

Business in Brief

Clatsop home listings down, prices up 16%

ASTORIA — There was a marked decline in Clatsop County real estate listings in April, the first full month following Oregon's decision to limit face-to-face business transactions and order most residents to stay home to avoid coronavirus infections.

Prices climbed at a brisk pace, however, according to data from the Clatsop Association of Realtors.

Active residential listings in the county declined nearly 16% this April compared to a year earlier, with 219 available this year compared to 260 in April 2019.

Perhaps because potential sellers chose to hunker down rather than take a chance on having to move in the midst of a pandemic, new listings plunged 55% in April. Only 42 properties came on the market, compared to 94 a year earlier, in what is ordinarily the start of the active spring selling season. There were no new listings below \$200,000 and only eight below \$300,000. Fully half of the new listings were for more than \$400,000.

Sales were completed on 41 properties during the month, down about 23% from April 2019. Forty-four percent of April sales were for more than \$400,000. Another 49 sales were pending in April, 39.5% fewer than in April 2019.

The average selling price of Clatsop County homes went up 15.9% in April to \$387,758. Over the entire first third of 2020, prices increased 7.9% to \$392,624.

The median selling price — half went for more and half for less — increased 31% in April to \$380,000, compared to \$290,000 a year earlier.

It is taking somewhat longer to make a home sale, with an average of 120 days on the market as of this April, up from 107 days last April.

Study shows continuing importance of Oregon Coast tourism

ASTORIA — New numbers released by Dean Runyan Associates show that 2019 was Oregon's 10th consecutive year of growth in travel-spending and visitation. Although the covid-19 pandemic has brought the travel and tourism industry to a screeching halt, the firm observed that these numbers indicate that travel and tourism will be a crucial part of the state's economic recovery.

"Tourism has long been an important part of the North Coast economy. While we appreciate visitors staying home for now to mitigate virus spread, the result has been tough financial times for our local businesses," said Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director David Reid. "When the stay-home order is lifted, we'll need visitors and locals to support our restaurants, stores, hotels and attractions."

Since 2008, the industry has shown steady growth in earnings and employment, ranking second after agriculture and food. In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the tourism industry is one of the three largest export-oriented industries in rural Oregon counties (the other two being agriculture/food processing and logging/wood products).

Economic impact numbers for 2020 will be drastically different, but these 2019 numbers reflect the impacts generated by Oregon Coast tourism pre-covid:

- Total direct travel spending was \$2 billion, a 3.6% increase over 2018.
- Total travel-generated employment was 24,260, a 3.1% increase over 2018.
- Employee earnings were \$723 million, a 7% from 2018.

OR/WA crabbers continue efforts to avoid whale entanglements

ASTORIA — Dungeness crabbers operating out of the Clatsop and Pacific counties appear to have been successful last year in avoiding whales becoming entangled in gear. Whale deaths and injuries have become a constraint on the important West Coast industry in recent years, resulting in regulatory actions including a delay in starting the season in California in 2019.

In 2019, entanglement reporting on the U.S. West Coast continued to be higher than what had occurred historically prior to 2014, although fewer reports were received than in some of the recent record high years, according to a new report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Similar to recent years, humpback whales continue to be the most common species entangled on the West Coast with 17 separate entanglements confirmed in 2019. There were also eight gray whales confirmed entangled and one confirmed minke whale entanglement.

In the Pacific Northwest last year, there were three gray whale entanglement reports off the central Oregon coast, one near Brookings and one in Puget Sound. Three humpback entanglements were reported, including two near Neah Bay and one in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. In none of these instances could the source of the gear be specifically identified.

Starting this season, crabbers must implement a variety of steps to mark gear so NOAA can better identify where there may be problems.

The public plays an important role in saving distressed whales, like those that become entangled. Prompt reporting and monitoring of the animal are the best ways to help. You can report whales in distress to either the 24/7 reporting hotline 1-877-SOS-WHALE (767-9425) or the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF CH-16.

CMH resumes some elective procedures

ASTORIA — In response to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's decision to lift restrictions placed on non-emergent and elective procedures for hospitals statewide, Columbia Memorial Hospital (CMH) resumed offering an array of surgical services on May 1.

CMH said in a press release that it and the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) ensured that all five criteria put in place by the Oregon Health Authority were achieved. These include:

1. Hospital bed capacity in the region
2. Two-week (14 day) PPE supply on hand and maintained
3. Adequate testing capacity
4. Strict infection control and visitation policies
5. Necessary resources for preoperative care

"This action by the Governor, in consultation with the Oregon Health Authority, is imperative to restarting important health care in our community and raising the volumes in our facilities," Erik Thorsen, the hospital's CEO, said.

Surgeries are prioritized based on clinical need. CMH surgeons meet daily to review cases and determine the surgical schedule. "The criteria above are subject to change, so we ask that our patients wait to hear from their providers on surgeries that were postponed due to the covid-19 pandemic," CMH said.

CMH provides updates on its status at columbiamemorial.org.

TLC supports school district meal programs

LONGVIEW — TLC, a Division of Fibre Federal Credit Union, said it has stepped up to help ensure children don't go hungry while schools are closed.

TLC pledged to donate up to \$55,000, which will be disbursed to help each of the 24 school districts within its service areas across seven counties in Washington and Oregon. Collectively, these districts serve over 37,000 total students.

A portion of the donated funds will support schools in Pacific and Clatsop counties as a supplement to state-funded breakfasts and lunches already offered by the schools.

Shannon Cahoon, TLC community development manager, said the credit union is taking extra care to be responsive to the needs of its communities during this time, especially students who depend on school breakfasts and lunches as regular meals.

"Taking care of our youth and helping create equitable access to economic stability are two very important tenets of our corporate mission," Cahoon said. "Meeting the needs of vulnerable students and families during this challenging time is one way we can carry out those goals."

Pacific listings plunge, prices remain stable

LONG BEACH — Pacific County's housing market drastically slowed in April but prices remained stable.

There were 143 active listings in April, down 25.5% from the same point in 2019, the Northwest Multiple Listings Service reported. Only 35 dwellings were put on the market in April, less than half as many as in April 2019.

Twenty-nine residential sales were completed this April, 41% less than the 49 last April. Thirty-nine sales were pending in April, a plunge of 53% from April 2019's 83.

April's median price — half went for more and half for less — was unchanged at \$190,000. (NWMLS doesn't make average selling prices publicly available.)

March real estate statistics for Pacific County — unavailable when the April issue of CRBJ went to press — showed a brighter picture, although there already were signs of slowing.

Sales were completed on 27 single-family dwellings in March, 12.9% fewer than in March 2019. There were 52 pending sales, an 11.9% decline. The median selling price of a Pacific County house increased 12.77% in March to \$219,900, up from \$195,000 a year earlier.

