

IN BRIEF

Authorities investigate man's death after arrest

Authorities are investigating the death of a Warrenton man at the Clatsop County Jail.

Alexander Jimenez, 34, was arrested on April 17 by Warrenton police for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. He was reportedly out of control and police used a stun gun to gain control and make the arrest, District Attorney Ron Brown said.

Following the arrest, officers took Jimenez to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria for medical clearance before taking him to jail.

After Jimenez arrived at the jail, officials said he experienced a medical emergency in the sally port and medical staff and deputies tried to save him. He was taken to Columbia Memorial, where he later died.

An autopsy ruled out homicide as the cause of death. The man had underlying health problems and methamphetamine in his system, which may have contributed to his death, Brown said.

— The Astorian

Fourth virus case tied to Pacific County

LONG BEACH, Wash. — A fourth person with ties to Pacific County was diagnosed with COVID-19 and was being treated and isolated in an out-of-area medical facility.

A contact tracing investigation began after the county was notified about the new case and health officials do not believe the person was out in the public while contagious. Close contacts of the person are being found, notified and told to quarantine. Anyone with symptoms will be able to get tested for the virus.

If the case investigation reveals exposure to the general public, that information will be released, said Katie Lindstrom, director of the Pacific County Department of Health and Human Services.

The medical staff involved in transferring the patient out of the area used personal protective equipment. They are being treated as potentially exposed and are being quarantined and offered testing.

The first coronavirus case attributed to Pacific County was reported on April 10, though the person involved was not living in the county when diagnosed.

Notification about a second case was announced on April 18 and a third on April 19. Both those patients are isolating at home in the county. After conducting contact tracing investigations, the county does not believe the public was exposed to the virus prior to the two people isolating.

— Chinook Observer

Steadfast returns home after counternarcotic patrol

The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Steadfast returned to Astoria after a 65-day counternarcotic patrol of international waters off the coasts of Mexico and Central America.

While patrolling, the crew apprehended three suspected smugglers and seized 1,252 pounds of pure cocaine worth about \$21.5 million.

The Steadfast crew also participated in the Columbia River Maritime Museum's Miniboat Program, which connects students from local Oregon elementary schools with students in Japan. The program is designed to teach students about the significance of ocean currents and weather, while building miniature boats to send across the ocean.

During this patrol, the Steadfast crew launched two boats, Boat-A-Lahti and Philbert, about 200 miles off the southern tip of Baja, Mexico.

— The Astorian

DEATHS

April 20, 2020

SMITH, Joyce, 92, of Astoria, died in Longview, Washington. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

April 17, 2020

JIMENEZ, Alexander, 34, of Warrenton, died in

Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

April 16, 2020

HUGHES, Arthur, 70, of Seaside, died in Wheeler. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

Theft

• Marilyn L. Mobley, 54, of Ocean Park, Washington, was arrested Wednesday at Fred Meyer in Warrenton for theft in the second degree and criminal trespass in the first degree.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

TUESDAY

Clatsop Diking Improvement Co. No. 7, 10:30 a.m., annual meeting, Brownsmead Grange, 42880 Fish Lane, Astoria.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

Sunset rec proposes \$3M budget amid virus

Laid off 50 employees

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — The Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District's proposed \$3 million budget for the next fiscal year comes with many caveats.

Be prepared for every scenario, Skyler Archibald, the district's executive director, told board members during a Tuesday budget session.

With a likely decrease in revenue because of closed services due to the coronavirus, the district will freeze employee wages and there will be less expenses for administration, the pool, recreation and the community and youth centers. The spending plan is slightly lower than this fiscal year, which ends in June.

The district laid off 50 of 57 employees in March because of coronavirus. The district lost between \$100,000 to \$120,000 in revenue since the facilities were closed in March because of

Gov. Kate Brown's executive order and could continue to bleed \$100,000 monthly during the shutdown.

All part-time program and maintenance staff with the exception of the meal site coordinator have been laid off, he said. That includes lifeguards, youth recreation leaders, patron relation specialists, special event leaders and others.

Three of those laid off in March have been rehired, he said.

"We are predicting a decrease in our ability to generate revenue, particularly for the first and second quarters of the fiscal year," Archibald said. "There's a lot of concern. We don't have any revenue coming in. The majority of our operations are funded by the residents of the district through their taxes. That's pretty stable for this fiscal year and moving forward for the short term, but after that period, and given our inability to generate revenue, we're taking a really cautious approach."

More than 50% of reve-

nue comes from taxpayers, amounting to around \$1.7 million. Additional revenue comes from program fees, timber taxes, donations and special events.

The pandemic comes at a period when the district had the "most well-funded budget to date," Archibald said, as property values continued to grow within district boundaries.

"The district is in good shape," Archibald said. "We're still able to invest in infrastructure and capital expenses."

"Essentially we had the budget down about the middle of February, to have it be able to be presented with small adjustments as we saw fit," Archibald said. "Then in the middle of March, life changed and things got a lot different, we essentially scrapped that budget and presented the budget here today."

Personnel expenses stand at \$1.8 million in the general fund, which includes money for administrative, aquatic, the youth and community centers, recreation and spe-

cial events funding.

The Sunset Pool, which operates at a cost of just over \$1 million, is the district's most expensive facility.

"We're taking a cautious approach but a hopeful one," Ronald Blin, the budget committee chairman, said. "But as things come back in this town, as we build slowly, this pool is going to be an important component as long as people are assured that it's going to be a safe experience, it's going to be an important contribution to us feeling about everything."

Employees will not receive cost-of-living increases in addition to frozen wages. Travel and training will also be curtailed or prohibited, Archibald said.

"We try to be prepared for every scenario. Unfortunately, we have to present a budget. If we have to adjust as we go on, we'll adjust, we'll do a supplemental budget, we'll look at other things to make sure we're accounting for other things are happening," Archibald said.

Legislators table \$50M hospital relief plan

Lawmakers want it to include forgivable loans or grants

By DICK HUGHES
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon legislators balked Thursday at loaning \$50 million in federal money to rural hospitals reeling from the coronavirus pandemic.

Members of the Legislative Emergency Board tabled the proposal so it could be reworked to include forgivable loans or straight-out grants. Several legislators said hospitals would be unable to take out loans, even at zero percent interest for the first year as Gov. Kate Brown has proposed, and the allowable uses were too restrictive.

"This was federal money given to us to pass on to our rural hospitals. Why are we making it a loan program as the state?" asked state Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. "It's wrong. It's morally incorrect in my opinion. This money should be grants from the beginning. In that way, we could actually help our rural hospitals."

Thirty-three rural hospitals would be eligible. But Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said the plan envisioned by Brown's staff was the equivalent of throwing only a 6-foot rope to someone drowning 10 feet offshore.

"We would look so incredibly foolish if we allowed hospitals to go broke on our watch during a global pandemic," Johnson said. "But there is all kind of stuff wrong with what the governor's folks have written."

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, noted that some hospitals are getting federal assistance, with Congress approving additional funding this week. "I think we want to be cautious about how we don't just unilaterally say everybody needs, frankly free money," she said, "because there are a lot of businesses and a lot of places around the state that need that money, too."

After a recess, Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, called for tabling the proposal, saying Brown's



Tech Sgt. Aaron Perkins/Oregon National Guard

Federal money designated for rural hospitals could have helped areas like Seaside and Astoria.

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Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose

staff agreed with that move. No date was set for when the board would take up the issue again.

The board did approve coronavirus-related funding for rent assistance, small businesses, domestic violence resources, COVID-19 testing for workers in long-term care facilities and aid to jobless workers, such as undocumented immigrants, who are ineligible for unemployment insurance.

Many of the details have yet to be worked out. Legislative Fiscal Officer Ken Rocco told the board, which for the first time was meeting by video conference, that it remained unclear how much federal aid Oregon was getting and what restrictions accompanied the money.

Hospital officials from across the state had told legislators earlier in the week that hospitals cumulatively were losing \$13 million a day due to the costs of COVID-19 equipment, a state ban on

nonurgent surgeries, fewer people receiving care in emergency rooms and other factors. More than 30,000 Oregon workers in the health care and social assistance fields have applied for unemployment since March 15.

Oregon Health & Science University announced Thursday that it was substantially reducing salaries and making other cutbacks to deal with a projected revenue loss during the next 28 months of \$1 billion to \$1.4 billion.

"It is not just the rural hospitals that are struggling," Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, who is a physician at OHSU, told her colleagues on the board. "Every single health system in the state is struggling as a result of this."

Brown announced Thursday that as of May 1, she was lifting the ban on elective medical and dental procedures. Steiner Hayward said that would help, but hospi-

tals would take time to ramp up and have lost significant income in the meantime.

The board approved the 11 items on its agenda, all on a bipartisan basis and most of them unanimously. Much of the discussion centered on fiscal accountability for how relief money is spent and ensuring that rural areas benefit.

Legislators approved a new program under which businesses employing 25 or fewer workers could be eligible for state grants or loans if they have not received federal aid.

Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, said he had been concerned that coronavirus assistance had not been going to the smallest of small businesses, which are the economic backbone of his district.

"People are hurting everywhere," he said. "According to the state economist, they're hurting particularly hard in my part of Oregon."

The state will contract with community development financial institutions to run the program, but Gomberg noted those institutions primarily are along the Interstate 5 corridor.

"I worry that it's not going to support everyone equally," he said, "that perhaps we're focused on helping the most people rather than people who are hurt the most."

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