

STATE BUSINESS NEWS

State fines Florence cafe nearly \$18K over COVID-19 rules

FLORENCE — The state of Oregon has fined a Florence restaurant nearly \$18,000 for willfully exposing workers to COVID-19 after an investigation in which officials say compliance officers were threatened.

The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration on Tuesday, Feb. 23, announced the fine for The New Blue Hen, The Register-Guard reported.

The New Blue Hen, doing business as Little Brown Hen Café, had been allowing indoor dining since at least Dec. 26, a state investigation found.

“The business did so despite knowing it was violating a public health order limiting the capacity for indoor dining to zero in an ‘extreme risk’ county,” the state news release said.

The restaurant did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Complaints about the restaurant led to an inspection during which, “several people — including one carrying a firearm — blocked the business’ entrance and threatened compliance officers” on Jan. 4, according to the state.

The state assigned two compliance officers and both identified themselves during the inspection and asked to speak to the owner, the state said, at which point they were threatened.

The people at the entrance followed them to their cars shouting at them as they left, officials said.

Michael Wood, administrator for Oregon OSHA, imposed the \$17,800 penalty, which is twice the minimum penalty for a willful violation to reflect “the need to ensure a more appropriate deterrent effect where employers insist on disregarding

public health measures.”

Airline ordered to pay \$3.2 million after woman falls, later dies

PORTLAND — A jury has ordered Alaska Airlines to pay \$3.2 million to the family of a 75-year-old disabled woman who died four months after falling down a Portland International Airport escalator.

KGW reported the family of Bernice Kekona, of Spokane, Washington, filed a wrongful death suit against Alaska Airlines in December 2017, alleging neglect at the airport contributed to her injuries.

The jury returned its verdict Monday, Feb. 22.

In June 2017, Kekona was traveling from Hawaii to Spokane with a transfer of planes in Portland. She was disabled with an amputated leg and other health issues.

At the Portland airport, while trying to get to a gate for her connecting flight, she fell down an escalator, resulting in significant injuries that led to her death, according to the lawsuit.

In a statement, the Seattle-based airline said: “We’re disappointed in the ruling and are evaluating next steps. There is no more important responsibility than the safety and wellbeing of our guests, whether they’re in our care or the care of a vendor.”

Kekona’s family said they had requested gate-to-gate service for their mother, who needed wheelchair assistance. According to the complaint, gate agents met Kekona as she deplaned in Portland and provided her a wheelchair ride to the top of a sky-bridge. She was then left alone, according to the family, and became confused, leading her to tumble in her wheelchair down an escalator.

— Associated Press

ZIPLY

Continued from Page 1B

served when it comes to internet access.

When Zippy lights lights up the first addresses Wednesday throughout La Grande, it will be the third fiber build project in Oregon that’s ready for service in less than a year.

Zippy Fiber has been building fiber to underserved markets across the Northwest since June 2020. The company’s work will continue over the next several weeks in a staggered rollout across La Grande, but Zippy Fiber already has deployed many miles of new fiber-optic cables throughout the region and will continue to build out more territory.

During this rollout, the company also reported its DSL customers will begin seeing service improvements.

Part of Zippy Fiber’s investment is improving its core and aggregation network, across which all



Zippy Fiber/Contributed Photo

Zippy Fiber technician Greg Medina works to install fiber to a home in Kirkland, Washington in November 2020. The company recently announced its fiber-optic network in La Grande goes live Thursday, March 4, 2021.

CHECK YOUR FIBER AVAILABILITY

To check your address for fiber availability or to receive alerts when fiber internet is available at your home or business, can register at zippyfiber.com/LaGrande.

internet traffic travels. “While there’s still more work to be done,

by improving the quality, capacity and reliability of those critical network

components, customers of all types of services will benefit,” the press release stated.

Zippy Fiber’s headquarters is in Kirkland, Washington, and the company has major offices in Beaverton, Everett, Washington, and Hayden, Idaho.

FOOD

Continued from Page 1B

The effort has delivered 136.5 million food boxes, which initially contained only fresh produce but later also included meat, milk and now fish. Nearly a year later thousands of people still line up for the boxes.

On a Thursday afternoon in downtown Des Moines with temperatures hovering at 15 degrees, a slow stream of people walked up to a food pantry trailer at the city bus station for boxes containing a gallon of milk, produce and chicken.

“It puts a smile on your face,” said Dave Lestina, 59, who lives off a small disability check.

He counts on getting a food box from the distribution spot a few blocks from his small downtown apartment and notes that “it seems like some of it’s better than what you can buy at the supermarket.”

As Thomas Washington, 59, waited for food to be piled into a basket on the back of his motor scooter, he said, “We need more of these for people who can’t get down here.”

The United Fresh Produce Association, an industry group, and food bank officials have been working on recommendations that could continue the program possibly even beyond the pandemic.

Matt Unger, who heads the Des Moines Area Religious Coun-

cil’s network of 14 pantries, said the program now provides 2,400 food boxes to his organization a week.

Even assuming demand drops as coronavirus infections decline, Unger said, roughly 10% of U.S. households had trouble getting enough food before the pandemic hit. The food boxes are “the most accessible program that I’ve seen come out of the government,” he said.

Still, Carrie Calvert, a vice president of Feeding America, a Chicago-based network of 200 food banks, said it’s important to note that the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as food stamps, provides nine times the total amount

of food distributed by all food banks. The larger program, which enables people to use debit cards to shop at grocery stores, is still the most effective way of providing food, Calvert said.

Sue Wilson, who heads a largely volunteer food pantry in southern Iowa, said demand for food boxes remains strong, with volunteers driving boxes 20 or 30 miles to smaller, rural communities, where the need is often greatest.

Wilson said her small group has to borrow heavy equipment to handle the pallets of food boxes, and doesn’t know what she’d do if the program ended.

“It’s been a huge blessing for our community,” she said.

FFA

Continued from Page 1B

worked a minimum of 500 hours. They must prove involvement in the FFA, serve on a chapter committee, complete 25 hours of community service and more. Joseph had seven members earn this honor and Enterprise had 21 members.

Joseph members who earned this honor are Anabelle Russell, Hayden Hite, Jonah Staigle, Trace Collier, Ian Goodrich, Destany Moore and Maggie Zacharias.

Enterprise members who earned the State FFA Degree were Andy Huwe, Elizabeth Rowley, Bailey Vernam, Dylan Jennings, Gideon Gray, Jada Gray, Hunter Harvey, Destiny Wecks, Landon Green-shields, Lannie Stonebrink, Alona Yost, Gaven Winn, Kasey Duncan, Rilyn Kirkland, Caylynn Beck, Alex Albanez, Carrin Yaw, Grace Collins, Flynn Nave, Gracie Ellis and Addie Royes.

In the CDE team competitions:

Soils Judging and Crops and Weeds:

Joseph placed first.

Rituals:

Joseph’s Beginning Greenhand Team placed second and Enterprise’s Beginning Team was fourth.

Agriculture Sales and Service:

Joseph’s Advanced Team placed second and its Beginning Team placed



Chelcee Mansfield/Contributed Photo

Joseph Charter School’s Advanced FFA competitors pose recently in the school’s refurbished gym. They are, from left, Layla Snyder, Juston Rogers, Mary Thiel, McKenzie Keffer, Josey Wearin, Anabelle Russell, Jonah Staigle, Trace Collier and Hayden Hite.

first, Enterprise’s Advanced Team placed fourth and its Beginning Team placed fourth.

Advanced Parliamentary Procedure:

Enterprise’s Team of Flynn Nave, Alona Yost, Bailey Vernam, Cody Fent, Trace Evans, Aubrina Melville and Maclane Melville placed first in Districts and first in Sectionals. Joseph’s Team of Mary Thiel, Hayden Hite, Trace Collier, Juston Rogers, Layla Snyder and McKenzie Keffer.

Beginning Parliamentary Procedure:

Enterprise’s team of Jessica Jourigan, Talia Aase, Brandon Charlton, Zach Farr-Roberts, Alex Rowley, Quincee Zacharias and Codi Cunningham placed fourth. Joseph’s team of Owen Gorham, Kane Johnson, Aimee Myers, Cooper

Nave, William Clark, Andrew Beachy and Payton Hess placed second in Districts and first in Sectionals.

Creed Speakers:

Enterprise’s team was Codi Cunningham, Quincee Zacharias and Jessica Jourigan. Joseph’s team was Kane Johnson and Rhyson Collier.

Beginning Public Speaking:

Enterprise’s team was Zander Flores, Sydney

Hopkins and Lily Royes. Joseph’s team was Cooper Nave (third) and Jaxon Grover.

Sophomore Public Speaking:

Enterprise’s team was Tanner Kesecker, Emily Love and Harlie Stein. Joseph’s team was Mary Thiel (first at Districts, fourth at Sectionals) and McKenzie Keffer.

Advanced Public Speaking:

Enterprise’s team was Tegan Evans and Destiny Wecks. Joseph’s team was Anabelle Russell (second at Districts and first at Sectionals) and Jonah Staigle (third.)

Extemporaneous Speaking:

Bailey Vernam of Enterprise.

Job Interview:

Enterprise’s team was Alona Yost and Casidee Harrod. Joseph’s team was Josey Wearin and Grace Hickman.

The FFA mission is to provide the next generation of leaders who will change the world by focusing on premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education, according to the press release. This mission has been proven through the hard work of all of our students during these challenging times.

In a statement from Wallowa’s FFA adviser, Jeremy McCulloch, he said most of that chapter’s activities for FFA Week were curtailed by the pandemic restrictions.

“Everybody’s picking and choosing with all this

going on,” he said.

“This year in Wallowa, we were forced due to COVID-19 restrictions to stay pretty much in-house during FFA Week. Many years we are able to do outside events in the community and engage with our alumni and supporters in more ways,” McCulloch said in an email. “The focus this year, being forced by regulations to be internal, have shifted toward making sure our next generation of FFA members, our Discovery members in seventh and eighth grade are prepared for FFA membership and excited for what the future holds. Chapter officers helped with some team-building projects and we have some community service projects we are working on in the shops.

McCulloch said his chapter is working toward spring.

“Our Introduction to Agriculture class also spent FFA Week gearing up for spring activities like the annual plant sale and our chapter officers have begun discussions about our (we hope) annual chapter banquet,” he said.

UPGRADE

NORTHWEST FURNITURE & MATTRESS

215 Elm Street La Grande • (541) 963-5440

northwestfurnitureandmattress.com

M.J. Goss Motor Co.

HOME OF **WARRANTY FOREVER!**

FIND NEW ROADS

www.gossmotors.com

1415 Adams Ave, La Grande 541-963-4161

All Qualified New and Pre-Owned Vehicles We Provide You With A Complimentary Power Train Warranty Forever