



»INSIDE

# Astorian

148TH YEAR, NO. 92

WEEKEND EDITION // SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2021

\$1.50

CORONAVIRUS

## Astoria elementary students to return to classrooms

Target for classes is Feb. 11

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Astorian*

Elementary school students in Astoria could return to school buildings as early as Feb. 11 following a slight dip in the number of local coronavirus cases.

At a special meeting Wednesday night, the Astoria School District Board voted unanimously in favor of a recommendation by Superintendent Craig Hoppes to begin phasing students in kindergarten-through-fifth grade back into classrooms at Lewis and Clark Elementary and Astor Elementary. Students would attend school in-person five days a week for three hours each day.

The decision comes on the heels of a vote by the school board last week to delay reopening schools until virus case metrics improved. Under the state guidelines and metrics reported to the school board Wednesday, Clatsop County's recent drop in cases and infection rates would allow the Astoria School District's youngest student to begin returning to school.

The county, however, remains in the state's extreme risk category, the highest risk level for the virus.

Some students across grade levels are already back in school buildings on a limited basis for specific activities or classes.

"We are going to work hard to make sure all the safety and health protocols are in place," Hoppes told the school board

*See Classrooms, Page A6*

## State discloses virus cases at hospital

Part of a weekly report on workplace outbreaks

By NICOLE BALES  
*The Astorian*

Columbia Memorial Hospital is tied to 27 coronavirus cases, the state disclosed.

The virus cases, detailed by the Oregon Health Authority in a weekly report on workplace outbreaks released on Wednesday, date back to Nov. 27. The most recent onset was Jan. 14.

The health authority discloses outbreaks at businesses with 30 or more workers once five virus cases are reported.

Columbia Memorial administrators stressed that there is no active outbreak at the Astoria hospital and sought to assure patients that it is safe to attend appointments.

"This number (27) is a cumulative number of caregivers who have become ill due to COVID over almost two months," Nancee Long, a Columbia Memorial spokeswoman, said in an email.

In response to questions from The Astorian, Long said five employees tested positive for the virus during the week of Nov. 27.

*See Hospital, Page A6*

## On the North Coast, masks are — mostly — the norm during pandemic



Hailey Hoffman/  
The Astorian

By NICOLE BALES  
*The Astorian*

Despite initial grumbling and even some defiance, wearing face masks in public has become a norm on the North Coast during the coronavirus pandemic.

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden required masks to be worn on federal property and asked Americans to wear masks for 100 days. The new order and message are part of Biden's national strategy to fight the virus.

Gov. Kate Brown's required people in Oregon months ago to wear masks in indoor public spaces to contain the spread of the virus.

Police saw a spike in mask-related calls after the government mandate, but those calls have dwindled. While business leaders say instances of people trying to enter retailers without masks is the exception, it does happen almost every day.

David Reid, the executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, said most retailers are firm about mask requirements and make sure

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Geoff Spalding | Astoria police chief

to intercept people before they get too far into the store.

"While it's disappointing to have to turn someone away or lose a potential customer because they refuse to comply, these owners know that the health and safety of their staff, other customers and themselves are far more important," Reid said in an email. "In this case at least, 'the customer is always right' doesn't apply.

"What's interesting is that when someone is refused entry or service because they are not wearing a mask, the other customers in the store often say 'thank you' to the shop owner for their diligence. We saw early in this pandemic that while requiring safety measures may cost a few customers, NOT having those measures in place actually costs more customers. Most people want to feel safe when they shop and appreciate the lengths store owners go to in order to keep them safe."

Astoria Police Chief Geoff Spalding said officers typically notify the proper licensing authority, as opposed to issuing a citation, when responding to calls about businesses defying the mask mandate.

The police chief said, for example, that an officer recently responded to a complaint at a coffee drive-thru over employees not wearing masks. The officer notified the state Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Clatsop County Public Health Department.

*See Masks, Page A6*

## Homeowners sue city to hurry window replacement



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Thomas and Priscilla Levy want to replace 19 wooden windows in their historic house on 16th Street and Grand Avenue with Fibrex, a composite of reclaimed wood fiber and thermoplastic polymer.

Objections from the preservation society

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

A retired couple has sued Astoria to force the approval of window replacements in a historic house over the objections of the Lower Columbia Preservation Society.

Thomas and Priscilla Levy bought the house at 16th Street and Grand Avenue in August and retired from Portland.

The couple submitted an application in September to replace 19 white pine window frames in the house with Fibrex, a composite of reclaimed wood fiber and thermoplastic polymer made by Andersen Windows & Doors. Thomas Levy argued that the old windows were beyond repair, with black mold and deterioration.

*See Windows, Page A6*

### MORE INSIDE

County reports new virus cases • A6



7 29467 20121 7