



Cheryl Paul sets out coats to be donated at the Astoria Warming Center.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

## Knappa closes school to stem flu outbreak

Forty-three percent are sick at Hilda Lahti

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Daily Astorian*

KNAPPA — Hilda Lahti Elementary School in Knappa will keep kindergartners through sixth-graders at home today and Wednesday to help stem a flu outbreak that has affected an estimated 43 percent of students, along with several teachers and staff.

The outbreak began last week. Superintendent Paulette Johnson said some classes at the elementary school on Monday were down to four healthy students. The school district met with county and state health officials Monday to discuss next steps.

“The health department’s take on it is if you can’t function as a school, close it,” Johnson said.

Hilda Lahti is a kindergarten-through-eighth grade school, but kindergarten through sixth grade are in a contained area. The flu has not significantly hit the middle school population yet, and seventh- and eighth-graders who attend classes at Hilda Lahti and Knappa High School will stay in school, Johnson said.

“Hopefully by Thursday morning, we’ll have more kids at school,” she said.

Clatsop County Public Health Director Michael McNickle said no other school districts in the county reported abnormally high rates of flu infection.

Kendra Gohl, the director of nursing and an infections prevention specialist at Columbia Memorial Hospital, said the incidence of influenza this winter has been higher than in the last couple of years and largely affecting younger populations.

“The metro areas were already seeing it,” Gohl said. “It was only a matter of time before we would get it.”

Three people have been treated at the hospital for influenza since last fall, Gohl said. She commended Knappa for making the decision to close classes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that the spread of flu this season is worse than in any year since the 2009 swine flu pandemic. Two children died from the flu earlier this month in Oregon amid reports that the infection has spread across the state.

### TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Health officials have tips for parents who think their children might have the flu:

- Keep them home for 24 hours until after fever has resolved without the aid of fever-reducing medicines
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Wash hands often with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the inside of the elbow
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth to prevent the spread of germs
- Get the flu vaccine

## Midway through the season, warming center makes progress

### Neighbors report fewer issues with the homeless

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Astoria Warming Center is halfway through its season and neighbors say they have seen less of an impact from the homeless than they did last winter.

By the time the season ends in March, and the warming center has used up the 90 days of operation allowed by the city and state fire code, another option might be in the works for the homeless.

Helping Hands Re-entry Outreach Center, with facilities in Clatsop, Tillamook and Yamhill counties, is planning an expansion into Astoria.

Helping Hands Director Alan Evans and his staff are in the process of trying to acquire a building near downtown that could provide 60 to 70 beds. The facility would provide a mix of emergency shelter and transitional housing for people participating in the nonprofit’s longer-term re-entry program. Evans is confident his offer on the building will be accepted, but is not ready to reveal the location.

The warming center, which provides shelter on winter nights when low temperatures and expected rainfall hit certain thresholds, is operated out of the basement of the First United Methodist Church on the corner of 11th Street and Franklin Avenue. It is a low-barrier emergency shelter and serves a mix of people: both those who are looking to get back on their feet, and those who are not.

See WARMING CENTER, Page 4A



The Astoria Warming Center sits empty prior to opening for the night.



Cheryl Paul and Ami Kreider go over paperwork before opening the Astoria Warming Center.

## Coast Guard digs toward source of oil spill

### Excavation of oil tank near Cannery Pier Hotel

By JACK HEFFERNAN  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Coast Guard began chipping away Monday at a dilapidated pier that likely holds the source of an oil sheen on the Columbia River.

After the first of what will likely be a multiday effort, officials offered more detail about what may have caused the spill.

The sheen was first reported Jan. 18 near the Cannery Pier Hotel. It has been concentrated near the hotel but was visible about 5 miles along the river at its peak.

Other affected areas — including the Hammond Mooring Basin — have been cleaned up, while a containment boom has been placed near

the hotel. Oil has also been spotted on boats in the area.

A Coast Guard diver discovered the tank a couple of days after the sheen was reported. The pier is located on the same property as the hotel, though hotel management maintains it did not have prior knowledge of the tank until the sheen appeared.

Coast Guard crews on Monday cut a hole in the tank — located on the south side of the pier and encapsulated by concrete — to survey it. The tank likely has a capacity of 10,000 gallons — a larger size than previously believed — and contains about 2,000 gallons of heavy, sludge-like oil, said Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Andrew Madjeska. A storm earlier in the month may have shifted the pier and the tank, which already had holes on its side.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Workers use heavy equipment to access a pier in Astoria that is thought to be the source of an oil leak.

See OIL SPILL, Page 7A

