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THURSDAY • December 17, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Jeff Denny of La Grande

Pacific Islanders struggling with hunger

Anti-immigrant stigma, language barriers, exacerbate access to cultural food

By Kaleb Lay

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened an already colossal problem of food insecurity in the United States.

With nearly one in three children and one in six people overall in Union County now unsure where their next meal might come from, the bite of hunger is present and raw in Northeast Oregon.

In the local Pacific Islander community, challenges in putting food on the table are exacerbated by a struggle to find culturally relevant and fulfilling food, desires to avoid xenophobic stigma and barriers in navigating an unfamiliar society.

“Even though we struggle with food access, many folks don’t know that (food assistance) is available to them, whether that be just a language barrier and they don’t know how to access it or they know it’s available but they don’t want, you know, the handouts,” said Tyana Musrasrik, president of Eastern Oregon Cofa Alliance National Network, a Pacific Islander advocacy group. “And especially, there are some attitudes of ‘the immigrants’ and looking down, we’re always looking for handouts, those sort of misconceptions. So, many folks don’t want to be that group.”

Eastern Oregon CANN has been working to combat food insecurity in Union County’s Pacific Islander community by distributing food boxes that contain culturally relevant foods such as rice, taro and breadfruit. Musrasrik said finding those foods can be difficult, especially when a person has to rely on food banks and other aid services.

“It’s not affordable,” Musrasrik said, “because who wants to bring these foods into rural Union County, Eastern Oregon?”

Because Pacific Islanders typically use rice in large quantities, buying by the box or small bag isn’t economical and many drive as far as the Tri-Cities in Washington to purchase 20- to 40-pound bags to meet their dietary needs. This further

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Homes for vets

Housing complex for veterans could open next fall in La Grande

By Dick Mason

The Observer

LA GRANDE — A new community is taking shape in La Grande, one which may blaze a trail for others to follow.

Veterans Village Union County will be a community to help veterans who are homeless or have low incomes. Workers are making significant progress in its construction at 1612 Russell Ave. Four of the village’s 10 planned small cottage-style homes are close to being completed.

“We should have (the four homes) finished by March,” said Gust Tsiatsos, the contractor of the project and the owner of GCT Land Management with his wife, Karin.

In addition, the foundations for two more of the small homes have been poured, Gust Tsiatsos said. He said he hopes to have Veterans Village Union County finished by the fall of 2021, at which time veterans can begin moving in. Three of the 10 homes will be handicapped accessible.

Veterans Village is being constructed with the help of a grant from Oregon Housing and Community Services, Oregon’s state housing finance agency. OHCS provides financial and program support for projects that create and maintain quality, affordable housing for Oregonians of lower and moderate income.

Veterans Village Union County is one of several small-home housing projects for veterans in Oregon. The homes provided at the others are often not as large as those being built at Veterans Village UC, Tsiatsos said. The contractor said in a press release he hopes Veterans Village will be successful to the point that it can be used as a model for future projects in the community and the region.

Tsiatsos said the relatively mild conditions Union County is experiencing late this fall is helping with the construction process.

“On Saturday (Dec. 12) we were able to get a concrete foundation put in. It is unusual to be able to do that this time of the year,” Tsiatsos said on Dec. 14.

Each unit in the village will have 480 square feet of space, but the design gives the small homes a bigger look and feel. These include the construction of tall pitched roofs over 9-foot ceilings, Tsiatsos said. Large living room windows and sliding glass doors in the back also work to enhance the feeling of spaciousness.

Veterans Village will have features aimed



Dick Mason/The Observer

D.J. Coon of Valley ICF Construction moves siding Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020, at Veterans Village Union County in La Grande. The site will feature 10 small homes for veterans as well as a community center.

“It will provide access to support services, which will give them a chance to grow and flourish.”

— Terri Bradley of GCT Land Management on the benefit of the community center that will be built at Veterans Village Union County

at creating a sense of engagement and a neighborhood feeling, said Terri Bradley of GCT Land Management. These include a community center, dog park, benches and common lawns.

The house that workers at the site are using as a base will become the community center after renovations. The center will

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Legislature sets special session on COVID-19

State lawmakers consider extending eviction moratorium

By Gary A. Wamer

Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — After weeks of negotiations with lawmakers, Gov. Kate Brown announced a one-day special session of the Legislature will convene Monday, Dec. 21, to deal with COVID-19 related issues.

The need for state action has grown in recent weeks as Congress has failed to come up with a bill extending several key programs on unemployment, a eviction moratorium and small business subsidies.

Brown says she will ask for \$800 million to help Oregon residents who have battled a pandemic and one of the worst fire seasons in state history.

“Many Oregon families are struggling with unemployment, housing, food insecurity, and paying their bills,” Brown said. “We must protect Oregonians now, as we face some of our hardest days.”

A possible third special ses-

sion has been on the table since August as the likelihood of substantial federal aid such as the \$2 trillion CARES Act passed in the spring were unrealized.

The session is expected to:

- Extend the state’s residential eviction moratorium beyond its current expiration on Dec. 31 to as late as July 1.
- Provide liability protection covering COVID-19 related claims for schools.
- Spend \$600 million for aid to those affected by the COVID-19 crisis and those hit

working with legislative leadership of both parties, prior to calling a special session, to narrow the agenda to four agenda items,” said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. “While the devil is in the details, all four items are needed and should have bipartisan support.”

Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, did not return messages seeking comment.

For the third time this year, lawmakers will come to the Capitol in Salem amid an epidemic which has only grown more

a lot to do ... tenants, landlords, schools, food security. We’ll get it done.”

Over the past week, the state has seen an average of 1,320 cases per day, and will soon pass 100,000 cumulative cases of COVID-19. Deaths have risen 32 percent in the past two weeks, and are now at 1,168 since the pandemic began. More than 300,000 have died in the U.S. and 1.63 million around the world.

Brown did not invoke a never-before-used constitutional clause that would have allowed

“The governor has made the very difficult decision to call a special session. We’re going in to help Oregon and her people. There’s a lot to do ... tenants, landlords, schools, food security. We’ll get it done.”

— Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem

by late summer wildfires that burned over 1 million acres in Oregon.

- Allow restaurants and bars to sell cocktails to go as a way to make some money at a time when dining is prohibited or limited.

“I appreciate Gov. Brown

threatening in the intervening months.

“These are tough times,” Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said in a statement. “The governor has made the very difficult decision to call a special session. We’re going in to help Oregon and her people. There’s

the Legislature to convene a “catastrophic” session. A move favored by many Democrats, it would have allowed lawmakers to avoid traveling to Salem and instead hold hearings and floor votes remotely.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 33 LOW Mainly cloudy
Friday 41/30 Rain and drizzle

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