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Weather  
Mild temperatures, 50 percent chance of rain at midweek, then sunny



**Gorge Local, In Business**  
**The Logs in BZ Corner lives on**  
— B1

**Time Change: On Saturday**  
**night set clocks back one**  
**hour!**

**Gorge friends remember 'car**  
**girl' Mariana Torres — A11**

**Sports — Gorge high school**  
**teams get back to competing**  
— A13

# Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER | THE DALLES | WHITE SALMON

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## STUDENTS COME BACK TO SCHOOL



Kindergarten teacher Sara Grace Durrance gives students a video tour of Parkdale School. The hall bulletin board reads, 'How Excited We Are To See You Back!' / 'Que emocionados estamos de verles de regreso!' Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

## HR district welcomes K-1 this week

**At Parkdale, direction**  
**dots will help orient kids**

By Kirby Neumann-Rea  
Columbia Gorge News

COLORFUL ARROWS AND bright blue dots — hundreds of them — welcomed students back this week to Parkdale Elementary School, a place most students have not seen for a year.

At all Hood River County School District buildings, staff have been making ready for the return to school March 8, either by getting materials and furniture in the right place or orienting kids via the on-line distance learning system that became the norm.

Starting March 8, all K-3 students will be phased back on campus by March 19, with phased full return by April for older grades, after Spring Break.

Parkdale's main entrance now is the entry that had been the building's front doors back in its Parkdale High School days.

Custodian Terry Draper painted hundreds of blue dots, and dozens of colorful arrows, on the floors inside and around the school perimeter, to help keep students separated



Long-time secretary Heidi Huskey, right, talks with custodian Terry Draper as he shifts chairs at Parkdale. "The main task is to make sure the teachers all have enough desks and are separated," Draper said. Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

and going in the right directions during arrivals and departures, entries and exits, and hallway passage and recess times.

The video interfaces that have become the necessary standard will be mostly phased out within weeks and distance learning is now being put back in the box to make way for face-to-face learning denied children since March 2020.

Schools have been closed to students since then, except for last month's return of a handful of students at each building under the district's Limited In-Person Instruction mode.

"It's a logistical challenge," Parkdale Principal Gus Hedberg said of the work of getting ready for

See **SCHOOL**, page 9

## TD officer terminated after being disqualified as state witness

By Jacob Bertram  
Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES — The City of The Dalles terminated Police Officer Jeffrey Kienlen in response to a decision, made by Wasco County District Attorney Matthew Ellis, to disqualify Kienlen as a witness in any county-led prosecution efforts. Police officials announced Kienlen's departure late last week.

City of The Dalles Police Chief Patrick Ashmore said in a press release the department was notified of Ellis' decision March 2, and that as of March 5, Officer Kienlen is no longer employed by City of The Dalles Police Department, "given his inability to perform the essential duties" of a police officer.

"As public officials, the public's trust is imperative and we understand the importance of transparency and accountability. We look

forward to continuing to provide excellent service to the public," Ashmore stated.

Kienlen had been placed on administrative leave back in January, following the initiation of a Wasco County District Attorney-led investigation into the officer.

Ellis had announced days prior to the officer's firing that he made the decision, following a Feb. 26 due process hearing held with Kienlen and legal counsel, to place the officer on a Tier 1 Brady List — the most severe administrative penalty prosecutors can apply to law enforcement officials.

It was the first time in recent history that a member from law enforcement in Wasco County has been prohibited from testifying as a state's witness because of their conduct, Ellis said in an

See **OFFICER**, page 8

## Cause of COVID decline unclear

By Mark Gibson  
Columbia Gorge News

Recent dramatic decreases in COVID-19 cases statewide and in the Gorge has no single cause, said Mimi McDonnell, health officer with North Central Public Health (CNPH). "We don't really know, it's a lot of things," she told the Wasco County Board of Commissioners March 3. She said the current theory is that the decline was the result of a combination of factors. "The lack of holidays, after the surge in late fall, that was huge," she said. And vaccine availability, especially for long term care facilities and health workers, was an important factor. "There were a lot of outbreaks there, and those are not happening anymore."

She added that there is discussion regarding whether or not there may be a seasonality to the COVID virus as well, "but we don't know yet." Another possible but important factor, she added, was that more people may have already had the virus than was thought. "It may be that more people have had it than we knew, and are immune," she said, noting that testing was seriously limited early in the pandemic.

Testing now is readily available, but fewer people are being tested day to day. "We were testing close contacts and those with symptoms, and with the drop in cases fewer tests are being done," she said. However, testing is still being done

See **COVID**, page 2

## Google agreement decision delayed

By Mark Gibson  
Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES — Wasco County and the city of The Dalles have delayed a final decision on a tax abatement agreement with Google for new server facilities in The Dalles as legal documents outlining the agreement are completed.

"These things are complicated, especially once we start to get the details of the agreement," said County Manager Tyler Stone at the March 3 board of commissioners meeting. "That agreement has to be translated into a legal document. That is the step we are at right now, is working through the legal agreement, the legal language. We're pushing off the

decision until that is concluded."

A decision by the city, anticipated March 8 (after deadline for the print edition), will also be delayed, according to Mayor Rich Mays.

Both entities instead continued to gather public input and answer questions regarding the proposal to enter into a Strategic Investment Program agreement with Google/Design LLC. Stone said the county hoped to have the documents completed by March 17. "That will be the goal," he said. "I don't anticipate changes in the overall terms," he added. "The challenge is you have to clarify, using legal language, what things mean. There is a lot of work in the detail of that."

See **GOOGLE**, page 8

## GORGE MAYORS

### Transition to remote governance 'seamless'

By Walker Sacon  
Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES MAYOR RICH Mays said the city made a "seamless transition" to governing remotely after starting the pandemic with a few difficult months as it adapted to the situation.

"I think the key is that this was the first time anybody had gone through this," Mays said. "This is brand new for everybody, but I think — over a period of time — we've adapted quite well."

Mays said a sense of relief has been felt in the city as case and hospitalization numbers have dropped and restrictions have been eased. He said people have been encouraged by vaccine rollouts and he has faith in local healthcare workers to vaccinate as many as possible in the coming months.

He said the pandemic put a damper on momentum which had been building in The Dalles,

particularly downtown.

"I thought downtown was picking up and some of the things we had envisioned for downtown and for the rest of the community were coming to fruition, but the COVID crisis — pretty much like it has everywhere — stopped that dead in its tracks," Mays said.

"I think now with things loosening up, if they continue the way they are with vaccines and with the lower numbers, I'm confident The Dalles will get back to where we were a year ago," he said.

Mays said his personal style is "more face-to-face," and he misses the "coffee with the mayor" meetings he used to host once or twice a month.

He said meeting individuals for coffee had been a good way to meet people since moving to The Dalles



Mayor Rich Mays

in 2015 and becoming mayor in 2018. "I've probably done that almost 300 times," he said.

"I didn't really know anybody when I was considering running for mayor, and my having coffee with people all over the city — and with different people — gave me a chance to not only meet new people but also to ask them what they thought was important for the city," Mays said. "So it was very valuable to me before I ran for mayor and after I got elected."

Mays said the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) deal being negotiated now to allow Google to expand its facilities in The Dalles would be a "step in the right direction" toward getting development of the city back on track.

Mays credited local essential workers, who he called "true heroes," for their work during the pandemic.

See **MAYOR**, page 2

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