

## IN BRIEF

## County unemployment was 8.1% in February

After a slight downturn during winter, employment in Clatsop County has stabilized heading into spring.

The county's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was at 8.1% in February, according to the latest state figures, compared to 3.3% a year ago before the coronavirus pandemic. The county went from more than 24% unemployment in April down to 6.1% in November, slightly lower than the state's unemployment rate. Unemployment crept up to 8.2% in January before leveling off. The statewide unemployment rate in February was 6.1%.

The county added 30 jobs in February, instead of the 220 expected by state economists heading into spring. Total nonfarm employment was at 17,490, down 1,610 from the year prior.

Leisure and hospitality accounted for more than 1,000 of the job losses, with around 23% of jobs in lodgings, restaurants and bars cut over the past year. Local government employment also dropped by 230 over the past year, with parks and other services curtailed by the virus.

Erik Knoder, a regional economist with the Oregon Employment Department, said employers are adding jobs back but struggling to find employees because of several potential factors related to the virus, including lack of child care, high housing costs and low wages. But he expects things to look better in March's employment figures being released April 20.

"What we've been hearing is that employers are looking for employees," he said. "They are starting to hire. So I have expectations that March will certainly show some growth. I don't think it will be explosive."

## Park district election forum planned

SEASIDE — The Seaside Signal and the American Association of University Women Seaside Chapter will present a forum for candidates for the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District's board.

The forum will be held at 7 p.m. on April 29. Candidates will participate with social distancing from the Bob Chisholm Community Center.

The event will be broadcast via livestream with links at sunsetempire.com and seasidesignal.com.

— The Astorian

## Ocean Beach School District explores year-round school

LONG BEACH, Wash. — COVID-19 has disrupted the past two school years at Ocean Beach School District, but the pandemic's most significant and longest lasting impact on local schooling may be yet to come.

At its monthly meeting in late March, school board members expressed a willingness for the district to explore a potential shift from the traditional school calendar — when school begins in September and lets out for summer break in mid-June — to what Superintendent Amy Huntley calls a "balanced" calendar.

Under balanced calendars, Huntley said, school years are typically broken up into nine-week terms, with a couple of weeks off in between each term.

The calendar includes a longer break in the summer, before the start of the next school year in the fall — although it would be noticeably shorter than the two-and-a-half months off that students and staff are used to.

"There's many pros, there's many cons, so this is just a chance for us to start chatting about whether, and how much, we want to explore this, and how soon we want to think about pitching this and throwing it out to the community," Huntley told board members.

— Chinook Observer

## Wastewater testing reveals coronavirus variant in Grants Pass and McMinnville

Researchers in Oregon have detected the B.1.1.7 variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 in Grants Pass and McMinnville.

The variant, which was first detected in the United Kingdom, is about 50% more contagious and likely causes more severe illness than the coronavirus that initially triggered the pandemic.

When people have COVID-19, they "shed" coronavirus when they go to the bathroom. This waste ends up in sewer systems where it can be collected and used to determine if there's coronavirus in the community. The samples can also be analyzed to determine which variants are present.

For several months now, researchers at Oregon State University have been sequencing coronavirus collected in wastewater samples from cities around the state.

— Oregon Public Broadcasting

## DEATH

March 29, 2021

TETLOW, William "Bill" Edward, 93, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Astoria Design Review Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

## the Astorian

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## Survey shows rural-urban divide in Oregon over remote working

By SUZANNE ROIG  
The Bulletin

BEND — Residents of rural areas think working from home is temporary and as soon as the threat of the pandemic ends, everyone will return to the office.

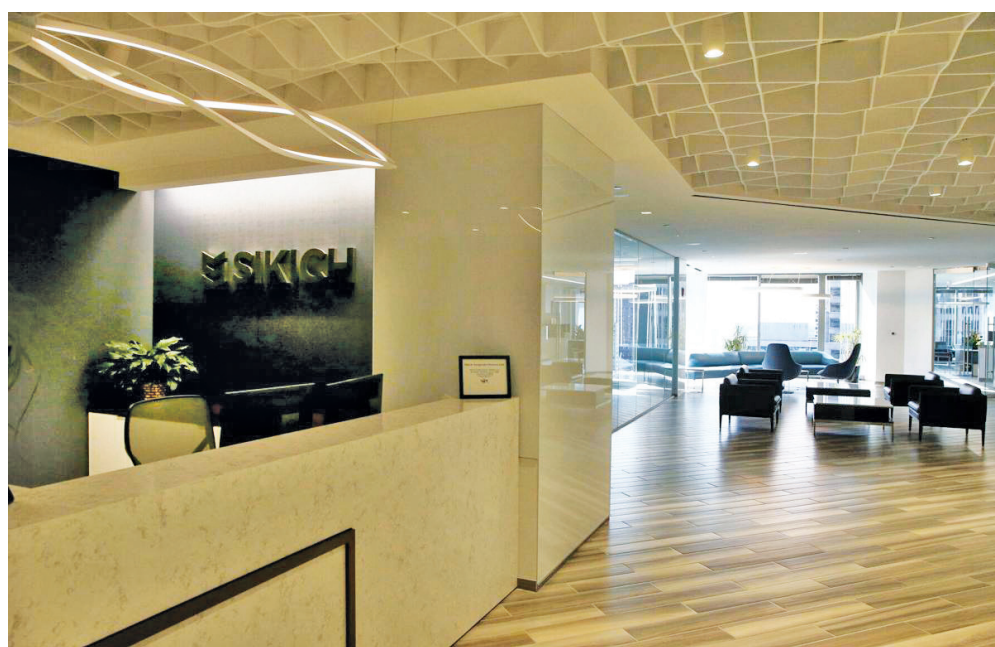
What's more likely to occur is increased flex time, where work is split between the office and home, said Dan McCarthy, High Lakes Health Care regional administrator. Post pandemic, McCarthy said, the company that employs about 350 people throughout central Oregon will still have remote workers.

"We found that a hybrid approach that balances work from home with office hours is something that will be here to stay," McCarthy said. "I believe there is something lost when working virtually 100% of the time."

Working from home misses checking in with each other, developing a sense of community and the dynamic interaction of problem-solving, he said. Virtual platforms just don't cut it.

McCarthy's views mirror about 601 people who were surveyed March 5 to March 10 as part of the Oregon Values and Voices project, a non-partisan charitable organization that partnered with Pamplin Media Group, EO Media Group and the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. EO Media Group owns newspapers in Oregon and Washington state, including The Bulletin and The Astorian.

The survey consisted of 49 questions sent to a random sample about changes caused by COVID-19 that will become permanent in Oregon. This is the second such survey orchestrated by



Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune

Near-empty offices have been common during the coronavirus pandemic.

the group on the effects of COVID-19.

In one question, 47% of the people who live in rural Oregon say they felt working from home was only temporary, compared to 37% in the Willamette Valley and tri-county area around Portland who said it's temporary.

Since workers in urban and suburban communities are more likely affected by congestion, their commute times are longer, making working from home more attractive, said Adam Davis, the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center co-founder.

"As a result of the coronavirus and how it has affected life at home and employment, a strong majority of Oregonians feel more of us in the future will work from home," Davis said. "This feeling is shared across all population subgroups with many feeling the change will be permanent."

Cheri Rosenberg, the CEO

of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, said the small-town feel has created a tight bond between employee and employer.

"Because we tend to have a more personal relationship between our employers and employees, it's a conversation we are able to have," Rosenberg said in an email. "For those who are able and prefer to work from home, those steps are being taken. For those who are ready to get back into the office, those steps are being taken there as well."

"We're able to have the best of both worlds due to the ability to be very open and candid with one another."

In the survey, 33% of those ages 45 to 64 said the ability to work from home was temporary, compared to 53% in the same age group that thought working from home was permanent. And 64% of those who earned more than \$100,000 a year said

they believed working from home would become permanent, compared 28%, earning the same amount, who said it would be temporary.

The survey's margin of error, for the full sample, ranges from 2.4 to 4 percentage points depending on how the response category percentages are split for any given question, according to the survey authors.

Katy Brooks, the CEO of the Bend Chamber of Commerce, said she's seen the data play out during this past year. But Bend is a city with a high percentage of remote workers given that Bend has a low inventory and employees appear to like the flexibility of working from home.

"There are plain savings in office space, utilities if they function well with a hybrid or remote format," Brooks said. "I've spoke to dozens of companies in Bend who are considering a permanent hybrid model for these reasons."

## Bend Blockbuster booming after Netflix documentary goes viral

By KYLE SPURR  
The Bulletin

BEND — The Blockbuster video rental store in Bend was already popular when it became the last location on Earth. It drew visitors from across the United States and as far as Taiwan and London.

But in the past two weeks, the store off N.E. Third Street has been flooded with even more visitors and online orders after Netflix boosted its visibility. It was featured in "The Last Blockbuster," a documentary about the store that started trending in the top 10 most watched movies on Netflix.

People have sent flowers and called the store just to say "thank you" for staying open. Those visiting the store wear masks and keep their distance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but are not deterred from finding a movie to rent.

In the backroom, staff members have been busy packaging thousands of online orders for Blockbuster T-shirts, hats and face masks, which are all made by Bend businesses.

"It's a little bit crazy, but it's a very good thing," said Sandi Harding, the store's manager. "We'll take a little crazy if it means keeping the store open."

Harding is the star of the movie, which peaked as high as the No. 4 movie in the United States since it appeared on Netflix on March 15.

People have stopped Harding in the grocery store to take pictures with her and one boy visited the Bend Blockbuster and was in awe of seeing Harding, she said. "It's good for the store. It's good for the community," Harding said. "And I can learn to live with my newfound fame as long as it doesn't mess with what we are doing every day."



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Milt McConnell, of Bend, takes a picture of Mark Style, of Philadelphia, and Illene Style, of Bend, in front of Bend Blockbuster on Monday.

*'IT'S A LITTLE BIT CRAZY, BUT IT'S A VERY GOOD THING. WE'LL TAKE A LITTLE CRAZY IF IT MEANS KEEPING THE STORE OPEN.'*

Sandi Harding | the store's manager

The two Bend filmmakers behind the documentary, Taylor Morden and Zeke Kamm, had no idea if the store would stay open when they started filming in 2017. The movie focuses on Harding's day-to-day effort to run the store, which became the last in the world when the Blockbuster in Perth, Australia, closed in March 2019.

Morden said he's heard from people who call Harding a national treasure and say the store must remain open at all costs. He's pleased to know the film's attention on Netflix may be what keeps the store open.

"For us to have some small part in helping the store stay open is amazing," Morden said. "Not a lot of documentaries actually accomplish the goal of their story."

The Bend Blockbuster has no plans to close. It has

a steady lease agreement with the building's property owner. The owners of the local Blockbuster, Ken and Debbie Tisher, have leased the property since 1992, when it was a Pacific Video store. The store was franchised in 2000 and became a Blockbuster.

In its heyday, Blockbuster had 9,000 stores. The documentary reminds people about those years when Blockbuster was the leader in home entertainment.

Morden said many viewers enjoy the irony of watching the documentary on Netflix, the streaming service credited with changing the way people watch movies at home and leading to the demise of Blockbuster.

The film has also brought viewers to tears, especially those who have fond memories of working at a Blockbuster in their childhood,

Morden said.

"The best part is the people who message us and say they worked at Blockbuster and were crying watching the movie," Morden said. "It brought back so many great memories."

Morden and Kamm are still amazed their movie has gone viral on Netflix. Kamm said he's heard from old high school classmates and a childhood crush, who all enjoyed the film.

"It's affected people emotionally," Kamm said. "I think it reminded people that we had this thing that was such an important part of our lives. Hopefully, it reminds people to appreciate the things they have now."

Both filmmakers feel connected with the Bend Blockbuster, even though they are done filming their movie. They contact Harding regularly to find out if she needs more DVDs of their movies or movie posters to sell at the store.

"I'm sure I'll be involved with the folks at the last Blockbuster until they ever close," Morden said. "There is no way we are not going to be connected."