

DAY CARE

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attending her day care center would be down. This is because many parents are working at home due to COVID-19, which means they have no need for day care.

A plus for day care providers is they are exempt from some social distancing rules such as the 6-foot guideline, Hansen said. Rules day care centers must adhere to include limiting the number of children at a center to no more than 10.

The children Hansen is caring for range in age from 2 to 10, and she is trying her best to keep them at ease in the face of the health crisis. Hansen said the younger children seem to be fussy and anxious.

“They know something is different but they don’t know what it is,” said Hansen, who tries to give these children extra attention and love to comfort them.

Michelle Richardson, the owner of Michelle’s Child Care in Cove, is among the day care providers that closed following Brown’s order. The parents of almost



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Dax Law assembles a structure last week during day care at Central Elementary School in La Grande.

all the six to seven children Richardson provides care for have essential jobs, which means she could have remained open. She closed, though, because all her parents were asked by their employers to work from home.

Richardson said she greatly misses the children she cared for, especially her youngest, a pair of 2-year-olds.

She said she wishes she could see them because they are at an age when they are quickly developing. “I am missing their changes,” she said.

Richardson said the clo-

sure has posed a financial hardship, one compounded by delays in getting unemployment payments from the state, a source of major frustration. Another concern is she does not know what to expect when she does reopen since her children will have become accustomed to staying at home with their parents.

“They will have to re-acclimate,” she said. “They will have a different routine.”

While the COVID-19 crisis has dramatically reduced the number of day care centers in Union County, it also has given

rise to a new one at La Grande’s Central Elementary School. The day care center is open every weekday to children age 5 and older whose parents are first responders and health care providers.

These children receive day care from Central’s non-teaching staff, plus lunches and snacks, all at no cost. The La Grande School District is being reimbursed for the meals by the federal government, and the Central staff is continuing to be paid during the shutdown under the terms of Brown’s executive order. The day care services are being provided by staff who have had their duties reassigned, said the school district’s business manager, Chris Panike.

At Central, children spend their days in a classroom and in an enclosed playground. Members of Central’s staff are devoting a significant portion of their time helping children with distance learning classroom projects at their schools. About 12 children attend the day care sessions, and they are from all elementary schools throughout Union County. The service will be offered through June 2.

MARKET

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entrances, and new regulations call for booths to be at least 6 feet apart, for shopper lines to be chalked in 6-foot increments and for the market never to have an average of more than one person per 90 square feet. The number of people at the rope-off site will be monitored to make sure this threshold is not exceeded.

The rules also prohibit loitering or socializing, and nobody will be allowed to eat on the premises. Vendors are being encouraged to round up their prices to the next dollar to limit the number of coins and bills exchanged during transactions.

Avila is confident customers will adjust to the new rules with limited difficulty because of what they have experienced during the pandemic.

“We are definitely used to doing things in a different manner,” she said.

For a complete list of the rules, visit the La



Observer file photo

The La Grande Farmers Market opens Saturday with social distancing rules due to coronavirus.

Grande Farmers Market website. www.lagrande-farmersmarket.org.

Thanks to a state grant, available again through the market’s six-month season is the Double Up Food Bucks program. The program allows the market to double the value of the federal government’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

At the La Grande Farmers Market, anyone making up to \$10 in purchases with an EBT card will receive another \$10 to spend at the market.

“It will help those who are the most vulnerable,” Bogard said.

IDAHO

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of Jackson County is pending. Many of the rejections, McCarter said, were because of procedural problems such as in Jackson County. The county clerk there, Christine Walker, said Friday that initial requests were rejected mostly because they were deemed by county legal counsel to be administrative rather than legislative, as required by the Oregon constitution. That was the same reason Union County rejected the petition.

Jackson County could decide Tuesday on the group’s most recent pro-

posal. And as of last week, there are appeals for at least five of the petitions. The effort also includes several counties in northeastern California.

County clerks in the Oregon counties were contacted for confirmation of the petition’s request in their counties, but only a few responded and confirmed the status McCarter listed.

McCarter is uncertain about the effort’s outcome.

“I’m not sure. I believe it can happen, but until we start going down that road ... we won’t know,” he said. But, he noted, it has been done in the past. The U.S. Constitution and state constitutions include provisions

both for creating new states and moving state borders.

The most dramatic case was during the Civil War, when West Virginia — which had refused to join Virginia in seceding from the Union — seceded from Confederate Virginia and formed a new state in 1863. Later that year, the new state acquired a couple more Virginia counties.

More recently, in 1961, a county border was altered between Minnesota and North Dakota.

McCarter said a recent resolution passed in West Virginia welcomes Virginia counties to join the state over opposition to the Virginia governor’s strict gun control policies. He said a

case more similar to Oregon’s is ongoing in rural Illinois where people are frustrated with being dominated by urban Chicago’s control of the state. They are considering joining more rural Indiana, he said.

But the effort isn’t just to get Salem to sit up and take notice of rural Oregonians.

“We’re not doing it just to make a statement,” McCarter said. “We are doing it to actually move Oregon’s border.”

EOU

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An in-person ceremony is the preferred option for both on-campus and online students. Walking across the stage to receive your diploma from the president is a huge milestone and represents an incredible investment of time and effort.”

Alex Navarro, who is finishing an art degree at EOU, had planned to walk at graduation to celebrate the culmination of his years at EOU. With the cancellation of the ceremony, Navarro’s family changed their plans to come visit. As disappointed as Navarro was to hear the commencement was being moved to digital, the family agreed the cancellation was for a good reason.

“We’re living in confusing times right now and I’m glad EOU played it safe,” Navarro said. “Even if it were still on, I wouldn’t go. People are facing much more difficult hardships than missing a commencement ceremony.”

The program for the virtual commencement and what it will look like is under development, Seydel said.

EOU is not the only university to revamp graduation. The University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Blue Mountain Community College and other universities and colleges across the state and nation also are offering virtual graduations and postponing commencement ceremonies to the fall.

Seydel acknowledged the cancellation will not directly affect the university financially, as tickets are free and students are able to purchase and use

their cap and gowns. But spring graduation at EOU brings to town around 3,000 people. With no graduation, the local economy may take a hit.

Scott McConnell, owner of Side A Brewing in downtown La Grande, said graduation weekend is one of the busiest times of the year. Because of coronavirus, McConnell, many things remain uncertain.

Dining at the Landing, the restaurant at The Landing Hotel, also sees a large influx of diners during graduation weekend. Dining at the Landing owner Merlyn Baker said the cancellation of the ceremony and restrictions on seated dining means the restaurant will see a major impact to revenue.

“The commencement itself is not the big effect. Is the parents and supporters who come to eat, to celebrate the student and to help them move out,” Baker said. “It is more related to the extended days that they are here.”

The hotel books rooms for graduation a year in advance, and hotel owner Karin Tsiatsos said all the reservations are canceled. However, she said the business likely will be able to fill the rooms in the meantime.

“We have a lot of people canceling, but we also have people booking,” Tsiatsos said.

But the Best Western in La Grande reported the university’s change has affected its business.

“There are half the reservations from before all this started,” said Krystie Davidson, district manager.

The hotel is usually at 90% occupancy around this year time of year, she said, but this weekend the hotel

was at 44% occupancy.

“Graduation weekend is another (big) weekend. Our rates don’t change, we are just more busy, but now we are not,” Davidson said.

Union County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Suzannah Moore-Hemann said the loss of the in-person graduation will have a negative effect on the local economy.

“We won’t see the influx for that weekend that we normally have,” Moore-Hemann said. “In light of everything, we are going to see a different polarized shift, and that is one of the events where we are not hosting people from out of the area.”

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