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OREGON MASK MANDATE

SWITCHING GEARS

Business owners say most customers, employees are ready for lifting of indoor mask mandate

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A major change is coming to businesses across Oregon.

In the wake of COVID-19 rates showing a steady decline in recent months, the state is set to end its statewide indoor mask mandate on Saturday, March 12. Local businesses will be required to shift gears again with the upcoming change but for the most part they see it as a positive development.

“I think a lot of customers are going to be really happy with the ability to choose for themselves,” said Liberty O’Dell, manager of La Grande Liquor and Smoke Shoppe. “That will probably spur more business.”

Businesses have perhaps been most impacted by the indoor mask mandate passed down from the state government. As of March 12, businesses will be able to decide for themselves whether people are required to wear masks while indoors at their establishments.

Masks off

La Grande Liquor and Smoke Shoppe faced not only a statewide mandate but requirements from the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission.

“As an agent of the state liquor commission, we have an agreement with them that we’ll follow what they ask us to do with their liquor,” O’Dell said. “We hold that agreement to be mutually beneficial, so when they ask us to do something we follow through with that.”

The local store will now stop policing mask usage by customers on the premises, but leave the decision up to employees whether they want to wearing a face mask. According to O’Dell, the store encourages customers to continue to wear masks if they choose.

“If people still feel uncom-



Kenneth Watson, an employee at La Grande Liquor and Smoke Shoppe, La Grande, assists a customer with a purchase on Tuesday, March 8, 2022. Beginning March 12, businesses will be able to decide for themselves whether wearing masks inside is required.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group



A sign outside Bella Mercantile states masks are required to enter the store on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022. Indoor mask mandates in Oregon will be lifted on March 12 following an announcement by Gov. Kate Brown.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

fortable about their safety, they can wear a mask,” he said. “We did get quite a few people who were thankful we were requiring masks, but we also got way more vocal people who were against the mask mandate.”

HQ, a performance venue in downtown La Grande, recently announced upcoming in-person

events as COVID-19 numbers decline. The venue is resuming its weekly open mic night on Thursdays, and the owners are beginning to schedule concert events for the spring. Chris Jennings, the venue’s co-owner, noted that HQ will abide by the update to the mask mandate

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EOU students and staff eager to finally take off their masks

School’s indoor mask mandate will be lifted March 12

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Daniel Fuchs is happy to see change on the horizon.

Eastern Oregon University has announced it will be lifting its mandate for wearing masks on campus indoors beginning Saturday, March 12, in accordance with the state’s plan. The lifting of the mask mandate will come about two years after it was imposed.

“I’m excited. There is something really good about being able to see people’s faces,” Fuchs, a freshman at EOU, said. “It is important to be able

to see people’s faces when interacting with them because it lets you see their emotions.”

Gov. Kate Brown last month announced the current mask requirements will expire at 11:59 p.m. March 11, citing decreasing cases, hospitalizations and a strategic alignment with the lifting of mask mandates in Washington and California.

Brown announced Oregon’s accelerated timeline Feb. 28 on the two-year anniversary of the state’s first known COVID-19 infection, saying residents must “learn to live with the virus” while maintaining vigilance going forward.

EOU freshman Eli Millington is also looking forward to being mask free because it will make interacting with

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COVID-19 hurts Liberty Theatre restoration

\$600,000 needs to be raised for theater restoration project to finally be completed

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE— Two years ago, Ashley O’Toole, chair of the Liberty Theatre Foundation’s board, saw a light burning brightly on the near horizon.

O’Toole believed that restoration of the Liberty Theatre, which started about a decade ago, would be complete by the end of 2020. Almost all of the funding needed to complete the project was in place and a building contractor and sub-contractors were set to complete work.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The pandemic stalled completion of much of the venue’s restoration work in part by creating supply

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The original chandelier, now restored, lights up the Liberty Theatre on Monday, March 7, 2022, in downtown La Grande.

Dick Mason/The Observer

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 22 LOW Cloudy and cold		Friday 49/30 Mostly sunny
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CONTACT US

541-963-3161
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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page A4.



SATURDAY

OREGONIANS SEE HOMELESSNESS AS TOP ISSUE

Online at lagrandeobserver.com