

CORONAVIRUS



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Lolly Champion, left, and Susan Martin organize food for the Thanksgiving food boxes at the Cannon Beach Food Pantry.

Local food banks see the strains during pandemic

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Some North Coast food banks say the number of people seeking help is creeping back up to the high levels they saw at the beginning of pandemic-related closures and layoffs back in March.

Volunteers and administrators draw a line to Gov. Kate Brown's two-week freeze, which imposes restrictions on businesses and social gatherings to slow the spread of the coronavirus, along with uncertainty about whether financial assistance will be renewed as federal aid packages expire.

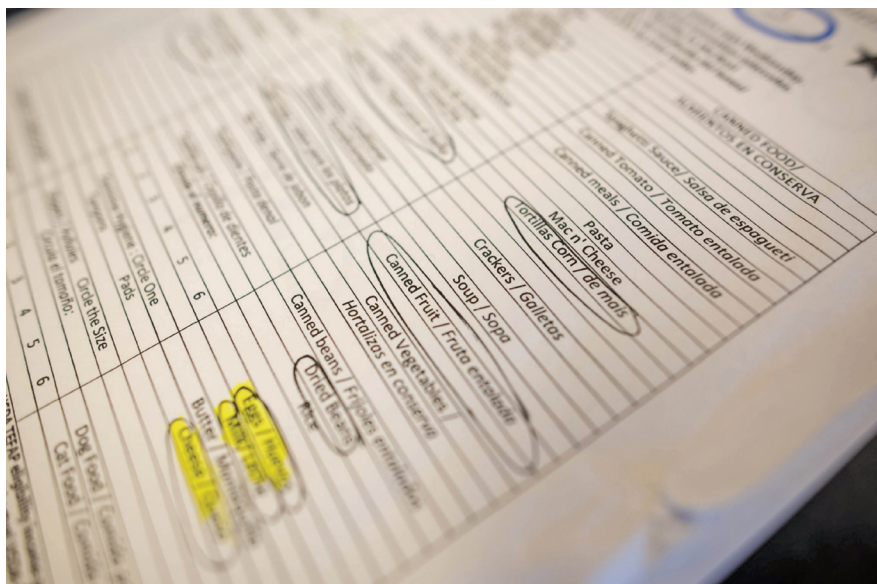
The pandemic has exacerbated food and housing insecurities, disproportionately impacting people who already face significant social and economic challenges, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici said in a conference call with stakeholders Wednesday ahead of the holiday season.

Congress only recently resumed negotiations on an economic relief package after failing to pass a \$500 billion plan in October that would have, among other things, helped boost weekly unemployment benefits.

With Republicans and Democrats in a stalemate over the scope and size of the relief package, renewed economic aid may not arrive until after President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

"It's beyond urgent that Congress provide more aid," Bonamici, an Oregon Democrat, said.

It is "unconscionable," she said, that the Senate has not taken action on several potential relief measures. "They have done nothing since (the spring) and the pandemic, as we know, is not just still here, it is surging."



Volunteers organized food boxes based off of preorder forms.

'IT'S BEYOND URGENT THAT CONGRESS PROVIDE MORE AID.'

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici

Demand

Food programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture have provided a robust, consistent flow of supplies to food banks, regional officials told Bonamici. But these programs need to be expanded and extended to continue to meet what they expect will be an ongoing, heightened need for food, some told her.

At the Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank warehouse in Warrenton, demand has increased by roughly 20%, according to Dusten Mar-

tin, the chief operations officer for the food bank. The food bank has also provided food to people in quarantine after outbreaks at local seafood processing facilities.

Demand has been mixed at pantries and other agencies the regional food bank supplies, but many say they saw an increase in March and in the months that followed.

"What we saw in March was phenomenal," said Maureen Casterline, the board vice president for the South County Food Bank in Seaside.

The food bank served 152 people in a single day after state and local restrictions and shutdowns were implemented in March. At that time of year, the food bank normally serves only 70 people in a day.

Demand remained high for about a week. Volunteers saw many new faces,

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County listed as 'high risk'

Coronavirus restrictions to continue after state freeze

By GARY WARNER
and NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

With coronavirus infection rates rising rapidly in Oregon, Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday that state restrictions on social gatherings and businesses would continue after a two-week freeze expires next week.

The governor outlined a new, data-driven framework to assess risk and help contain the spread of the virus through the winter.

"Until our COVID-19 vaccines are widely available, health and safety precautions will remain in place so that our schools, our businesses and our communities can reopen and stay open," Brown said.

At least 21 counties, including Multnomah, the state's largest by population, are at extreme risk, Brown said, and would see government restrictions similar to the freeze continue through most of December.

Clatsop County was one of six designated as high risk.

In high-risk counties, indoor social gatherings would continue to be limited to six people from two households. Outdoor gatherings could have eight people.

Indoor dining at restaurants and bars would be allowed, but at 25% of capacity — or up to 50 people — with an 11 p.m. closing time. Outdoor dining would be allowed for up to 75 people, with a limit of six people a table from two households.

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Fort Astoria sign gets a rewrite

Message seen as more inclusive

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

New language for the Fort Astoria sign focuses on the history of Native Americans and the fort's importance as a trading nexus.

The language would replace an emphasis on colonial European domination that some had found dated.

A diverse work group, including tribal members, preservationists and museum professionals, updated the language on the Exchange Street sign. The city's Parks Board approved the new language Wednesday, sending it to the City Council for review.

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Surprise donor buys Astoria man a car

A chance encounter for gas station attendant

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

An Astoria gas station attendant was stunned after a customer bought him a car.

Bradley Rowe was near the end of his shift at Safeway Fuel Station in late November when Bill Ring, a product specialist at Warrenton Kia,

approached him and told him a customer, who wished to remain anonymous, left money for Rowe to pick out a car at the lot.

Rowe said he was in complete disbelief, and, at first, could not think of who the customer might have been.

He was skeptical as he drove to the Kia dealership after his shift, and while waiting for all the paperwork to be processed on the 2016 Kia Sportage he picked out.

He said his last car was unreliable and needed constant maintenance and repairs. The Kia was the nicest vehicle he has ever driven.

"I've literally woken up in the morning and went to find my keys

just to make sure that it wasn't a dream," Rowe said.

While Rowe said he respects the man's wish to remain anonymous, he has thought about who he may have been and what motivated him to be so generous.

He said that after a year that has brought so much hardship, the gift gives him and others a little bit of hope. More than 1,000 people have reacted to Warrenton Kia's Facebook post about the surprise.

"Some people say it's God, others say it's karma," Rowe said. "I think it was just a very kind man,

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Warrenton Kia

Bradley Rowe and his girlfriend in front of his SUV.



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