



Jason Duniphin checks out recently-donated clothes at the Hood River Hospitality Center, located in a meeting room at Riverside Community Church at Sixth and State streets. Kirby Neumann-Rea photo



Justin White smokes brisket on his outdoor smoker at Apple Valley in Parkdale. Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

Hospitality Center serves unhoused guests

First-time service is daytime warm place, and a referral center

By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

After six weeks of operation, Hood River Hospitality Center, a new daytime service for the unhoused, is a place for food, warmth and socialization, as well as a larger networking purpose.

Beyond hot soup, coffee, and a warm place to spend a few hours, the first-year center is also providing guests with connections to health and social service resources. Normally open from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays, it is centrally-located downtown at Riverside Community Church United Church of Christ (RCC) at Fourth and State streets. The center has a spacious outdoor covered area along with an indoor space and restroom access.

Last week, with the arrival of snow and colder weather, the center opened at 8 a.m. instead of 11 a.m. With the help of volunteers, the center was able to respond quickly to the need, according to Emma Tarbath, who sees to daily operations. She works with Kerri Quinlan, center coordinator.

"I'm usually out and about as well as here, and can stay warm, but with this snow it takes its toll," said guest Jason Duniphin, who on Thursday looked through a recent large donation of clothing and winter gear.

"Sometimes you go in to places and it's kind of a hit and miss and some things are better than others and it's kind of refreshing since I'm from here," said Duniphin, who attended Wy'east Middle School and Hood River Valley High School.

"My dad was born here and grandparents were from here and to see (the center) here and some of the networks and availability amidst the conditions and things we're in right now, COVID and everything," Duniphin said

he suffers from PTSD and is on disability, but is trying to transition off disability and seek self-employment, "To see come back home and see what other areas lack, it's quite refreshing. There's kind of an escalating homeless matter here in Hood River."

Since opening Jan. 6, the center has had 107 visits, an average of 4-5 per day, although it has consistently averaged about 6-7 per day since late January.

In addition to being a daytime place of warmth, support facilitated by Tarbath has included COVID-19 vaccine referral, access to EBT cards for food purchases, Direct Express Card, referral to the Warming Shelter and One Community Health, as well as help with job applications and Section 8 housing paperwork.

"A lot of our people are regulars and we get a few people who are passing through," Tarbath said. "It started out a lot slower than we were expecting but that ended up being a positive in a way, to help with housing, and medical referrals and EBT cards.

"So it's been a lot more personalized, and it's been definitely a learning process," she said. "We've seen a gradual increase in the number of people coming, and the folks at the hospital and police know about us at this time and the (CAT) bus is bringing people here."

Tarbath noted the large donation of clothing, another of feminine hygiene products, and a cash gift designated for size-specific clothing purchases for the guests.

Social distancing, mask-wearing and other coronavirus prevention measures are strictly enforced and no known COVID exposures have occurred at the center.

The center is located in the same space that from 2017-20 had housed the Hood River Warming Shelter, and while the Hospitality Center partners with Hood River Shelter Services, the Hospitality Center is a project of RCC,

and is supported by grant funds. The Hospitality Center partners with multiple community entities, including Hood River Shelter Services and The Next Door.

Funding comes from Providence Health and Services Oregon, City of Hood River, and an anonymous donor. The center seeks to connect guests to services including the Warming Shelter, which this season moved to Hood River Valley Christian Church, and will be open through mid-March.

"We got connected with different people and reached out and it's turned out to be something like a daytime outreach place, with a lot of offices closed right now and with the shelter at night, this is where people can come and hopefully get some help," Tarbath said.

"Emma has worked closely with Alisa Fowler from Mid-Columbia Community Action Council and Sarah Kellems from Hood River Shelter Services, who have been extremely supportive in advising the project," said Quinlan, who was hired to oversee the center.

"Though it is not surprising that these needs exist, it calls attention to the fact that this short-term Hospitality Center solution during COVID, may be identifying greater casework needs to support the unhoused population," Quinlan said.

"Emma has done a fantastic job of navigating the day to day needs of this new program." Tarbath is supported by volunteers Kathy Watson, Molly Harman, Mary Ellen Holmes, Liz Nichols, Christina Cork, Jennifer Talley, Sarah Bellinson, Kane Ricardo, Beth Hart, Eric Ervin, Kathy Ann Harris, Kalani Karington, Camilia Richardson, Yvonne Arbogast in various ways, and Quinlan said "the staff at Riverside Church has been incredibly helpful. The center would not function without the support of Vicky Stifter, Lorre Chester-Rea and Joe Smith."

DINING 'Hiring spree' anticipated

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fresh new look," and exterior painting will happen when the weather improves. Baseline will be open 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., with what White calls "southern hangover food": Biscuits and gravy and other morning fare, and alcoholic concoctions including Bloody Marys, Mimosas and Morning Mules.

At Apple Valley, "We haven't changed since the first lockdown, we went to to-go only and no outside seating. We figured we'd only be able to fit 12 people in the dining room including the servers and we'd need to add another server for two tables, so it just wasn't worth it at this time. Hopefully we'll be able to open outdoors in March, and maybe reopen that way at the same time as Baseline Biscuits."

Pies and other Apple Valley fruit products, preserves and barbecue sauces

can be ordered online and then picked up inside the dining room, where a full line of Apple Valley products are for sale on a retail basis.

Meanwhile, the prospect of his new business opening in about a month is "exciting and nervous," and White will be going on a "hiring spree" this week.

Mesquetry kept going with take-out service for the past year, and Klejah and his crew have tried to bide their time.

"We kept the kitchen staff employed, but there was not much for servers, and I would fill in, and it was tough. We were focused on keeping workers working so when we could open again I wouldn't have to look for new people. I was trying to keep as many people as I could with the business we had, not counting to make many profits at the time but be ready when we were able again and have a crew ready, and be successful." Klejah said a new website and on-line ordering system installed last year helped streamline takeout service.

Allowing some diners inside provides another welcome source of revenue, Klejah said.

"You still have the same crew in the kitchen, and you have to hire back bartenders and servers, but it has improved things a lot.

"I hope all the regulations are going to be a little looser in the next few months as we take care of the pandemic, somehow, so we can, you know, live a normal life again."

He is looking forward to allowing more people to enjoy the sleek "Shed Lounge."

"When the pandemic happened, we lost our tenant (a dry cleaning operation), and knew it was going to be hard to find a solid tenant," Klejah said, "and I decided to use the time to expand it and put lots of sweat equity, and I worked with friends who are contractors and turned this into an additional lounge area where people can have a drink and also have the same food on the restaurant side." He also added a video gaming room and two restrooms.

KLICKITAT COUNTY TRANSFER STATION FEE INCREASE FOR NON-COUNTY RESIDENTS

Effective January 1, 2021, the disposal fee for non-county residents increased at all Klickitat County Transfer Stations. **This increase does not affect county residents.** However, secondary proof of residency will be required upon request beginning **April 1, 2021.**

For questions or concerns, contact Republic Services at 509-773-5825. For location, fees, and accepted items, please visit www.KlickitatCounty.org/374/solid-waste.

County Resident Rates

Minimum Entry \$7.00 (includes 1 cubic yd)
\$5.18/ea additional cubic yd

Out-of-County Rates

Minimum Entry \$35 + tax & gate fee (includes 1 cubic yd)
\$25/ea additional cubic yd