



AP Photo/Patrick Sison
Clatsop County has joined a lawsuit against opioid manufacturers.

‘GOOD FIRST STEP’

Support builds for Clatsop County’s role in drug fight

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

It’s not yet clear how a national lawsuit against pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors will affect Clatsop County, but locals involved with the issue say the fight to curb opioid addiction will extend well beyond the courtroom.

Clatsop County joined a handful of Oregon counties in a lawsuit that, for now, is being heard by a federal judge in Ohio and involves scores of other communities across the country.

The suit claims a number of drug manufacturers and distributors — through misleading information about addiction potential and inadequate record keeping — should bear much of the responsibility for spikes in opioid addiction the past two decades.

“What I hope would come from this would be a major airing of the whole, miserable event,” said Dr. Thomas Duncan, the county’s public health officer. “A lot of people cashed in on the gullibility of patients.”

More than 27 percent of Clatsop County residents were prescribed opioids in 2015, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Curry County’s rate, by comparison, was 35 percent — the 74th largest figure of any county in the country.

Heroin and mixed prescription drugs led to 12 overdose deaths from 2014 to 2016, according to Clatsop County Medical Examiner JoAnn Giuliani.

“Most of what we would be alleging would be characterized as bad acts by the distributor,” said Michael Rose of D’Amore Law Group, which is representing the Oregon counties in the suit. “Generally, in discussions, the counties aren’t concerned with making a lot of money. There’s a concern about the harm they see every day.”

Distributors say they do not manufacture or prescribe the drugs, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is responsible for limiting production.

“Given our role, the idea that distributors are responsible for the number of opioid prescriptions written defies common sense and lacks understanding of how the pharmaceutical supply chain actually works

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Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Walmart General Manager Kimberly Smith stands outside the Warrenton location set to open on Wednesday.

WALMART ERA BEGINS ON THE NORTH COAST

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — After years of lawsuits, settling on a location and building a storefront, the North Coast’s new Walmart opens at 8 a.m. Wednesday on the corner of Ensign Lane and U.S. Highway 101.

The national retailer has been filling its new supercenter and training staff in preparation for the grand opening. General Manager Kimberly Smith said the store has hired more than 250 people.

GRAND OPENING

The North Coast’s new Walmart is located on the corner of Ensign Lane and U.S. Highway 101. It’s scheduled to open at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

“I want to say 95, 98 percent of our associates are local,” Smith said, adding that while the store has enough people to open, it will continue to hire.

The 150,000-square-foot supercenter includes groceries, electronics, clothing, home accessories, sporting goods, a pharmacy, auto and outdoors, along with a Subway restaurant and ATM. The store has made nods to local hobbies, such as clam guns, crab pots and a do-it-yourself baiting area, Smith said.

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Walmart employees at the new store in Warrenton prepare for the grand opening.



The Daily Astorian

A local family is taking over operation of Custard King.

Local family takes over Custard King in Astoria

More seafood planned

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

A local family is reopening the Custard King in Astoria.

Tara Gerlitz, her partner, Jeromy Connor, and her mother, Jamie Gerlitz, have leased the small walk-up on Marine Drive and are preparing to open later this month.

Custard King had initially closed in December for the winter season before the owners, who had difficulty managing it from a distance, decided to move on.

The family had been discussing a food cart or brick-and-mortar restaurant for the past several years but were waiting for the right location, said Jamie Gerlitz. When the family spotted the Custard King lease, they decided to take the plunge.

Connor is a commercial fisherman, while the Gerlitzes have experience in the restaurant industry. Jamie Gerlitz previously managed the Old Oregon Smokehouse in Tillamook, while Tara Gerlitz made custom cakes from home. This is the family’s first time as business owners.

The original plan was to replace Custard King with a new restaurant. But over time, the

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