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CORONAVIRUS

County to remain at lower risk for virus

Leaders encouraged by case counts

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Clatsop County will remain at lower risk for the coronavirus as case counts stay steady.

Over the past few months, most Oregon counties have seen risk levels decline.

"This should serve as a reminder that when we follow the health and safety measures we know work against this virus, we can truly make a difference in infection spread," Gov. Kate Brown said in a statement Tuesday. "But, we still have more work to do before we reach the level of communitywide protection we need in order to

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Toxin levels put clam digs on hold

A winter spike found at beaches

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Domoic acid levels in razor clams on Clatsop County beaches spiked this winter, throwing the possibility of popular recreational digs into question.

The elevated levels are tied for the fourth-highest ever observed on the North Coast since the toxin was discovered in the area in 1991. They are also the highest levels ever observed during the months of December and January, according to state fishery managers.

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Senators advocate for exporters

Hampton Lumber and others want access to ocean carriers

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and several colleagues are pushing the Federal Maritime Commission to protect the access of exporters to ocean carriers amid surging demand during the coronavirus pandemic.

Ocean carriers bring in highly valuable consumer electronics, apparel, building equipment and other finished products from Asia to the U.S.

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Dancing through the pandemic

After a year of restrictions, there is something like hope in the air

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

For a dancer, two weeks without regular practice can be an eternity.

If you're not working every day on strength and flexibility, muscles begin to weaken. Your jumps aren't as strong. Your leg can't kick up as high. You feel shaky. What Maggie Wall, the director of the Astoria School of Ballet, calls "Elvis leg" might make an appearance — an unintentional wobbling boogie in the hips and knees.

But for much of last year, amid ever-shifting coronavirus-related restrictions and concerns, Wall's students and other young dancers on the North Coast were constantly starting then stopping. Some attempted to keep up through virtual lessons, following along to videos in carpeted living rooms or on kitchen linoleum — not ideal.

A year after virus restrictions first went into place, some in-person classes have since resumed and dance studios and schools that serve school-age children have started to plan performances again — many of them virtual and nothing like the productions they used to put on.

The studios have made numerous changes to stay afloat. For all, simply closing down was not an option. While there are enduring fears as they struggle to make ends meet with fewer students, fewer classes and less flexibility about what



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

TOP: Dancers do barre warmups at the start of rehearsal at the Astoria School of Ballet. **ABOVE:** A ballet dancer stretches inside a taped square at Maddox Dance Studio. The floors are covered with tape and stickers reminding dancers to 'mind their spacing' to encourage social distancing while in the studio.

they can offer, there is something like hope in the air.

"We're still here," Wall said, "and kids are still pursuing this."

A shift toward child care

When Gov. Kate Brown announced the first round of restrictions last March, the students and teachers at Encore Dance Studio in Warrenton were in the middle of getting ready for a spring recital. They had costumes ready to go.

"We're going to have a recital. I don't care what it looks like," Denele Sweet, Encore's owner, decided when she realized their original plans wouldn't work under the new constraints.

So the recital, like many events since last spring, was virtual. At the time, some still thought — or simply hoped — the pandemic would be over soon. Wall and others remember thinking, "We'll be shut down for a couple weeks then we'll be back."

But Sweet felt differently. "My gut feeling was this was going to last for a good year, if not two," she said.

She didn't know when it would be legal to open the dance studio fully again, but she did know two things for certain: "Fitness was a no-no, but child care was a yes-yes."

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'As dancers we're trained to pivot and turn and leap: Go to the floor, get up, turn, go the other way, change lanes. It's constant changing and you have to be prepared. You can't get flustered when the gear changes. You have to adapt and you have to adapt with grace and style.'

Denele Sweet | Encore Dance Studio in Warrenton

