

## IN BRIEF

## Seaside man seeking \$1.1 million for negligence

A Seaside man is seeking more than \$1.1 million for negligence after being seriously injured in a crash in December.

Justin Powell was walking across 12th Avenue and N. Holladay Drive in Seaside when he was allegedly struck by a vehicle driven by Erik Yetzael Mendez Lopez.

Powell was struck at a high rate of speed, which threw his body over the hood of the vehicle, according to a court filing. He suffered numerous fractures, a laceration, a concussion and other injuries that have required surgeries.

Mendez Lopez, 23, of Seaside, was arrested and later charged with assault in the second degree, failure to perform the duties of a driver to injured persons, driving under the influence of intoxicants, failure to perform the duties of a driver with property damage, recklessly endangering another person and reckless driving.

The lawsuit also accuses Naked Wines of negligence for allegedly serving Mendez Lopez alcohol prior to the crash while he was visibly intoxicated.

Powell's attorney declined to comment.

Mendez Lopez's attorney and Naked Wines could not be reached for comment.

## Circuit Court restrictions extended

The Clatsop County Circuit Court is extending coronavirus restrictions until September.

Most hearings will continue to be held remotely and most nonessential hearings will be set out until after Sept. 1.

The customer service window will be open for business except during the lunch hour and will close at 4 p.m. People are required to wear face masks while in the courthouse. Court payments can be made online, but people on monthly payment plans are not required to make a payment before September.

In anticipation of state budget cuts, all circuit courts in Oregon will be closed on Friday, June 26 and July 17 and staff will take unpaid furloughs.

Several court staff will be placed on unpaid furlough for the months of June and July, which may also cause some delay in response times.

— The Astorian

## Pacific County unemployment soars amid coronavirus pandemic

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Pacific County has largely been spared from a public health crisis that has devastated so many other areas across the country and world so far, but a new state report shines light on the crippling blow the coronavirus pandemic has delivered to the county's workers.

In a monthly report from the Washington State Employment Security Department released on Tuesday, the county's unemployment rate ballooned from 6.9% in March to 17% in April, higher than the statewide unemployment rate of 15.4%.

— Chinook Observer

## DEATHS

May 27, 2020

MATILLA, Gary, 62, of Seaview, Washington, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

May 26, 2020

MAIZELS, Gayne, 69, of Warrenton, died in Warrenton. Hughes-Ransom

Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

Feb. 27, 2020

HOLMGREN, Frans Gustav, 87, of Clackamas, formerly of Svensen, died in Clackamas. Crown Memorial Center in Milwaukie is in charge of the arrangements.

## ON THE RECORD

## Theft

Mitchell Dean Simonsen, 35, of Hammond, was arrested Thursday at Home Depot in Warrenton for theft in the second degree.

## DUII

Justin Royce Harris, 42, of Portland, was arrested Thursday on U.S. Highway 101 for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

## MONDAY

Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

## TUESDAY

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A.  
Seaside Library Board, 4:30 p.m., Seaside Public Library, 1131 Broadway.  
Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).  
Miles Crossing Sanitary Sewer District Board, 6 p.m., 34583 U.S. Highway 101 Business.  
Seaside Planning Commission, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.



## PURPLE AND GOLD

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria High School sophomores Nevaeh Miehle and Lexi Reibold paint graduates' names on the windows of Street 14 Café in downtown Astoria on Wednesday afternoon. The windows of businesses up and down Commercial Street feature purple-and-gold decorations and the names of 2020 graduates prior to their drive-thru graduation on June 6.

## Oregon prepares to combat virus, fire season

By GARY WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon has to prepare for a possible second spike of COVID-19 in the fall, fight wildfires while not spreading the infection to crews and do it with budgets slashed by the state's dire finances, lawmakers were told Wednesday.

The hearing by the House Interim Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness was cast as a timeout for state agencies to tell legislators how they have dealt with the pandemic and what they plan to do going forward.

What specific equipment, training and planning do state agencies need as "we find the time to put Humpty Dumpty back together again?" said state Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, the chairman of the committee.

The committee cannot work on bills during the interim between sessions, but it can take testimony to help shape future legislation.

Though the 2021 session doesn't start until January, Gov. Kate Brown is expected to call a special session within the next few months to deal with a projected shortfall of nearly \$3 billion due to cratering state revenues. The deficit is caused by closed businesses and mass layoffs that resulted from shutting the state down to try and suppress the spread of the deadly virus that has killed more than 100,000 people in the United States since February.

Brown has asked state agencies to come up with a plan to cut 17% of their current budgets. It's a baseline for discussions with the Legislature on how to save some areas from the chopping block while deepening cuts in other areas or increasing revenue. The result would be hammered out when Brown calls on lawmakers to return to Salem.

Evans said he has no timetable for when that might be. "I don't know when and if there will be a special session," Evans said.

## Expensive disaster

Andrew Phelps, director of the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, said the coronavirus was the longest, biggest and most expensive disaster in state history. Because the pandemic hit every state and almost every nation, the usual network of shared resources between governments collapsed under the unprecedented demand.

Phelps said that even if a vaccine is found within the



Oregon National Guard soldiers learn the basics of wildland firefighting in 2015 at the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training center in Salem.

next year, the recovery from the damage wrought on the health and economy of the state will likely last through the end of the decade.

"Hopefully this is a once-in-a-lifetime event," he said. "This will be the largest natural disaster to hit Oregon by a factor of 10."

The virus will still be circulating through the state population as the summer fire season starts.

Doug Grafe, fire protection chief of the Oregon Department of Forestry, said COVID-19 was shaping the way the state will fight blazes. The key will be early fire suppression to hold down the number of crews that have to be deployed.

"We have to be aggressive on the initial attack," Grafe said. "We have to keep large fires off the landscape."

Grafe said that likely won't be easy with about 90% of the state in drought condition and a hot summer forecast.

Smoky conditions as in past summers would aggravate the breathing problems of those who are struggling with COVID-19's attack on their lungs.

Rep. Kim Wallen, R-Medford, asked Grafe about any disconnect between the state and the U.S. Forest Service, which in the past has allowed fires deep in the wilderness to burn unchallenged.

Grafe said federal officials agreed that there would be no watch-and-wait approach this year.

"That is not a policy choice they are willing to make because of the COVID situation," he said.

While officials will try to limit the infection from spreading by changing the way firefighters set up camp and keeping a tighter limit on who can come into a command center, the bottom line is that crews will not be held back if they are needed.

"We're ready to respond," said Jim Walker, Oregon

state fire marshal. "I'm not sure we will know the finish line until we get a vaccine."

The Oregon National Guard will supply firefighting teams, but won't be able to send in its CH-47 Chinook helicopters, which can dump up to 1,500 pounds of fire retardant at a time. They have been deployed overseas with 1,600 guard members mobilized to serve in U.S. Army anti-terrorism operations in 10 different countries around the horn of Africa. So have Chinooks based in Washington state.

Oregon National Guard officials have made inquiries about obtaining the twin-rotor heavy helicopters from the East Coast if necessary. While the first units will start returning to the state next month, the helicopters are not scheduled to return until next year.

"They will be back in time for the 2021 fire season," said Dave Stuckey, deputy director of the Oregon Military Department.

This year, the state will have to depend on HH-60M Blackhawk helicopters, which can carry 520 pounds of retardant per trip. Forest Service and civilian contracted firefighting aircraft are also going to be involved in stopping any major fire.

Stuckey said troops returning from deployment overseas will spend two weeks in quarantine at a training facility in the U.S. as a precaution against spreading COVID-19 before they are allowed to come back to their hometowns.

## Local response

Brian Young, the president of the Oregon Emergency Management Association, which represents local

response forces around the state, said the possibility of a pandemic has always existed, but most of the regional emergency management scenarios were geared toward floods, fires and at the top of the list, earthquakes.

"A year ago we were talking about Cascadia and about what that would do to the region," he said.

Young called for a better integration between federal, state and local emergency responses. Not for a future disaster, but for the one ongoing right now.

"This is more like a pause in the middle of the game," Young said. "Take a high overview of the lessons learned."

Young said that a bigger and better cache of items needed by first responders and medical providers for the pandemic was a top priority. The breakdown of supply chains early in this year's crisis led to shortages of face masks and other personal protective equipment, with panic buying of what little equipment became available.

Evans agreed that the scramble of sometimes competing agencies made a cohesive effort difficult to build and maintain.

"Emergency management can be like herding cats," he said. "Disasters are won or lost on a local level."

Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond, a committee member, said that any solution to the PPE shortage had to include how to ensure that local doctors, dentists and others aren't forgotten. Many contributed their masks and other equipment to emergency medical personnel caught in the shortage. They need their supplies to be replenished to survive.

"If hospitals are having a hard time, how do any of these other businesses even have a chance?" Zika said.

Akiko Saito, director of emergency operations at the Oregon Health Authority, said the agency was simultaneously trying to figure out the short-term response to the pandemic and what a mid-term, nonemergency response will look like before a vaccine is found.

"We have to watch and make sure we can guard against a rebound of the virus," she said. "We're preparing for a possible second wave in the fall."

## the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873  
(USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com  
MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number:  
503-325-3211

Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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