

IN BRIEF

County reports three new virus cases

Clatsop County on Friday reported three new coronavirus cases.

The cases include a woman in her 40s living in the southern part of the county and a male between 10 and 19 and a man in his 20s living in the northern part of the county.

All three were recovering at home.

The county has recorded 761 cases since March. According to the county, 18 were hospitalized and five have died.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 147,419 cases and 2,024 deaths from the virus statewide as of Monday morning.

— *The Astorian*

Fred Meyer, QFC will pay workers \$100 to be vaccinated

Kroger, the grocery chain that owns QFC and Fred Meyer, said Friday it will offer employees a one-time \$100 payment after they receive the coronavirus vaccine. Employees who cannot get the vaccine for medical or religious reasons can take an “educational health and safety course” to get the bonus, the company said.

The payment is meant to encourage workers to get vaccinated and “recognize our associates’ contributions,” Kroger executive Tim Massa said in a statement.

The federal government says employers can mandate the vaccine, though for now most companies say they are not yet planning to require it.

Kroger workers who “receive the full manufacturer-recommended doses of the COVID-19 vaccine” will be eligible for the \$100, the company said.

Trader Joe’s said last month that it will pay employees for an additional two hours of work if they are vaccinated.

Few Oregon grocery workers have access to the vaccine. The state has limited distribution to health care workers, teachers and nursing home residents until this week, when residents over age 80 can begin scheduling appointments.

The national union that represents Kroger workers, United Food and Commercial Workers, called the payment a “slap in the face,” however, pointing out that the company announced this week it would close two stores in Southern California in response to a local mandate to raise pay by \$4 an hour during the pandemic.

Seattle passed a similar \$4 requirement.

“If Kroger really cares about its employees, the company must share the profits the pandemic has generated with all of its front-line grocery workers across the country,” UFCW President Marc Perrone said in a statement, calling for free vaccines for employees.

Kroger said Friday it will also provide “a \$100 store credit and 1,000 fuel points” for workers, including front-line grocery and pharmacy employees, starting Thursday.

— *Seattle Times*

Inslee signs bill to help Washington state unemployed, businesses

A bill that increases the minimum weekly benefit for unemployed workers during the coronavirus pandemic and prevents a dramatic increase in unemployment taxes paid by businesses was signed into law Monday by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

“We know that this pandemic has caused sweeping economic hardship for workers and businesses,” Inslee said. “This bill is a big step forward to softening those impacts.”

The measure will prevent \$1.7 billion in automatic unemployment insurance tax increases from taking effect through 2025, including \$920 million this year due to last year’s pandemic-induced layoffs.

The bill also boosts the minimum weekly unemployment benefit for workers who make between \$21,000 and \$27,800 per year, from \$201 to \$270 per week, starting in July.

— *Associated Press*

PUBLIC MEETINGS

- TUESDAY**
- Clatsop County Planning Commission**, 10 a.m., (electronic meeting).
 - Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors**, 5:15 p.m., workshop, (electronic meeting).
 - Astoria Historic Landmarks Commission**, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.
 - Clatsop Community College Board of Education**, 6:30 p.m., (electronic meeting).
 - Cannon Beach City Council**, 6 p.m., work session, (electronic meeting).
 - Lewis & Clark Fire Department Board**, 6 p.m., main fire station, 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business.
 - Warrenton City Commission**, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.
- WEDNESDAY**
- Astoria City Council**, 9 a.m., work session, City Hall, 1095 Duane St.
 - Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, Astoria City Council and Warrenton City Commission**, 5 p.m., work session, (electronic meeting).
 - Cannon Beach City Council**, 6 p.m., work session on Cannon Beach Elementary School, (electronic meeting).
 - Clatsop County Board of Commissioners**, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).
 - Warrenton-Hammond School District Board**, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

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Duncan’s Crossing finds no bridge too far

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — When he ran for City Council in 2014, City Councilor John Duncan listed as one of his top goals to complete and extend the portion of the Ridge Path from Eighth Street to Gearhart Loop Road.

Duncan and his volunteer army marched through mud, brambles and elk droppings with loppers and saws. He worked so long and with such pride that other volunteers pled fatigue to convince him it was time to quit for the day. He was out working on the path two days before his death in September 2015.

Duncan’s widow, Sandy, sought to remember her husband in a way that would have been meaningful to him. With her cooperation, Gearhart established a fund for “Duncan’s Crossing,” a project designed to bridge wetlands and connect the path to Gearhart Loop Road.

“John saw the completion of the Ridge Path between Ninth and 10th streets and then north from 10th Street along the Neacoxie to Gearhart Lane as an opportunity to do a couple of things at once,” volunteer Bob Widdop said. “As an engineer it was a chance to use his skills for a public good and to organize the public to participate in a hands-on project that gave a significant sense of accomplishment to all involved.”

The former Native American trail runs between privately owned residential properties within the blocks between Cottage Avenue and Neacoxie Creek, extending from F Street on the south to 10th Street on the north. The first 11 blocks were established by the original plat of Gearhart Park, as laid out and recorded by M.J. Kinney in 1890.

The path deviated through the years as houses sold and lot lines shifted, but the trail retained its magic and became an iconic symbol of Gearhart.

In 1985, the city’s master plan called for the city to preserve and enhance the Ridge Path as a recreational asset for the city and a segment of the Oregon Coast Trail by establishing connections to the path, allowing public access and maintenance.

The city procured an easement for an extended path from 10th Street to Gearhart Loop Road, Russ Taggard, a planning commissioner and Ridge Path volunteer, said, with the vision of a “seamless path to follow the founders’ lead.”

Duncan’s Crossing

At the request of his widow and with the interest of volunteers, the city set up a memorial fund in honor of Duncan, the proceeds to be used to complete Duncan’s Crossing, with the goal of wooden walkways to span wetlands along the path between Eighth and 10th streets, along with extensions north to Gearhart Loop Road.

Duncan’s unfinished plan was revised by Widdop, but met with state and federal regulatory hurdles.

In 2019, the city hired consultant Austin Tomlinson to work through the process and write the application to extend the walking path through the wetlands. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in conjunction with the local tribes, also required an archaeological survey to make sure there wasn’t anything of historical significance in the area.

Survey and wetlands maps were updated and the



Photos by Steve Urman
The Gearhart public works team, from back to front, Stephen Petersen, Mark McFadden and Gage McFadden help move rails into place.



The concrete base to hold the bridge.



Steve Urman at work on the Ridge Path.

Army Corps and Oregon Department of State Lands approved the joint permit application in March.

Part-time resident Steve Urman and his wife were walking along Gearhart Loop Road last June when they saw a small sign for the Ridge Path. “We had never seen this part,” he said. “It’s beautiful.”

He contacted the city and asked City Administrator Chad Sweet for an update.

“Chad said, ‘Oh my gosh

we’ve been waiting for someone to come out and get this thing back to life again.’”

Urman, a physician based in Portland, got involved.

He sent letters to residents, set up meetings and gathered new groups of volunteers. Work parties resumed in August.

Keith Keranen Excavating donated time and labor to dig in the stream and lay the 18 supporting beams. Mark McFadden, of the city’s public works staff, brought city staff to help put in the supporting beams, railing support and decking.

With \$12,000 raised from donors and an additional \$12,000 budgeted from the parks budget, the city hopes

to meet or exceed the anticipated \$25,000 to \$30,000 project cost. The city has also applied for a grant through the Pacific Power Foundation.

In September, Urman began additional fundraising to meet a rise in the cost of materials.

Teams are now installing railing support and will complete the bridge with decking.

“The current status is we are working with the volunteers, public works and appropriate weather to complete the beam installation,” said Taggard, who plans to work on the project through completion. “This stage requires young muscle to pack the beams from 10th to the concrete piers. Once the beams are set with the help of public works, the rest of the project is all volunteer.”

New signs

New signs will be placed all along the trail. In the spring, maintenance is expected, especially at the north end of the trail.

“We have a great group of volunteers and public works staff pulling together to get this job done,” Sweet said. “Building the Ridge Path extension and the bridge crossing has been a wonderful experience.”

Sandy Duncan said she’s happy the work is proceeding. “Very happy. We’re anxious to be able to walk on it, be able to push our baby carriages and ride our bicycles,” she said.

It is the wide participation of longtime and more recent residents that Duncan would have appreciated most, Widdop said.

“Although he would probably be shocked by the delay and expense of getting the federal approval for the work between Ninth and 10th, I think he would be more pleased that a maintenance work party five years later drew mostly new and longtime residents who hadn’t been involved previously and that the final work to 10th Street has significant volunteer input,” he said.

Volunteers will be out again on Feb. 16, Sweet said. “It’s nice to see people pulling together to accomplish something positive that will be used by many. I imagine John Duncan would approve.”

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