of some people's COVID-19 vaccine symptoms and worried how she would react.

But Cardenas also thought of how her husband, a nursery worker, had been hospitalized for COVID-19 in the spring and how the two eldest of her five children, ages 12 and 9, became sick, and are eager to begin classes in person in the Woodburn School District as the delta

variant rages.

In the end, a slight fever and sore arm were worth it to keep her children safer as they return to in-person learning, she said.

"I'm not saying it'll protect us 100%, but it'll help us be less likely to end up in the hospital," Cardenas, 35, said in Spanish. "They made it for a reason."

Cardenas is part of a rising number of farmworker families getting vaccinated in recent weeks, in part out of concern for children amid the delta variant, according to several community-based organizations that serve agricultural workers.

The work of these organizations and the Oregon Health Authority has stayed largely consistent in the past month, distributing PPE, encouraging vaccines — often through personal stories and

connecting farmworkers to other resources.

"We have to make sure we're protecting the parents in the worksite, but also the children, and that we're protecting families as a whole," Daysi Bedolla Sotelo, organizing director at PCUN, Oregon's farmworker union, said. "It's about having a generational approach so we don't forget anybody or leave anybody behind."

Earning farmworkers' trust

Though the government declared farmworkers "essential" at the beginning of the pandemic, the Oregon Health Authority did not open vaccinations to them until the end of March, a decision that some advocates said contributed to disparities in vaccination

rates between people of color and white people.

As of Friday, 51.8% of Hispanic/Latino people in Oregon have been vaccinated, compared to 67.1% of white people.

The state's vaccine database does not track professions, so it's difficult to know how many farmworkers have been vaccinated.

Advocacy organizations face significant challenges when trying to convince many agricultural workers to trust a vaccine effort pushed by the U.S. government.

The U.S. government has a history of medical malpractice toward Latinos and other communities of color. For example, California targeted Mexican-

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Mill City Volunteer Fire Department is recognized for its efforts in saving the town during the anniversary memorial for the 2020 Labor Day wildfires in Mill City. PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL DOLLINS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Oregon limits 'love letters' from home buyers

Jessica Guynn
USA TODAY NETWORK

DJ and Lauren Bowser had been hunting for a home in the Miracle Mile neighborhood of Los Angeles for months when they bid on a 1920s Spanish bungalow.

They offered nearly \$200,000 over the asking price of \$1.29 million with friendly terms.

To sweeten the deal, their agent advised them to enclose a heartfelt letter and family snapshots. They felt awkward about it — "you have a sense of being judged" — so they mostly wrote about how much Bear, their 11-pound, 5-year-old Chihuahua terrier mix, would enjoy running around in the grassy backyard after living in an apartment her whole life.

They beat out multiple offers, including one that was higher than theirs.

"We were told Bear won us the house," DJ Bowser said.

In hot markets where multiple bidders are jockeying for the same house, homebuyers will do just about anything to get their offer noticed — and that includes writing "love letters" in hopes of making a personal connection with a seller.

These ardent pitches often rave about a home's natural light or historic character. They also contain deeply personal details about people's lives along with photographs, and even videos.

Increasingly, though, real estate agents are refusing to accept or deliver these letters as concerns grow that they violate fair housing laws.

Oregon is the first state to ban the practice.

Starting in January, a real estate agent must reject any communication that would reveal the buyer's race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status or familial status, according to the new law.

"We are not impeding on their freedom of speech or written communication. We are limiting transmission of communications that are not relevant and could potentially be breaking fair housing laws," Rep. Mark Meek, D-Oregon City, who sponsored the legislation, told USA TODAY.

While most people are familiar with racist practices like redlining, restrictive covenants and predatory lending, love letters and their accompanying photographs are "the dirty little secret of real estate," Meek said.

"Buyers send letters and photos of their family to the seller in hopes of having a connection, and in many cases they do," he said. "I began wondering if these letters were exacerbating disparities out there."

Fair-housing experts say love letters can create bias, even if it's unintentional.

They tap into that desire "to sell your house to another family that's like my family," University of Missouri law professor Rigel Oliveri said.

Even though a love letter helped them buy a house, DJ Bowser said he supports the new Oregon law.

"You wonder why sellers choose the families that they choose or the individuals that they choose to purchase their homes, and I hope it's not based on biases," he said. "However, in the end, these letters create a bias no matter what."

Fair housing violation or 'woke cancel culture'?

The real estate industry is split on the practice.

Cambron Elsey, an agent in Charleston, South Carolina, who has been opposed to love letters for years, says taking them out of the equation is a "huge service" to the real estate profession.

But Ken Calhoun, a broker in El Dorado County, California, says legislating against the letters is unnecessary and just another example of "woke cancel culture" run amok.

In the 45 years he has been selling real estate, Calhoun says he has never seen a seller refuse to accept an offer or choose one offer over another based on skin color or a legally protected status.

"Will they have a letter-monitoring department to

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'A lot of heroes that night'

Santiam Canyon residents share stories from 2020 fires

Virginia Barreda Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Dave Keasey was abruptly woken by firefighters pounding on the front door of his Mill City home as flames reached his driveway on Labor Day last year.

With minutes to spare, they fled the Santiam Canyon, forced to leave two of their cats and nearly all their belongings behind.

When he and his wife, Dorothy, returned two days later, they expected to find only embers and ashes at the top of the hill where they lived.

Instead, they discovered their house had survived, and so had their cats.

During a recent memorial service to honor the five people killed in the fire and those who helped fight the historic blaze, Keasey thanked the firefighters who were there to protect his house.

"Had the firefighters not arrived to awaken us at midnight, I have no doubt we would've been trapped by the fire with nothing but a garden hose to fight it," he said.

"There were a lot of heroes that night. Perhaps foremost are those who stood on the fireline to save this town. Those volunteer firefighters not even from Mill City or Gates who stayed behind when we left at



A community member signs a banner to thank unsung heroes whose efforts aided the Santiam Canyon.

the risk of being trapped themselves doing what they could to try and save our home. And they did save our home. They saved us."

About 150 people gathered at Kimmel Park in Mill City Sunday for the Canyon Strong Wildfire Memorial on the one-year anniversary of the Beachie Creek and Lionshead fires.

It was one of three memorial gatherings held in the canyon over Labor Day weekend.

Another in Detroit invited community members to

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COVID-19: Is it safe to eat at restaurants right now?

Tirion Morris and Connor Radnovich
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Jonathan Jones says he is kept up at night worrying about the possibility someone gets sent to the hospital with COVID-19 after dining or working a shift at his restaurant.

It's one of the biggest reasons why Jones decided to voluntarily end indoor dining a few weeks ago at Epilogue



Many restaurants have returned to indoor dining following the transition to the "high risk" category in Marion and Polk counties.

ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Kitchen and Cocktails in downtown Salem.

"If there's a way to prevent that from happening as much as possible, then I feel ethically responsible to take those steps," Jones said.

Since his decision, Epilogue's sales are down 50%.

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