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CORONAVIRUS

SIGN OF CHANGE



Kevin Riddle finishes his 31-day countdown to the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at his Astoria home on Wednesday morning.

Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian



Gearhart police scale back on crisis response

Reaction to a death in Texas

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — Drawing a line between law enforcement and crisis response, Police Chief Jeff Bowman announced that his officers will no longer be the first responders to mental health calls unless there is an imminent threat of physical harm to others.

In a letter to Mayor Paulina Cockrum and the City Council on Monday, the police chief said the social services community should step up and take an active role when people report a mental health crisis or reach out to a suicide hotline.

“The first call should be to social services, not the police,” Bowman said in an interview.

Bowman said only when a subject in a mental health crisis is imminently in harm’s way will police respond. “Is the sub-

ject running around the Grocery Outlet parking lot with a machete, or is he sitting there talking to himself?” he asked.

Bowman issued the directive in response to a January incident in Killeen, Texas, when a police officer, dispatched to a family home during a mental health crisis, ended up fatally shooting a man in his front yard. The family has complained that the officer was not equipped to handle the situation and has called for the officer to be fired and arrested.

“Why was this officer dispatched at all, and why did the command staff allow this officer to respond?” Bowman asked.

Bowman emailed the directive “as a head’s up why we may or may not respond” to Seaside police and Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop County’s mental health contractor.



Jeff Bowman

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Life Flight Network
Life Flight Network is stationing a new Bell 429 helicopter at the Astoria Regional Airport in Warrenton.

Life Flight upgrades helicopter at airport

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Life Flight Network will station a new helicopter at the Astoria Regional Airport as part of a regional upgrade in speed and medical capabilities.

The new Bell 429 helicopter, among four the nonprofit medevac service bought for \$34 million, is expected to arrive in spring. Ben Clayton, the chief operating officer for Life Flight, said they provide

better patient access and ability to navigate using flight instruments when visibility is low.

Life Flight’s helicopters are equipped to operate like mobile intensive care units with a nurse, a paramedic, ventilators, laryngoscopes and the ability to transfuse red blood cells. The new upgrades include the ability to do onboard plasma transfusions to help slow and replace blood loss in trauma patients.

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Task force in position for vaccine rollout

New panel led by hospital director

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The slow rollout of coronavirus vaccines has left health care leaders in the uncomfortable position of telling people at risk from the virus they will have to wait.

Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center ser-

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vices at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, who is leading Clatsop County’s vaccine task force, said the most common questions come from seniors with underlying health conditions who want to know if they can get vaccinated.

“Unfortunately, the answer is just ‘no,’” he said. “As vaccines become more available, we’ll be able to move down the list and get to you.”

“It’s not the task force’s job to identify who the next group is,” he said. “We’re going to use the (Oregon Health Authority) guidelines to guide how those decisions are made. It’s not the task force arbitrarily making decisions about who the next person is to get the shot.”

Nearly all of the vaccines in the county have been administered — 1,847 as of Friday — and the county Public Health Department, hospitals and other organizations charged with distribution are anxiously waiting for more doses.

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Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center services at Columbia Memorial Hospital, is leading a county vaccine task force during the coronavirus pandemic.

Edward Stratton/The Astorian

