

Hospitals: Columbia Memorial laid off 90 employees following the March order

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... it has to be balanced with the safety of our health care workforce,” he said.

Columbia Memorial laid off 90 employees — about 12% of the workforce — following the governor’s order in March.

Mike Antrim, a spokesman for Providence Seaside, said the hospital has not laid anyone off.

“We’re really pleased that Gov. Brown has opened up the opportunity for us to look at elective procedures for our patients,” Lisa Vance, the chief executive for Providence in Oregon, said in a statement. “There’s significant pent-up demand and concern as you can well imagine from those patients whose procedures have been delayed.”

Vance said Providence hopes to resume as many procedures as possible by May 4.

“So all of us as we are beginning to bring patients back into our facilities will



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Columbia Memorial Hospital announced temporary layoffs after coronavirus restrictions.

have to think of a lot of things,” she said. “How guests get to wait for their loved one. How we assure we have staffing ramped back up to where they need to be.

“Today, we have a lot of individual staff working in different jobs that we’ve needed under this COVID time period. So we need to go through all those processes so that we are ready for this time period. So it is chang-

ing — we’ve COVID-retooled, so to speak, and now we are going back to the new normal.”

Dr. Dominique Greco, a family medicine practitioner with Providence Seaside Clinic and chief medical officer for the hospital, said they are “cautiously optimistic” and prepared in case there is a surge of the virus.

“Our communities have just done an amazing job at all levels of getting on top

of this so that we hopefully won’t ever see that surge that a lot of places are seeing,” Greco said.

Greco said most patients have told her they have avoided coming in unless it is necessary. Her main message to patients is to reach out to their primary care provider if they are not sure whether or not to come in for care.

“We don’t want somebody to get sick with some-

thing else because they’re trying to avoid one problem,” Greco said.

Greco said the precautions in place include making masks available for everyone and screening people before entrance into buildings.

She said physicians are also trying to limit exposure by coordinating care more with patients so everything can be completed in one visit.

Although lack of testing has been a challenge on the North Coast, Antrim said the hospital’s testing capacity has been underutilized.

He said Providence can process up to 500 to 600 tests per day with about a 24-hour turnaround at the hospital’s regional laboratory.

Erik Thorsen, Columbia Memorial’s CEO, said in an email to employees on Thursday that the hospital is pleased the governor will lift restrictions.

“This action by the governor, in consultation with the Oregon Health Author-

ity, is imperative to restarting important health care in our community and raising the volumes in our facilities,” Thorsen said. “We are looking forward to getting back to more of what we do best, caring for the people of Clatsop County.”

Dentists and vets

Brown also thanked dentists and veterinarians for their donations of personal protective equipment. Her order forced many dentists and vets on the North Coast to close or scale back services.

Dr. Dennis Klemp said dentists are awaiting guidance from the Oregon Dental Association as to how to move forward.

“I’m just so encouraged that we’re moving forward, that there is light at the end of this tunnel,” said Klemp, who has a dental practice in Astoria. “We’re just going to move forward with that same cautionary step and make sure we continue to take care of our patients.”

Sign: Some would prefer a message that makes it clear businesses are still open

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admonition also applies to them.

“Like don’t even bother coming in,” she said.

Fenison is collecting signatures on a petition that asks the city to amend the signs. She supports the city’s policies and doesn’t want to suggest what the signs should say — she trusts city councilors and believes they could come up with something better.

But she would like a softer message, one that makes it clear businesses are still open and North Coast residents can still shop.

So far, she has collected over 70 signatures from a mix of locals and people who live outside of the area.

Many Cannon Beach business owners make the bulk of their money during the spring and summer tourism season, but they rely on local traffic in the late fall and winter. Without a boost from spring break crowds this year and with summer still an unknown, they are more reliant than ever on local customers.

Last spring, Fenison moved her business into a new location nearly four times the size of the old one.

“That was kind of a big transition and an expensive year,” she said. “We really counted on this year to bring us out of it. There’s no cushion for us.”

Like other business owners, she is trying to adapt, finding new ways to reach

customers and provide them with goods in a safe way. But the streets are deserted and rent is not cheap.

She isn’t sure if she’ll be able to bounce back.

“It’s impossible to say, honestly,” Fenison said. “All I know is it has significantly hurt our business and there’s a lot of businesses that wonder if they’re going to be here after this is over.”

Deanna Hammond, the co-owner of Cannon Beach Bakery, supports Fenison’s efforts and plans to pen a letter of her own to the City Council making a similar request.

“We can go to Seaside, Warrenton, Astoria to do our shopping and support our local businesses, but they don’t feel like they can come

here and support us because it clearly states the town is closed and they’re worried they’re going to be ticketed,” she said.

The bakery offers pre-ordering and pickup options and is looking to add home delivery several days a week.

“I absolutely feel like we can weather this storm,” Hammond said. “I’m not saying it’s going to be easy.”

After all, she added, “we’re not going to be able to pay our rent in May. We’re just not. Maybe a portion of it — and when does this stop?”

Like many others, they will be looking to help from the government or from grants.

The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce

sent a poll to business owners asking what would be the most helpful assistance from the city. More than half responded that they would prefer assistance through a grant program, Jim Paino, the chamber’s executive director, said. Several hotels also asked for a deferment of lodging tax payments.

The City Council is discussing potential relief options.

In his most recent message to residents posted on the city’s website on April 13, Mayor Sam Steidel acknowledged the difficulty of the situation for businesses.

But Cannon Beach is a unique draw, the mayor wrote.

“When the time does

come, we will see business return with a fury,” he wrote. “People have been cooped up and our sands are too much the temptation to resist.”

The question of when to reopen to visitors is a difficult one, though, and balance is key, he added. Like other coastal leaders, Steidel is worried about a flood of people too soon.

Oregon and Washington state’s governors will ultimately make the call about when to change stay-at-home orders and other closure policies and cities like Cannon Beach “are somewhat at the whim of those higher powers,” Steidel wrote.

“That said, I will keep the closed sign up as long as possible,” he said.

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