

Pacific Seafood outbreak shows limits in state's response

By **JAMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

Ada Gabi Gutierrez Castañeda, 18, took a job this summer at Pacific Seafood in Warrenton to help support her family after her mother's hours at another seafood processor were cut amid the coronavirus pandemic.

When the virus then infected nearly 100 workers from Pacific Seafood's Warrenton facility, including Gutierrez, the company publicly blamed a Labor Day party some employees attended. But Gutierrez, who didn't go to that party, thinks she got the virus on the job. The company's own internal emails show that most of those infected live in off-site housing that Pacific Seafood arranged, and that only eight initial cases were linked to the party.

Oregon farms and food processing facilities have been linked to more than 50 coronavirus outbreaks since March, infecting more than 1,500 workers and close contacts, according to an analysis by The Oregonian. Those infections have had profound effects on small communities from Hermiston to Newport, which have suffered some of Oregon's biggest outbreaks despite their size and relative isolation.

The circumstances behind Pacific Seafood's Warrenton outbreak illustrate how complicated these incidents are, and may shed a light on why Oregon has been unable to prevent a number of similar outbreaks around the state.

How the virus spread

Pacific Seafood's Warrenton outbreak has infected 95 employees since early September, marking the third-largest outbreak at a food processing plant in Oregon to date. No employees have been hospitalized, according to the company.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A major coronavirus outbreak hit Pacific Seafood in Warrenton.

It is the second outbreak linked to Pacific Seafood's Warrenton facility following an outbreak that infected 15 people in May. Additionally, one worker tested positive before starting work at the facility in June. Another outbreak at Pacific Seafood's facilities in Newport in June infected 187 people and remains the second-largest workplace outbreak in the state, outside of the prison system. Additional small outbreaks occurred at Pacific Seafood's facilities in Clackamas and Charleston.

After learning early last month that eight workers from the Warrenton facility had tested positive for the virus, Pacific Seafood tested an additional 295 employees, starting with night shift employees and seasonal workers who live in off-site housing arranged by Pacific Seafood. Those tests revealed an additional 87

positive cases.

Pacific Seafood quickly tied the outbreak to a Labor Day celebration that took place outside of work and was not organized by the company. But in an email obtained by The Oregonian, Bill Hueffner, senior director of marketing and development at Pacific Seafood, said that only the eight early cases could be clearly traced to the Labor Day gathering.

According to the email sent by Hueffner, "the vast majority of workers who subsequently tested positive reside in the off-site seasonal housing at an area hotel." A spokesman for Pacific Seafood said the eight workers who initially tested positive

live in the off-site hotel.

Pacific Seafood works with local hotel operators and short-term accommodation providers to coordinate and subsidize housing for seasonal employees brought in from elsewhere in the United States and foreign workers on temporary H2-B visas. The housing sites are not owned or managed by Pacific Seafood.

It's not clear whether infections first spread among workers who attended the party, or if they first spread at worker housing or perhaps at Pacific Seafood itself. And the long incubation period of the virus and limitations of contact tracing mean it may be impossible

to ever know for sure.

However, Gutierrez, who lives with her family in Astoria, believes she contracted COVID-19 during the night shift at Pacific Seafood.

She credits Pacific Seafood with taking steps to protect workers, including implementing daily temperature checks and providing masks. Pacific Seafood's coronavirus safety plan also includes measures around social distancing, maintaining heightened

cleaning procedures and ensuring adequate ventilation within facilities, among other things.

But Gutierrez said employees — and even supervisors — at the Warrenton facility would take their masks off during their shifts and that certain tasks required workers to stand shoulder-to-shoulder without any barriers separating them. She said she didn't know of any workers who complained about possible breaches in safety measures, but also said supervisors would often refuse to talk to workers who didn't speak English.

Gutierrez worked at Pacific Seafood from June until September when she left the job to return to school. She clocked out for the last time on the morning of Sept. 6, the day before Labor Day. Later that week, she started having trouble breathing. After a co-worker from Pacific Seafood informed her that he had tested positive for COVID-19, Gutierrez decided to get tested and soon learned she had the virus. She has since recovered.

"That's the only logical place I could have caught it because all I would do is work and then come home and sleep and come back to work," Gutierrez said.

Patrick Allen, the director of the Oregon Health Authority, said in a town hall on Oct. 2 with community

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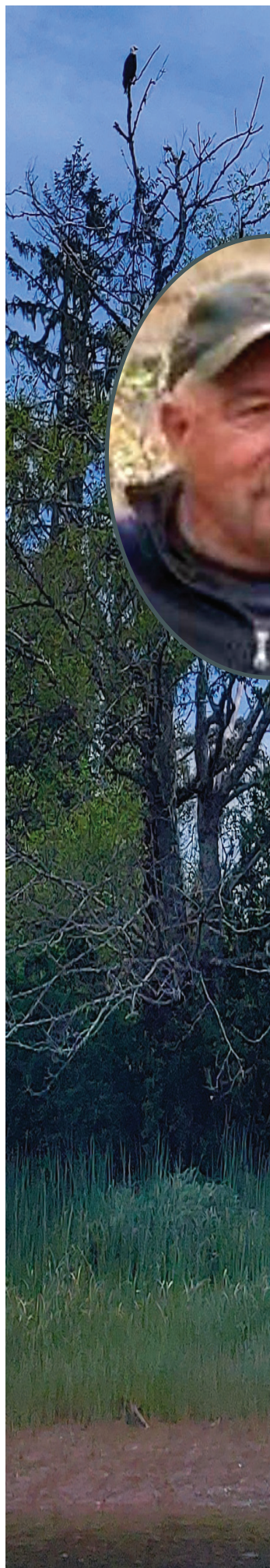
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Remembering Lonny "Skip" Dwayne Moore

Lonny "Skip" Dwayne Moore, 63, of Warrenton, Oregon, passed away peacefully on September 26, 2020 after a year long battle with cancer.

He was born in Astoria, Oregon on March 16, 1957 to Jim and Jean Moore, one of five brothers. Skip graduated from Warrenton High School in 1975, where he excelled at wrestling and being sarcastic. After graduation he went to work at the Warrenton Mill and later had two daughters, Stefanie and Stacey, and one son, Kevin.

Skip had a very real love for the game of softball. He coached/assisted with his daughter's softball teams in high school and went on to coach a competitive 18u team. Even after his daughters graduated, he continued to coach with a passion, sometimes a little too much passion (just ask the umpires)! Had it not been for his love of the game, he probably would have worked at the mill forever, but he was moved to swing shift and that interfered with practice and games, so he quit the mill.

Skip found his career niche at the Seaside Factory Outlet Center as the maintenance and janitorial man, or as he called it: "Facilities Maintenance Engineer aka the glorified poop picker upper and mall god". Everyone knew that you would have a friendly wave and dirty joke when you saw the green machine, except the bums, he was not friendly to those digging in his garbage cans. He prided himself on knowing everything that happened at the center. He "suffered" many years working with two women, who relied on his quick answering of the phone and problem-solving skills to keep things running, only having to temper his language and attitude occasionally.

Working at the mall allowed him a flexible schedule to continue coaching, but also to fish and hunt whenever he wanted. His record number of days fishing in a row was 72! To say he loved hunting and fishing would be an understatement. He passed that love on to his son, as well as many other people. Skip loved an excuse to take someone out on the boat or out in the woods. His hobby was also taxidermy. He assisted Kent Israel Taxidermy for years, and his home reflected that. Barely able to see the walls in his living room, there was an animal in every available space and a story behind it! You could also find him cutting meat in his garage every evening in the fall. Skip, along with Butch and others, cut and wrapped deer and elk during hunting season.

There were many nights of cold weather, good friends and inflated hunting stories. If you stood around too long you would be roped into helping wrap!

Despite the full life of raising kids, working, coaching, hunting, fishing, taxidermy, and meat cutting he still managed to volunteer for 26 years with the Warrenton Fire Department. Skip could be very calm under pressure, able to pay attention to details, and that showed in the many calls he responded to. It was fascinating to listen to the stories he had, from arguing with his chief over whether he could use a saw on a car, to delivering a baby in a parking lot, to doing dive rescue in the river.

Eight years ago, Skip made the decision to quit drinking. This decision not only improved his quality of life, but also that of others. He not only made friends during this time but influenced and encouraged others to stay on the sober path. His energy for life was renewed and with a clear, sober outlook on life his new motto became: "If it's not fun, I'm not doing it!"

The subject that has to be mentioned, he was a die hard Raiders fan, it was his one fault.

Skip was his own unique personality. Despite coming across as tough or grumpy sometimes, the one trait that resonated with everyone, besides his love of Copenhagen and diet coke, was that he had a huge heart! He was willing to help anyone, whether that be opening his home, helping find work, or just being a friend to listen. He will be greatly missed by all.

Skip was preceded in death by his parents Jim and Jean Moore and his brother, Dwight Moore. He is survived by his daughter and son-in-law, Bo and Stefanie Ward and their children Carter and Cooper, of Canby, Oregon; daughter Stacey Moore and her children Calvin, Kiki, and Harlow, of Warrenton, Oregon; son and daughter-in-law Kevin and Leah Moore and their children, Haiden and Ava, of Redmond, Oregon; brother Ronnie Moore of Georgia; brother and sister-in-law, Mike and Kristen Moore of Warrenton, Oregon; brother, Jeremy Moore of Pendleton, Oregon; several nieces and nephews; and numerous friends that became family.

A get together to honor Skip and share stories will be held October 24th, 2020 at 2 pm at Cullably Lake, first shelter. Please maintain social distancing and wear a mask.