

COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

100 people at each event.

Churches throughout Union County adapted services to meet the requirements of the executive order, such as shifting to hold sermons online. The Lighthouse Church also changed its format — moving services outside.

According to posts on the Lighthouse Church's Facebook page, members of the church began meeting outside for service April 12 with a "drive-up" service where people remained in or near their cars while the worship team and church leaders held the service. This model, with additional livestreams of the service, became a staple for the church during Phase 1 of reopening.

But the church's videos of services in April and the first half of May show dozens of parishioners gathered in the church parking lot around a central stage, ignoring the restriction on crowd sizes.

The video from the April 26 services shows church leaders and members engaged in the practice of the laying on of hands during prayer. Participants were close enough to rub shoulders and no one

was wearing face coverings. The video of the May 6 services shows churchgoers side by side. Again, no one in the videos appear to be wearing face masks. During Mother's Day, May 10, a pastor invited all the mother's in the audience to come forth for recognition. Numerous women lined up next to one another, only 2 or 3 feet apart at the most, and once more, no one wore a mask.

The church announced on its Facebook page Saturday that it canceled Sunday's service "due to recent outbreaks." The Observer made numerous attempts Monday to contact the church, but there was no response.

Union County did not enter Phase 1 of reopening until May 15, and even then there were restrictions on crowd sizes. Brogoitti noted the cases are not coming from just one source but warned that large gatherings can pose a risk in spreading the virus.

"Many of the recent positive cases are touching various areas of our community and are not confined to one location," she said.

Two weeks ago Tuesday, hundreds of locals protested for racial equity in downtown La Grande. While many in the throng

wore facial coverings, they did not remain 6 feet apart from one another, and the protest lasted several hours.

During a press call Monday afternoon with the Oregon Health Authority, Dr. Paul Cieslak, Senior Health Advisor at OHA, stressed the risks of large gatherings.

"One of the main messages we are trying to get out to the public is large gatherings are a really efficient way to spread COVID-19," he said.

Public health investigation continues

Brogoitti during that press call explained public health must investigate cases before working on contact tracing.

"We are working to respond as quickly as possible," she said.

The Center for Human Development also asks those who test positive to isolate for 10 days, and those who were in contact with someone positive to isolate for 14 days. The center also reported it is working to contact individuals who may have come in close contact — within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes — with one of the patients.

"If you are identified through this investiga-

tion as someone that may be at risk for COVID-19 public health will contact you," the press release stated. "CHD Public Health staff are making calls now. Some of these calls may look like they come from an unknown number. If you don't answer, they will leave a message. Please call them back as soon as you can."

Residents should continue to monitor themselves for symptoms of COVID-19, according to the center, and if they think they might have come in contact with someone or if they have symptoms, they need to speak with their primary health care provider.

1 in 210 Union County residents have virus

The Union County outbreak makes it the 10th county in Oregon with at least 100 cases, and moves it past Lincoln County for the highest number of cases per capita. Now, about .48% — or roughly one out of every 210 individuals — in the county has contracted the disease. Because of the outbreak, now nearly 16% of the test results in the county have come back positive. That number was around 1% last week.

Cieslak with the Oregon Health Authority also said

the state is not telling Union County to go back in phases but is looking at case count, hospital capacity and ability to protect its residents.

Mardi Ford, spokeswoman for Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, said the hospital is ready to handle a large number of patients. She also was on the Monday press call and explain Grande Ronde can expand to house 48 patients, and its pavilion near downtown could have up to 200. She also said at the beginning of March the hospital received word to prepare for 500 cases, and that is what it has done.

Union County's spike in cases is part of a surge statewide that has seen the seven highest single-day counts in the last nine. The current peak came on Monday with 184 new cases, pushing the state total to 5,820. Five days in that stretch have had at least 140 cases: June 7 (146), June 11 (178), June 12 (142) and June 13 (158) and June 15, according to the Oregon Health Authority website.

Like with Union County's Monday spike, outbreaks were a contributing factor in at least two of the days last week, with a large portion of the June 7 and June 8 spikes (114 cases that day) due to an outbreak at a Newport seafood plant, one

that in two days accounted for more than half of Lincoln County's 206 cases.

The counties with the four highest totals in the state — Multnomah, Clackamas, Marion and Washington — continue to be where the largest portion of cases are, accounting for close to 70.7% of all cases in the state. That ratio, though, is down with the spikes that have occurred outside of the state's most populous area.

The 10 counties with at least 100 cases are: Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Marion, Polk, Lincoln, Linn, Umatilla, Deschutes and Union. Four more have at least 80: Yamhill, Jackson, Lake and Hood River.

The seven-day average for confirmed cases statewide is at 129, much higher than May's peak of 78, which at the time was the high point for cases in the state.

Close to 56% of the cases in the state (3,244 total) are considered active.

The number of test results has been up as well. During the first 10 days of June, the state averaged processing more than 2,990 tests a day. All told, the state has conducted 175,941 tests, with about 96.8% of the results coming back negative.

BMHA

Continued from Page 1A

The shelter in 2012 became a high-save shelter, which meant the cost of keeping and taking care of animals increased. The 990 tax forms from 2011 on confirm this growing increase in expenses each year. While the shelter attributed much of the cost increase to the shelter's change in operations, questions about Brinlee's handling of money surfaced at Union County commissioner meetings.

The county in 2011 contracted with the association to help pay for services the shelter provides in partnership with animal control. However, there have been periods of time the association did not have a contract with the county. According to meeting minutes from the Oct. 5, 2016, board of commissioners meeting, the contract was reinstated with particular provisions for the BMHA board to meet, including keeping an up-to-date website and better track of finances and having a clear plan of operation.

"The county will require that BMHA has a management plan working with Union County Animal Control and the community," the Oct. 5 minutes state. "This would include hours of operation and drop-off of dogs by Animal Control after normal business hours. A separate document is needed to address

operations."

This same meeting allowed public comments, and those who spoke voiced frustrations with the shelter. Some community members were upset the shelter would not take sick animals, and others shared their personal experiences, one of which involved the director getting upset with a customer and staff. Jodi Lambert, who manages the Eastern Oregon Pet Lovers Facebook page, shared the story from a message she received:

"BMHA told them to let the cat go because they couldn't take it, couldn't afford the vet fee, and they would put it down anyway," Lambert said, according to meeting minutes. "The cat just had a broken leg. BMHA staff are rude and freak out if you take an animal to them without calling first. The last time she went to BMHA was when she was asked to pick up a black cat that was missing from a trailer park. BMHA told her it was a stray, so she posted it on the Facebook page. Then Leeann at BMHA said someone was missing a black cat and told her to bring them the cat, so she did. John (Brinlee) had a freak out session about her not taking it in. You can't win with them."

The county still decided to contract with the shelter under the promise of change and a plan to check back in with Brinlee and the association's board pres-

ident, John Rineheart, in a year. The meeting minutes for June 21, 2017, showed the shelter was not holding up its end of the deal with the county, particularly in regard to maintaining the website where the association was to post adoption listings.

At the June 2017 commissioner meeting, the county granted a six-month renewal of the shelter's contract, but it would be a year before the shelter went before the board of commissioners again. The county renewed the contract without issue, according to meeting minutes from July 25, 2018.

The Blue Mountain Humane Association board at its April 12, 2019, meeting discussed Brinlee's work with the shelter. Board members brought up concerns about missing money and improper use of funding. According to the meeting minutes, the director was accessing shelter funds without board approval and not providing any documentation about where the money was being spent.

There also was an issue regarding a 2012 raffle for an all-terrain vehicle that AC Powersports, La Grande, donated to the shelter to raise money. The board received complaints from people who purchased raffle tickets but never heard back regarding who won the ATV, and there was a rumor that Brinlee's then-girlfriend, LeAnna

Muse, purchased and registered an ATV.

Miller said the police are looking into the allegation. However, AC Powersports employee Cody Richelderfer said the store has no record of a sale of an ATV to Muse or to the Blue Mountain Humane Association at that time.

Former board member Cheryl Borum said the board gave Brinlee \$11,000

to purchase new kennel doors but never saw the correct number of doors purchased or installed. Borum said before Brinlee came on as director of the shelter had few financial struggles outside of the recession. However, some changes in the financial situation can be attributed to becoming a low-kill shelter, according to BMHA's comments during the commissioner

meetings through the years.

A former board member said the shelter did not compensate Brinlee for his work as director, and he lived at the shelter rent free. The board member spoke on the condition of anonymity to allow for open discussion about the issues with Brinlee. This was the only way to obtain an interview and is not a typical practice of The Observer.

JAIL

Continued from Page 1A

Retired Union County Sheriff Steve Oliver, a member of the Elgin Museum and Historical Society Board, said the old jail building was similar to many of the era used to house inmates.

"They were primitive jails but they were very efficient," Oliver said.

The jail reminds him of one near a school he attended while growing up in Asotin, Washington, more than five decades ago. Oliver said he recalls seeing inmates in the jail watching students through windows while holding on to its bars. He believes those held in the old jail in Elgin likely also could be seen watching people while standing and holding window bars.

Oliver believes that such

slights prevented crime.

"I wouldn't want to be in there (the jail)," he said.

The old jail building was renovated with help from the Brock Eckstein family of Elgin, the Collins Foundation and Bill Furman of Portland.

The Elgin Museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday through Sunday until late summer. Admission is \$2 per person for all ages.

The museum is now at the old Elgin City Hall, 180 N. Eighth St. The museum reopened for the first time in a decade in May 2019. It had operated on the second floor of the Elgin Opera House for a number of years before it was closed because of space issues.

Everyone visiting the museum must adhere to social distancing rules due to the coronavirus pandemic. All visitors will

receive free masks made by the Elgin Lions Club.

Hopkins said the old jail is the first piece of an old town model he wants to create next to the museum. He would like to later have a small one-room schoolhouse and other old structures at the site.

He knows of other cities where old-town re-creations have been a success.

"They have become beautiful destinations (for travelers)," Hopkins said.

An old town in Elgin might encourage tourists driving to and from Walla Lake to stop in Elgin and perhaps spend the night, he added.

"It could be a good draw," Hopkins said.

He knows he will face many hurdles but plans to continue pursuing the creation of the old-town attraction in Elgin.

"I'm a dreamer," he said.

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