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Weather
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Blast off! Online performances begin Dec. 4. — B1

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INSIDE!



Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER | THE DALLES | WHITE SALMON

Wednesday, November 25, 2020 Volume 1, Issue 34

\$1.00

Skyline emergency department project moving forward

■ **By Jacob Bertram**
Columbia Gorge News

Drywall and sheet rock were going up last Wednesday on the Skyline Health campus construction site in White Salmon, marking progress on the emergency department expansion and renovation project, which began last August.

Skyline Health's emergency department capital project will soon move on to phase two of their construction timeline, set to be complete in May of 2021.

Skyline's \$6.1 million project will increase capacity, enhance patient security and privacy, and improve staff workflow, said Skyline CEO Robb Kimmes. Funding comes from a mixture of state grants, donations, and from bonds refinanced in 2017.

"We've got top-notch providers, and now we're going to have a top-notch space to go with it," said Kimmes.

Kimmes said the project reflects growth in the area, as the hospital makes moves to expand and revitalize services to its full potential. "As the town has grown, so has the needs of the emergency department," said Kimmes.

Phase one of the project includes the construction of the emergency department expansion, while



Construction workers were putting up drywall Wednesday afternoon. According to superintendent Christopher Douglass of construction firm Howard S. Wright, work on the roof is substantially complete, and phase one of the project is set to be complete in January. **Jacob Bertram photo**

phase two will see renovations to the existing emergency department, constructed in 1996.

The expansion will add around 2,800 square feet to the department, including two examination rooms, four patient-centered rooms, a new nurse's station, and

a family lounge, Skyline's take on a waiting room. Renovations include security doors to the emergency department and a separate ambulance bay from visitor access to the department.

Each examination room will be bigger than the existing rooms,

allowing for medical technology, such as ultrasound technology and X-ray machinery, to be transported into patients' rooms and for more medical personnel to be present and have easy access to the bed.

See **SKYLINE**, page 3

Thanksgiving underlines realities of COVID-19 response

Health officer urges 'small sacrifices now' to stem pandemic spike

■ **By Kirby Neumann-Rea**
Columbia Gorge News

The term "surge protocol" is back.

As communities everywhere this fall face a large increase in identified COVID-19 cases, health officials are issuing renewed and unprecedented health advisories as the Thanksgiving holiday arrives, bringing strong concerns for super-spread events and renewed outbreaks.

Meanwhile, Hood River County Health Department Director Trish Elliott gave a sobering report last week to the Board of Commissioners on the realities of rising coronavirus cases, an overworked staff and overtaxed pandemic response system.

"With the current surge, we are seeing a huge daily increase in the number of cases and contacts that we are calling," Elliott said. (See details in a Q-and-A, page A8.)

Regarding contact tracing, "It's impossible for our staff to keep up with what we are doing right now," she said. The revised contact

See **COVID-19**, page 8

Chief Deputy DA resigns after 21 years

■ **By Neita Cecil**
Columbia Gorge News

Leslie Wolf, the child abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence prosecutor for 21 years for Wasco County, has left the district attorney's office.

"After many years in the Wasco County District Attorney's office I felt it was time for a change, and it seemed like the ideal time to move on," she said. Her last day was in early October.

"In seventh grade, I knew I wanted to be a prosecutor and spent the next decade achieving just that," Wolf said. When Wasco County DA Eric Nisley "asked if I



Leslie Wolf

She prosecuted misdemeanor crimes, including DUIs, thefts, dog cases, and fish and wildlife crimes. She had never shot a gun, nor ever hunted, and she was quickly educated by Oregon State Police troopers including Fred Patton, Mike Caldwell, and Craig

Gunderson, about Wasco County's vast and beautiful wildlife. Her highlights were the prosecution of a bear poacher and a big horn sheep poacher.

In 2003, Wolf had her first domestic violence case. "I met a victim who had been tortured, beaten, and treated like an animal time and time again. Her resilience and bravery were both admirable and inspiring. I knew then that supporting survivors and helping families and children was where I really wanted to make a difference."

That is when her caseload changed to handling all domestic violence, child abuse and sex

assault cases. "From homicide to dependency cases, my goal was to protect the citizens of Wasco County, to educate the public about abuse and neglect, and to hold offenders accountable while making sure they got the best and effective treatment and help."

Wolf regularly began to speak at schools, gyms, churches and community events about what we as a community can do to stop abuse and violence. She became active in the Wasco County's Child Abuse Team, Domestic Violence Council, Sexual Abuse Response Team,

See **WOLF**, page 10

TD man arrested on sodomy charges

■ **Emily Fitzgerald**
Columbia Gorge News



Steven Leroy Thomas

A The Dalles man was arrested Nov. 12 for charges related to the sexual abuse of multiple children between 1999 and 2005.

Steven Leroy Thomas, 66, faces five counts of Sodomy in the First Degree in Hood River County Circuit Court for allegedly engaging in oral intercourse with five children under the age of 12 between Jan. 1, 1999, and Dec. 31, 2005. He was additionally arrested — but not charged — on four counts of Sex Abuse in the First Degree and two counts of Incest.

He is currently being lodged at the Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility (NORCOR) on a \$25,000 bail. His next court date, a plea hearing, is scheduled for 11 a.m. on Dec. 10.

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Guide to Restaurants — Special Section



Getting the right seasoning on barbacoa beef is Evelyn Bustos' task in the kitchen at Boda's Deli in Hood River. This scene is from April 2020 just as coronavirus restrictions started to make life complicated for restaurants, bars, and other food and drink purveyors. Since then, establishments have adjusted to changes in health guidelines, food preparation, staffing, schedules, menus, service hours and dining spaces, and more. The pandemic's realities have brought rolling challenges for dozens of businesses in the region. In this edition, Columbia Gorge News includes Restaurant Guide, an exhaustive list of establishments from throughout the Gorge. Use the guide to find take-out meals, for now, and for dine-in once the official "freeze" restrictions are lifted. Look for the insert in this edition, along with related "shop local" articles on pages A12-13.

Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

Songer calls COVID-19 restrictions 'illegal'

■ **By Jacob Bertram**
Columbia Gorge News

Klickitat County Sheriff Bob Songer doubled-down on his stance on the statewide COVID-19 restrictions, calling Governor Jay Inslee's latest round of COVID-19 restrictions "illegal and unconstitutional," and reminded citizens that sheriff's deputies will not be enforcing the guidelines in a Nov. 18 announcement.

Songer also requested business owners who "feel they are being harassed by (Washington State Department of Labor & Industries) agents or the Washington State Liquor & Cannabis (Board) Agents" to call his personal cell phone.

"If the citizens and business owners of Klickitat County choose to follow Governor Inslee's COVID-19 restrictions, that is their right to do so," Songer wrote in the announcement. "However, if the citizens and business owners of Klickitat County choose NOT TO FOLLOW Governor Inslee's COVID-19 restrictions, that is their

Constitutional Right to do so."

Inslee's proclamation, which went into effect Nov. 16 and will last for four weeks until Dec. 14, bans indoor dining and various other indoor services and prohibits in-person gatherings with people outside your household "unless they (a) quarantine for fourteen days (14) prior to the social gathering; or (b) quarantine for seven (7) days prior to the social gathering and receive a negative COVID-19 test result no more than 48-hours prior to the gathering."

Songer said in an interview with *Columbia Gorge News* he included the statement directed to business owners because "you got a lot of small business owners scared to death that they're losing their businesses, with diminished capacity... And I think it's a legitimate concern."

Asked what he believes harassment by state agents would look like, Songer cited, "If they're making unusual stops, more frequent

See **SONGER**, page 3