

IN BRIEF

Vaccine demand swamps Pacific County call center

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — More than 1,000 vaccine appointments were scheduled in Pacific County last week, as the local vaccination effort ramped up to its highest level yet.

The push to vaccinate those who are newly eligible as part of Tier B1 — which includes people who are 65 and older, or are 50 and older and living in a multigenerational household — wasn’t without hiccups.

There were widespread reports of people calling the Emergency Operations Center to try and schedule an appointment, only to run into phone systems that were overwhelmed by the large volume of calls flooding county phone lines. One person told the Chinook Observer that they tried to call and schedule an appointment more than 400 times, to no avail.

At the Jan. 20 Pacific County Emergency Management Agency council meeting, Scott McDougall, the agency’s director, said that eight to 10 county personnel were manning the call center to try to schedule appointments for people on Jan. 19, the first day appointments were being accepted. With so many people trying to call at once, and each phone call taking about six minutes to complete, the system was stressed.

“(The first day) did not go without glitches, but overall it was a very successful day. We were able to get more than 600 people scheduled,” McDougall said. “We are handling as many calls as the county phone system will allow us to handle.”

On Jan. 21, the Pacific County Health and Human Services Department announced that more than 1,000 vaccine appointments had been scheduled, exhausting the county’s entire vaccine supply and fully booking upcoming drive-thru clinics in both north and south county.

For people eligible to receive the vaccine but not able to schedule an appointment, the county is now asking them to complete a form online that will put them on a waitlist.

— Chinook Observer

Oregon first state to decriminalize possession of drugs

SALEM — Police in Oregon can no longer arrest someone for possession of small amounts of heroin, methamphetamine, LSD, oxycodone and other drugs as a ballot measure that decriminalized them took effect on Monday.

Instead, those found in possession would face a \$100 fine or a health assessment that could lead to addiction counseling. Backers of the ballot measure, which Oregon voters passed by a wide margin in November, hailed it as a revolutionary move for the United States.

“Today, the first domino of our cruel and inhumane war on drugs has fallen, setting off what we expect to be a cascade of other efforts centering health over criminalization,” said Kassandra Frederique, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, which spearheaded the ballot initiative.

— Associated Press

DEATHS

Jan. 31, 2021

GARNER, Richard “Dick” Arnold, 75, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell’s Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

Jan. 28, 2021

HACKETT, Barbara Ellen Schwartz, 73, of Seaside, died Seaside. Caldwell’s Funeral & Cremation Arrangement Center of Seaside is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

DUI

• Stephen Brian Weidman, 50, of Portland, was arrested Saturday on U.S. Highway 26 for driving under the influence of intoxicants, hit-and-run and reckless driving.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, noon, work session, (electronic meeting).
Port of Astoria Commission, 4 p.m., (electronic meeting).
Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors, 4 p.m., workshop, (electronic meeting).
Clatsop County Health District, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).
Astoria Library Board, 5:30 p.m., Astoria Library, 450 10th St.
Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).
Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

WEDNESDAY

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

THURSDAY

Maritime Memorial Committee, 2 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.
Seaside Parks Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Locals honored for volunteerism

Mathews, Moha make valuable contributions

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Corleen Mathews calls herself more of a follower than a leader. The second-generation Norwegian has been involved with the Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival since the 1960s, while volunteering in schools and at various events for the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber highlighted Mathews’ efforts Saturday with the George Award, Astoria’s citizen-of-the-year honor, during an online annual banquet. Mike Moha, the business manager for the Warrenton-Hammond School District, took home Warrenton’s equivalent honor, the Richard Ford Distinguished Service Award.

Mathews has been married for 58 years to her husband, Loran, president of the Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association and winner of the George Award in 1980. The award came as a surprise to Corleen Mathews, who said other winners seem to be more forward-facing in the community.

“I’m just a follower,” she said. “I don’t want to be the head of anything.”

But Mathews has been a stalwart volunteer, helping test the hearing and vision of students and giving an estimated 160 pints of blood to the American Red Cross.

“Humility is one of her defining characteristics, but there was no way we were going to let her sneak by unrecognized,” Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones said.

Mathews said it has been a rather boring year during



Photos by Edward Stratton/The Astorian

LEFT: Mike Moha, the business manager for the Warrenton-Hammond School District, took home the Richard Ford Distinguished Service Award for his volunteer efforts. RIGHT: Corleen Mathews won the George Award, Astoria's volunteer-of-the-year honor, for her many years volunteering locally.



David Plechl

Jeanne and Tommy Smith, owners of Main Street Market in Warrenton, took home the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce's Member of the Year Award.

the coronavirus pandemic, staying home with her husband to avoid getting the virus and waiting to be vaccinated. She plans to volunteer helping schedule locals for vaccinations.

Moha, who has worked for Warrenton schools since 2008, moved from Colorado to Warrenton 20 years ago with his wife, Carla, an accounting teacher at Clatsop Community College. The two have raised three children in Warrenton, with two in high school and another at the Oregon Institute of Technology.

“Helping your hometown,

to me that’s the right thing to do,” Moha said.

Much of Moha’s work in the community comes through Warrenton-Hammond Healthy Kids Inc., a nonprofit youth support group. He served on the Warrenton Business Association, helping oversee events like the Fourth of July parade and downtown Christmas decorations, and is in his second term as a member of the Warrenton Planning Commission.

Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer said Moha embodies the jack-of-all-trades spirit of Richard Ford, a former city

Seaside city manager announces plans to retire

Winstanley will serve through June 2022

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — City Manager Mark Winstanley announced his planned retirement at the end of June 2022.

The city manager, who started with Seaside as finance director in September 1985, was named city manager in November 2001.

Over the years, his job has encompassed the role of budget officer, human resources manager and staff liaison to the City Council.

“Even though I have nice-colored hair and lots of it, I am getting old. By that time I will be 68 years old,” he said. “That’s long enough to be city manager. It is time for there to be new people that will take on those reins.”

Winstanley’s announcement was made at Saturday’s City Council goal-setting discussion, a biennial event, this year held in a virtual format.

The decision came, he said, as he looked back at the last year when the coronavirus pandemic threatened businesses and the local economy, closing the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, city buildings and restricting the flow of tourism.

“If we had had this conversation a year ago, I would have said there’s no way we could have continued under these circumstances,” he said.

Winstanley outlined some of the challenges the city will likely face in the coming years.

“In the next couple of

years you are going to be looking at not the building of streets and the reconstruction of buildings like the convention center or the acquisition of \$1 million fire trucks, as much as the construction of electronic ways that we communicate with our constituency,” he said. “The development of more interactive websites, our ability to communicate with our constituents — those are going to be the type of infrastructure you have to deal with.”

Winstanley proposed a timeline for selection of his replacement, which should be underway by December or January, with options to choose internal or external candidates.

Winstanley recommended Jon Rahl, who was named assistant city manager in April 2018.

“Jon is every bit the talented individual I thought he was and I am even more impressed with him today than I was 2 1/2 years ago when I made the decision to hire him,” he said. “I have no reservations in recommending to you that Jon should be that person. He has ties with the other communities in this county and knows all of the leadership in those different cities. That will serve you remarkably as you move forward.”

The hiring process should be one of the city’s highest goals for the next two years, Winstanley said.

Mayor Jay Barber said planning should begin sooner rather than later. A best-case scenario would include Rahl among the candidates. “I’ll be bringing forward, with Mark’s help, a proposal for a calendar to start succession planning. We have work to do,” the mayor said.

Oregon reverses course on reporting virus deaths

By BRAD SCHMIDT
The Oregonian

Gov. Kate Brown reversed course Friday under political pressure and ordered state officials to resume publishing full details of each Oregonian who dies with COVID-19.

Brown’s turnaround came less than 48 hours after the Oregon Health Authority discontinued sharing specifics of each death and less than 24 hours after Brown’s spokesman defended the agency’s decision.

Brown ordered the Oregon Health Authority to publish full death details weekly rather than daily, as the agency had done for 10 months.

But state health officials said they’ll resume daily, with a daily obligation more convenient for their workflow.

“In a pandemic, Oregonians must have access to timely info to keep themselves & their families safe,” Brown said via Twitter. She directed the Oregon Health Authority to “disclose all data on COVID-19 deaths weekly, including the date the individual tested positive, their age, location & underlying health conditions.”

Oregon has been one of few states, if not the only, to disclose a wide assortment of detailed information about each person who dies with COVID-19. As an example, the state’s 1,888th fatality was an 82-year-old Douglas County man with underlying medical conditions who tested positive Jan. 14 and died Jan. 23 at Mercy Medical Center.

Officials at the Oregon Health Authority said providing that level of detail every day became too burdensome, particularly as deaths reached record highs in December. The agency abruptly announced Wednesday it would stop providing that information and instead would disclose only the number of new

employee.

“This guy does everything,” Balensifer said. “I don’t know how else to say it. He’s like the city’s Swiss Army tool. I just want to say, from a personal standpoint, this award is late in giving it to him.”

The chamber Member of the Year award went to Main Street Market, owned by Tommy and Jeanne Smith since 2015.

The Smiths moved from Springfield, Missouri, to become the fourth owners since the grocery store opened in the 1940s.

The couple has been involved in numerous local fundraisers, from Boy Scouts and youth sports to Filling Empty Bellies and the Adopt a Teen program. Jeanne Smith has organized Halloween and fall festivals as a volunteer with Spruce Up Warrenton, a downtown improvement group. Tommy Smith has served on the Warrenton Planning Commission and the city’s budget committee.

“Our approach has always been service first,” Tommy Smith said. “And that’s not only customer services, but also service to the community.”

Dan Travers, of Life Flight Network, the outgoing president of the chamber’s governing board, symbolically gave the President’s Award to people who have supported local business during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Many businesses would not have survived but for the loyalty of their regular customers and the patience of new ones,” Travers said. “For their part, we think many locals who would otherwise have bought online discovered the pleasure of doing business with a neighbor or doing takeout from a different restaurant.”

deaths and associated age ranges for Oregonians who died.

Brown’s office initially defended the decision to stop reporting broad details, asserting that a new online data page would “continue to give Oregonians a full picture of COVID-19 deaths in the state.”

But lawmakers on both sides of the aisle disliked the change. State Senate and House Republicans excoriated Oregon’s Democratic governor, questioning if it was a cover-up linked to Brown’s decision to prioritize vaccinations for teachers ahead of vulnerable seniors, whose deaths would no longer be as simple to track.

State House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat from Portland, also called for release of the information in an interview Friday with The Oregonian’s editorial board.

“I think that information should be provided,” she said. “It does humanize the toll of the pandemic when people can at least know how old somebody was, when they got a test. I think it’s very vital information to have.”

Brown’s reversal could also head off more difficult conversations in the Capitol. The Oregonian filed a public records request for the full death details the state stopped disclosing Wednesday, which the Oregon Health Authority subsequently denied Friday, citing a state law that gives the agency unchecked authority on what to release about public health investigations.

Kotek demurred on whether the law needed to change.

“This is the balance of, we can get into the weeds on stuff we don’t like,” she said. “Is now the time to do that? Right now, I’m just like, ‘Get that information back out. I think it’s important.’”

Brown announced her reversal on the death information a few hours later.

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