



In Business

EOLS moving forward

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SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

THE OBSERVER



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THURSDAY • April 2, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Judy Lucius of La Grande

Two new COVID-19 cases in Union County

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County has two new cases of the COVID-19 virus. One of them involves a Barreto Manufacturing crew member at the company's Hot Lake plant.

The Center for Human Development Inc., which oversees public health in the county, reported late

Wednesday afternoon that the new cases bring the county's total to three. The center did not provide any information about who the victims are. Barreto Manufacturing owner Greg Barreto said the confirmation of his employee's infection came Tuesday.

The employee came down with a fever on March 20, according to the

notice the company sent Wednesday to employees. Barreto, who is in his sixth and final year as representative of Oregon House District 58, said he was in Salem when the employee called in sick with COVID-19 symptoms and promptly sought testing for the virus. But the wait time for the confirmation, Barreto said, is frustrating.

"That was nine days ago," he said Wednesday afternoon.

Barreto said Thursday will mark 14 days since the employee presented with symptoms and no other employees have had any. He also said the employee has been home and isolating and has not needed to go to the hospital. But the business has stepped up its

sanitization and social distancing efforts.

"You have to do all of these things and hope for the best," he said.

Barreto Manufacturing has laid off 85 employees since mid-March due to the economic downturn from the efforts to curtail the spread of the 2019 coronavirus. Barreto said the company is operating with

a skeleton crew to finish out the remaining orders.

The Center for Human Development and the Oregon Health Authority are working to identify and isolate anyone who may have been in close contact with these individuals in the last 14 days, according to the news release from

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By the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 827,419
Worldwide deaths: 40,777
U.S. cases: 186,101
U.S. deaths: 3,603
Oregon cases: 738
Oregon deaths: 19
Union County cases: 3
Union County deaths: 0
Wallowa County cases: 1
Wallowa County deaths: 0
*As of 3 p.m. Wednesday, April 1

Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Military Department

FAQ

(from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

THERE IS A CASE IN MY COMMUNITY. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

During an outbreak, stay calm and put your preparedness plan to work. Follow the steps below:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Keep away from people who are sick. Limit close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).
- Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation, including temporary school dismissals in your area.
- Continue practicing everyday preventive actions. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains 60% alcohol. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
- Notify your workplace as soon as possible if your regular work schedule changes. Ask to work from home or take leave if you or someone in your household gets sick with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Stay in touch with others by phone or email. If you have a chronic medical condition and live alone, ask family, friends and health care providers to check on you.

Education



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande High School is shown March 17 after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown closed on-campus learning through April 28. The Oregon Department of Education is requiring school districts to take a historic step in the likely event that schools in Oregon remain closed past that deadline.

Oregon expands distance learning

■Distance learning begins April 13, school closures may run through June

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The likelihood that Oregon's public school closure will continue beyond April is real. So real, the Oregon Department of Education is requiring school districts to take a historic step.

The agency directed all public school districts late Monday to prepare to begin delivering classes via a distance learning model due to the COVID-19 pandemic. School districts must start offering classes April 13 as part of the state's new Distance Learning for All program.

Colt Gill, the director of the Oregon Department of Education and deputy superintendent of public instruction, said it appears increasingly likely schools will not reopen this academic year because of the coronavirus outbreak.

"As we continue the effective measures of Gov. (Kate) Brown's 'Stay Home, Save Lives' order, we also foresee the strong possibility that our students may not come through our school house doors this academic year," Gill said in a paper discussing the directive. "This calls for a shift from providing supplementary education to a formidable effort to provide Distance Learning for All."

InterMountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill said the state had to take this step because nobody knows how long the school closure, now set to run to at least April 28, will continue.

"The virus knows no timeline," Mulvihill said.

He said the InterMountain ESD will be doing everything it can, including providing technical support, to help the school districts in its service area, which includes Union County.

"The ESD is full steam ahead on this," Mulvihill said.

Prior to Monday's announcement, school districts were to offer supplemental curriculum for students via distance learning during the April closure.

"This will be a fundamental change for us," Mulvihill said.

SHORT TIME FRAME

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said it will be tough to develop a distance education program on such short notice. Pettit said it normally takes between six months and a year to create a distance learning program but now school districts are being asked to do this in two weeks.

"It is a tall order, but we will forge ahead," Pettit said.

He said a big plus of Distance Learning for All is it will keep students connected with their teachers.

North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon said he is worried families hit hard economically by the COVID-19 crisis may

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Addicts find help during COVID-19

■Online meetings take place of in-person gatherings

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — As local community centers close due to COVID-19, those who gathered there are looking for new places to meet.

On of those groups, Alcoholics Anonymous has turned to online meetings and forums for continued support.

"Online meetings have been around a long time and have been popular with people who live in remote places or who can't physically get to a meeting for whatever reason," a local AA member said. "This pandemic has certainly multiplied the use of online platforms. Is it as good as person to person traditional meetings? I'm sure there are differing opinions and I know many who are really missing the fellowship found in a traditional meeting, but when something like this happens and our choices are limited, we're grateful for the technology."

The person spoke on condition of anonymity.

District 29 is the local AA community that covers Baker, Union and Wallowa counties. Some meetings, including in Elgin, Joseph, Cove and Wallowa, remain open. However, the sobriety support suspended all meeting in La Grande and instead encouraged members to seek help and support online. Before

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Options available to cover cost of COVID-19 tests

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County is up to three confirmed cases of the new coronavirus, and the Oregon Health Authority reported neighboring Wallowa County now has its first case, while nearby Umatilla County has five.

The state health agency also reported 25 negative tests and one positive test for Union County. The test cost \$35.91-\$51.31, depending on whether the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regulate the test, according to Medicare Administration Contractor test pricing. Health insurance experts explained individuals have options for covering the costs.

Medicaid, which is available to adults and children who meet income, residency and additional requirements, with year round enrollment options. Medicare, which is for is a program for those 65 and

older or younger people with particular disabilities, can be supplemented with Medicaid to cover some costs. Private insurance companies in the state of Oregon are also covering testing costs, according to Holly Sorensen, an outreach programs coordinator for the Northeast Oregon Network.

But those who have been laid off due to COVID-19 closures also may have lost health benefits that came with the job.

Insurance broker Teresa Schwab explained the have some options.

"Your employer is required to offer you a COBRA Plan," she stated, but most folk pass on that.

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 is a federal law that allows some employees to continue health insurance coverage after leaving or losing their jobs. Schwab said COBRA "premiums are 100% your responsibility and they are

costly."

People also now qualify for special enrollment for an Affordable Care Act plan, she said, and those who are unemployed or under-employed may qualify for a tax subsidy, meaning they receive reduced premiums.

The federal government has re-opened open enrollment, Schwab explained, allowing people who do not have an insurance

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
25 LOW
Partly cloudy



Friday
47/24
A shower in spots

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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SATURDAY

SHERIFF'S NEW COMPUTERS

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