

Making history: How the Gorge community is coming together to distribute the COVID vaccine

By Judy Bankman
For Healthy Gorge Initiative

The Gorge has always been a leader when it comes to taking care of one another. Since COVID-19 hit last spring, we have been seeing less of each other face to face — but that doesn't mean we have stopped working together or supporting those who are most vulnerable. Since the COVID vaccine became available, countless organizations, made up of community members, have worked tirelessly to get the vaccine into people's arms as quickly as possible. And we wouldn't have been able to do this without our key ingredients: Strong existing relationships and willingness to collaborate.

In Klickitat County, collaboration among clinics from Goldendale to White Salmon has made the vaccine more available throughout the region. Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, staff at the Klickitat County Health Department have been meeting regularly with Klickitat Valley Health in Goldendale, Skyline Hospital, and NorthShore Medical Group in White Salmon. Relationships strengthened, which meant that when it came time to vaccinate, it was easy to work together.

Klickitat Valley Health (KVH) purchased a freezer for the Pfizer vaccine when it became available several months ago. The clinics on the west side of the county began receiving the Moderna vaccine, but it wasn't enough — so KVH started sending its Pfizer vaccine to the west side clinics. When the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was paused, affecting a vaccine clinic NorthShore had already scheduled, it was the Klickitat County Health Department's turn to provide enough Moderna doses so that community members didn't have to cancel their appointments.

In a collaborative effort with Mercer Ranch, nurses with the Klickitat County Health Department have given vaccines to farmworkers in the eastern part of the county. Mercer Ranch secured space for the clinic at the Alderdale fire station and put the health department in touch with other ranches in the area who had employees and staff interested in getting the vaccine. As a result, in one day, 250 vaccines were given at farms and vineyards.

"Everyone is cooperating and working very well together," said Kristi Ridgeway, Clinical Division manager at Klickitat County Health Department. "[It's about] really just wanting the best for the county and getting the shots in people's arms."

Cooperation is happening on the Oregon

side, too. North Central Public Health District (NCPHD), serving Wasco, Sherman, and Gilliam counties, has been hosting regular vaccine clinics at the Readiness Center in The Dalles. NCPHD partners with Mid-Columbia Medical Center, who helps staff a Wednesday clinic, as well as the Wasco County Medical Reserve Corps, which has provided about 1,700 volunteer hours at vaccine clinics as of the third week of May. NCPHD's Friday Night Lights vaccine event, which had music, free pizza, and snacks, was spotlighted by the Oregon Health Authority for its success and creativity in getting the vaccine to 16-17 year olds.

Hood River County Health Department has also hosted multiple large vaccine events and has prioritized farmworkers because of the disproportionate impact of COVID on this community. In Hood River County, about 46% of COVID cases have occurred in the non-Latino community, with 54% of COVID cases occurring among Latinos, even though Latinos make up closer to 30% of the population. This inequity occurs because Latinos more frequently hold higher risk jobs, do not have paid vacation or sick days, and less access to health care or linguistically and culturally appropriate health information, among other barriers. We have also seen this play out on a national level.

"Our partners were so amazing and critical, they were such a big part of getting our farmworkers signed up," said Sarah Franklin at Hood River Health Department. "I have a representative from Oregon Child Development Coalition in one of my meetings who would sit down with her families and sign each of them up on the online system. She had a direct route with me if she needed any help. And she was able to reach families we might not have been able to reach otherwise."

Heart of Hospice has been another proactive community partner in distributing the vaccine, at first via home visits to its own patients, and later to the community at large through multiple pop-up clinics in Cascade Locks, Hood River, and for local orchards.

"We reached out to our health departments, Mid-Columbia Center for Living, all the doctors we work with, and just said, 'Hey everyone, going into people's homes is the name of our game. Now we can give COVID vaccines and would love to help service this population that's difficult to reach,'" said Jessalyn Fey, a nurse at Heart of Hospice.

By the middle of May, Heart of Hospice had given roughly 900 COVID vaccines. Through a partnership with The Next

Door Inc. and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, One Community Health (OCH) hosted multiple vaccine events at Celilo Village throughout the winter and spring. Its staff created a fact sheet in plain language detailing facts about the vaccine and conducted in person outreach at Celilo Village and the local in lieu fishing villages, helping Native American community members sign up for the vaccine. If someone didn't have transportation, OCH staff worked with MCEEDD, which provides free transport to vaccine appointments.

Because OCH was part of a pilot program through the Oregon Health Authority, it was able to offer the vaccine to farmworkers and tribal community members before they were eligible according to federal guidelines. This expedited and improved access to communities that have been disproportionately affected by COVID.

"At the last [vaccine] event, I heard a gentleman I've known since I was a girl talking about how beautiful it was for him to be a farmworker and for him to be vaccinated first," said Gladys Rivera, Preventative Services manager at OCH. "The fact that we're first means a lot."

Many farmworkers have now received the COVID vaccine, in large part due to education and outreach provided by The Next Door Inc., and clinics held by One Community Health. In December, Kathy Nishimoto at Duckwall Fruit conducted a survey among employees to see who was interested in a vaccine.

"At that time, only 40% were willing to do it," said Nishimoto. "We're up to 72 % vaccinated right now."

Throughout the pandemic, whenever Nishimoto received information from The Next Door, she would print it off and share it with her employees. Through word of mouth, vaccine acceptance slowly spread. So when One Community Health reached out to Duckwall, Nishimoto was eager to get the clinics started. The first clinic vaccinated growers in addition to employees, and the second clinic vaccinated about 600 agricultural workers.

These are just a handful of examples of how the community has been working together to offer the COVID vaccine. There's still more to do, but the strong relationships among health departments, non-profits, and local businesses have enabled us to do this challenging work more effectively, and do it together.



Ashley Bailey receives a vaccine from Kathy Schwartz, and Maddie Dollarhide receives hers from Chris McNall, both of NCPHD.

Photos courtesy of NCPHD

BUSINESS CARD Billboard


FULL COLOR BUY 11 MONTHS GET THE 12TH FREE!
email sales@gorgenews.com or call 541-296-2141

Becky Fry
541-490-3176
Becky@DonNunamaker.com
www.Bfry.DonNunamaker.com



OR & WA Broker
2495 Cascade, Hood River, OR 97031

Kim Dunn
Gorge Bookkeeping & Payroll Services, LLC



541-354-1151
541-490-0832



PACIFIC
CONSTRUCTION & LANDSCAPE
MAINTENANCE COMPANY

ERICK REYES 541.705.0516 CCB# 231232
OWNER ERICK.REYES.0789@GMAIL.COM


GORGEOUS TURF
SIT BACK, RELAX AND ENJOY THE VIEW

- Weekly Lawn Maintenance
- Spring & Fall Clean-up
- Tree Pruning
- And so much more...



(541) 490-2942 gorgeousturf@gmail.com
FREE ESTIMATES

LANES EXCAVATION INC.



Site Preparation • Utilities • Foundation
Excavation • Septic Systems • Stump Removal

Jeremy Lane, Owner 1767 12th St. #276 Hood River
lanesexcavation@gorge.net
541-490-2633 Bonded & Insured CCB# 185807

OR CCB #234564

Columbia Hills Construction LLC
30 YEARS EXPERIENCE

Painting • Tile Work • Flooring • Doors • Drywall
Kitchens • Baths • Decks • Fencing • Gutter Cleaning • etc.

1-541-965-9426 columbiahillsconstllc@gmail.com

Professional Pavers & Construction
Jeff Burns



Asphalt & Paving • Excavating • Road Building
Site Prep • Sealcoat • Land Clearing
Striping • Utilities • Demo

1767 12th St. #384 Hood River, OR 97031
OR CCB #215531 Office 541.386.1227
WA #PROFFPC831L7 Cell 541.399.3360
services@hrpropavers.com

SIMURDAK CONSTRUCTION
QUALITY BUILDING

Residential & Commercial
Large or Small Projects
HOOD RIVER, OREGON

541-490-2764
simurdakconst@aol.com simurdak.com
OR #182651 WA #S2MURC19187

OR IJC. #3393



AVALON BLOSSAGE

Debra Lutje CMT, LMT
541-296-9303
avalonblossage@gmail.com


Morgan Stanley



Michael Schock
Vice President
Wealth Advisor
4800 Meadows Rd., Suite 400
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
503-534-3428 or 541-214-4178
michael.schock@morganstanley.com

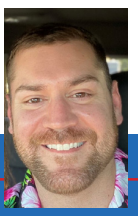
© 2017 Morgan Stanley Smith Barney LLC.
Member SIPC. CRCS96709
https://fa.morganstanley.com/michael.schock

RAY SCHULTENS
Nissan Ford MOTORS



CODY WALKER
Sales Consultant
Cell: (541) 980-2664
walker_c@schultensmotors.com

2400 West Sixth Street, The Dalles, Oregon 97058
Tel: (541) 296-6191 Tol Free: 1-800-934-9835 FAX: 296-6290




Kimberly Cowan
kimcowan@gorge.net
541-296-4200

312 Federal Street
The Dalles, OR 97058

INDIVIDUAL HEALTH
GROUP HEALTH
MEDICARE SUPPLEMENTS
MED ADVANTAGE PLANS




Jill Guenther
OREGON BROKER
541.490.3156
2495 CASCADE, HOOD RIVER, OR 97031

"Helping people find their place"

HOOD RIVER | THE DALLES | WHITE SALMON

Columbia Gorge News

Niki Piacente Digital Ad Director
541-296-2141 ext. 101 | cell 503-866-9874
nikip@gorgenews.com
P.O. Box 1910, The Dalles, OR 97058

Chris VAIL-OREGINS
Your Personal Oregon Broker

Results That Move You!

541-490-4812
www.ChrisCanDoRealEstate.com




2495 Cascade • Hood River OR