

CORONAVIRUS

Looking for distance

Outdoor seating a key element of reopening amid virus

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Restaurant and bar owners in Astoria are rolling out the barrels, tables and chairs as the weather improves.

Outdoor seating has taken on increased importance during a coronavirus pandemic that has left many restaurants with limited indoor seating and some customers wary of going indoors.

The state allowed Clatsop County businesses to reopen indoor dining, but required they distance parties by at least 6 feet and eliminate bar seating unless there is an impermeable barrier between customers and employees. The restrictions have led many restaurants to open with severely limited capacity or remain closed.

The City Council, acknowledging the struggle of restaurateurs, passed a temporary ordinance allowing sidewalk seating without a permit, provided businesses maintain a 5-foot-wide path for passersby. The decision followed the Oregon Liquor Control Commission easing requirements for bars and restaurants to expand outdoor alcohol service to sidewalks, streets and other common areas.

“Staff has actually been talking about this issue far before COVID-19 came about,” City Manager Brett Estes said at a recent City Council meeting before the adoption of the ordinance. “And so this is an opportunity for us to look and see how this all works. And after restaurants are able to move back to full seating within their establishments, we may look at bringing some code amendments to the City Council for consideration based upon this.”

Terry Robinett, who co-owns Merry Time Bar and Grill with her husband, Todd, said she had already secured a permit from the city to add several seats along the bar’s



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

ABOVE: From left, Pam Armstrong, David Armstrong and Amy Larson enjoy drinks at Reach Break Brewing’s outdoor dining patio on Friday afternoon. **BELOW:** Customers enjoy a meal on the deck at Mo’s in Astoria.

Marine Drive frontage, along with the state’s expedited outside liquor license. They have already emptied the inside of many tables and installed a large plexiglass barrier at the bar to stop airborne particles.

Ann and Tony Kischner, owners of Bridgewater Bistro near the Port of Astoria, said they felt relatively fortunate only losing about a third of capacity inside their spacious, high-end restaurant. To mitigate the loss indoors, they are expanding alcohol service on the deck outside overlooking the Columbia River and said they plan to put up wine barrels and serve drinks to people waiting on the sidewalk outside. They will add plexiglass to the bar.

“Every little bit’s going to count when it gets busy,” Ann Kischner said. “And the trick is we all have to make enough money this summer to get through next winter. And that’s hard enough to do when we can fill every seat.”

Some have pushed for even greater leeway to increase seating, from utiliz-

ing parking lots to closing certain streets, similar to the Astoria Sunday Market. Several businesses in Bend, for example, have partnered to take over portions of diagonal parking on the main drag to expand outdoor seating, with the support of the city.

“Parking lots is something that could definitely happen,” Estes said Friday. “They couldn’t reduce the number of required parking places, but if they had excess parking spaces above the minimum requirements, then businesses that have parking lots could do that.”

Estes has heard of more creative ideas, like turning the one-block 13th Street into a pedestrian zone, but said street closures would require City Council signoff.

Blaylock’s Whiskey Bar, celebrating its one-year anniversary last weekend, set up barrels and chairs along its storefront, while sunny weather filled the patio outside Reach Break Brewing,

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State rejects county’s call for mandatory virus testing

Response to outbreaks at seafood plants

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Responding to concerns from Clatsop County, the Oregon Health Authority said the state will not recommend mandatory coronavirus testing for essential workers at seafood plants and other food processors.

Outbreaks at Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria and Pacific Seafood in Warrenton prompted Michael McNickle, the county’s public health director, to call for mandatory, continuous testing paid for by businesses. In a June 2 letter to the state, he also called for more inspections

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River cruises plan return

American Song due on Saturday

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

American Cruise Lines, which runs cruises along the Columbia and Snake rivers, is planning a return to Astoria on Saturday.

The company’s 184-passenger ship, American Song, will leave Portland on Saturday at 75% capacity, provided it can get signoff from the state, and arrive later in the day at the 17th Street Dock. It would be one of the first cruises since the industry was shuttered because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Local officials have banned passenger-carrying cruise ships since March over concerns of increasing local exposure to the virus. But Clatsop County officials said in a statement Monday they are not opposed to river cruises returning, provided they follow guidelines set by the state.

“The county, city and Port are OK moving forward, depending on a clear understanding of how sick passengers will be addressed,” the statement said.

Officials with Gov. Kate Brown’s office were not immediately available for comment about what sort of protocols

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‘That could have been me’



Jim Courtney in Vietnam.

Seaside man finds meaning in memorial

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — When the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial went up in the Cove early this year, Jim Courtney paid a visit. He felt a rush of memories and emotion.

The image on the monument — a soldier walking through rice paddies carrying his weapon — uncannily resembles the scene he remembers in Vietnam.

“I carried an M16, same thing as him,” Courtney said. “I dressed the same. He’s walking through the rice paddies, helicopters in the background. That’s exactly where I

was at. That could have been me.” Courtney is happily retired in Seaside now. His mortgage is paid and he has time to indulge his hobby of candle making with his wife, Debbie.

After a career in construction, the Courtneys managed hotels in Astoria and Rockaway Beach. The couple bought their Seaside home six years ago and sold their interest in the Lamplighter Motel.

Behind Courtney’s easy smile today is his story of valor, glory and



Debbie Courtney

Jim Courtney at the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial in Seaside.

pain.

In 1968, at 19, he was hoping to go on the motorcycle racing circuit throughout the Northwest when an accident grounded him. He suffered a knee injury that interrupted his plans.

A draft notice followed soon after. “I thought, ‘They won’t draft me with my bad knee. I’m married, settled in.’ And here I got this draft



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

The Purple Heart medal bestowed on Jim Courtney.

notice. I said, ‘Oh, you’re kidding me.’ They said, ‘You’ll be fine.’”

Courtney served in the U.S. Army’s 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta.

On Oct. 31, 1968, he was returning to camp after a four-day mission in the jungle and rice paddies, on a Tango boat, an armed patrol boat

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EVERYDAY people

