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CORONAVIRUS

Domestic violence climbs on North Coast during pandemic

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Domestic violence, a persistent problem on the North Coast, has climbed during the coronavirus pandemic.

The number of people reaching out for help through a crisis line at The Harbor, an Astoria nonprofit that helps victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, has hovered at around 200 calls a month and is on track to reach 250 calls in October. Before the pandemic, the agency received about 100 to 125 calls a month.

The Harbor has also seen a significant increase in the need for emergency housing. Twenty-five people were housed in the agency's emergency shelter in October, compared to nine people last October.

Advocates have also detected a disturbing pattern in the severity of violence.

"I think it's staggering when you think about the size of the county," Terri Steenbergen, the agency's executive director, said. "And these people are all calling about some form of violence."

Housing a challenge

The Harbor, which has 12 staffers, including eight direct service advocates, has been overwhelmed by people in need of resources and services.

Steenbergen said the biggest challenge is access to affordable housing, which means more people are staying in the emergency shelter longer.

"That was happening before the pandemic in rural communities around Oregon, and it's even more so the case now," she said.

The social and economic ramifications of the pandemic have also contributed to the complexity of victims'

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A purple light shines through the window of Loop-Jacobsen Jewelers on Commercial Street in Astoria. Purple is the color of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October.

Breweries, City Council partner on wastewater

Fort George, Buoy Beer to divert brewery waste

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

The Astoria City Council on Monday signaled support for a phased approach to improve treatment of industrial wastewater coming primarily from Fort George Brewery and Buoy Beer Co. after a consultant presented a plan to divert brewery waste.

Fort George and Buoy Beer have created hundreds of jobs, renovated rundown commercial properties and boosted the region's economic fortunes. But the breweries are also taxing the city's ability to pump out treated wastewater into the Columbia River clean enough for federal standards.

Astoria's sewage lagoons, built in 1974, have never been cleaned of accumulated grit. They still meet the city's minimal population growth trends but were never designed to treat spent yeast, hops and other ingredients in brewery runoff.

Mayor Bruce Jones said finding a solution isn't about blaming anyone, including breweries, which he called critically important to the local economy.

"It's certainly not about pointing fingers," the mayor said. "It is what it is. It's where we are right now. It's the current status of the infrastructure and developing industries in our community."

City staff have recommended a \$5 million project in the next five years to significantly expand the treatment system's capacity by turning a lagoon into a sludge

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Cannon Beach police see rise in calls for service

Police chief ties increase to pandemic

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Calls for service to the Cannon Beach Police Department have already surpassed the number from last year,

an increase tied to the coronavirus pandemic.

The police department had 3,457 calls for service as of Oct. 1 — 510 ahead of the total for 2019.

Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn attributed the increase to the pandemic, with overnight camping as the largest factor.

Clatsop County and cities placed restrictions on hotels and other

lodging after an influx of spring break visitors in March. Cannon Beach took additional measures and excluded visitors who lived outside a 50-mile radius of the city.

Schermerhorn said people still wanting to escape to the beach would camp in their cars or on the beach.

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Business groups scramble to fund virus relief grants

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Business groups are scrambling to fill a \$600,000 gap between coronavirus relief grant requests and available funding by mid-November.

The linchpin could be getting the state to loosen restrictions on about \$350,000 in unspent grant money.

Around 400 businesses across Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties, along with portions of western Washington County, have applied for \$2.4 million in federal coronavirus relief funneled through the state to the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District and then to local support groups. About half of the requests are from Clatsop County.

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Land conservancy expands in Warrenton

Transfer will double wildlife corridor

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The North Coast Land Conservancy is expanding its holdings with the acquisition of 42 acres of wetlands in the city that will double the length of an existing wildlife

corridor.

The transfer of the Clatsop County-owned property off of Ninth Street to land conservancy ownership has been in the works for years, tied to efforts for Fort George Brewery to expand operations at the North Coast Business Park.

The transfer was intended as a mitigation measure after the brewery needed credits to fill in a wetland at the business park to build a road and develop the site.

County officials agreed this month to follow staff recommendations to finalize the transfer even though Fort George's plans to expand at the business park had

stalled and then stopped.

The county may have faced the possibility of a lawsuit from the brewery and daily fines from the Oregon Department of State Lands if it did not follow through on the transfer, according to a staff report.

Wetlands like those in the transfer, which include spruce forest as well as swamp habitat, are considered globally rare and are critical ecosystems.

They are "nature's kidneys," filtering out sediments, excess nutrients and pollutants, said Bonnie Henderson, communications

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The North Coast Land Conservancy has acquired 42 acres of wetlands in Warrenton.

