

IN BRIEF

County to begin vaccinating front-line workers

Clatsop County will begin vaccinating front-line workers against the coronavirus on Monday, along with people living in multigenerational households and people ages 16 to 44 with underlying health conditions.

People can fill out the vaccine survey on the county's website to enter the registry for a vaccine clinic appointment.

People can also schedule an appointment to receive a vaccine at Safeway pharmacies in Astoria and Seaside or Costco, Walmart or Fred Meyer in Warrenton.

As of Friday, 17,350 doses have been administered in the county and 5,210 people are fully vaccinated. The county's goal is to reach herd immunity against the virus by vaccinating 27,533 people.

State reports two more virus cases at Pacific Seafood

An outbreak at Pacific Seafood in Warrenton is tied to 10 coronavirus cases.

Eight cases were disclosed by the Oregon Health Authority on March 24 in a weekly report on workplace outbreaks. Two more cases were disclosed on Wednesday. The investigation began on March 9, according to the health authority, and the most recent onset was March 17.

A spokeswoman for the company said all 10 workers have completed their quarantine period and returned to work. An onsite vaccination clinic is planned for April 15.

Five test positive for virus at Seaside High School

SEASIDE — Three students and two staff members and volunteers have tested positive for the coronavirus at Seaside High School, the state disclosed.

The most recent onset of virus cases were on March 22, according to a weekly report of outbreaks released by the Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday.

"We continue to diligently follow all the cleaning and safety requirements in the Ready Schools, Safe Learners document, as well as the communicable disease plan that is posted on our website," Seaside Superintendent Susan Penrod said. "This plan is a collaborative effort developed by all the school nurses in our county."

— The Astorian

Travel Oregon offers grants to spur tourism industry

By JAMIE GOLDBERG
The Oregonian

Travel Oregon, the state's tourism office, is providing \$2.3 million in grants to fund projects across the state to help spur tourism as Oregon tries to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local governments, port districts, federally recognized tribes, nonprofits and Oregon-based tour operators and guides can apply for up to \$100,000 in funding to support projects focused on improving infrastructure to safely welcome back tourists as the pandemic continues.

The agency will fund projects that support outdoor recreation, help guides and tour companies operate, enable paid events and attractions to safely move forward and improve business districts, including funding projects that create new outdoor spaces for visitors.

The application process will remain open until March 31. Projects must be completed by the end of November.

"The grants that we're

'WE ANTICIPATE THAT WE WILL PROBABLY NOT SEE RECOVERY BACK TO 2019 LEVELS UNTIL AT LEAST 2024 AND IT COULD BE 2025.'

Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson

providing today are going to aid communities and aid businesses in being well-positioned to be able to offer these great Oregon experiences in a very safe way," Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson said. "That's what we're focused on, making sure folks know they can travel in Oregon safely."

The new initiative comes after Travel Oregon in February awarded \$913,000 to fund 34 projects across the state focused on improving visitor experiences during the pandemic. Among the recipients of that grant money was Portland's economic development agency, which received \$50,000 to improve the city's green loop.

Approximately 87% of American travelers have plans to travel in the next

six months, the highest percentage since the start of the pandemic, according to a recent study by market research firm Longwoods International.

However, Oregon's tourism industry has been decimated during the pandemic and it could take years for it to fully recover.

More than 1 million people visit Oregon in a typical year, fueling a \$12.8 billion tourism industry, according to Travel Oregon.

But visitor spending throughout the state dropped by nearly 60% last year as tourism dried up amid the pandemic, according to the agency. Tourism could be slow to rebound, especially if international travel remains limited and large events and conventions are slow to return. Oregon's lei-

sure and hospitality industry has shed 37% of its jobs during the pandemic, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"We anticipate that we will probably not see recovery back to 2019 levels until at least 2024 and it could be 2025," Davidson said.

While certain parts of the state saw tourism rebound last summer as leisure travel picked up, hotel occupancy in Portland plummeted from nearly 75% in 2019 to 34% in 2020, worse than anywhere else in the state.

The decline in tourism across the state could have severe financial implications for cities and counties.

In Portland, 5% of the overall lodging taxes assessed on hotel and vacation rentals goes to the city's general fund. The city received \$30.8 million in general fund money from hotel room taxes in the 2019-20 fiscal year, but expects those revenues to be down 75% this fiscal year.

"The travel and tourism industry is a primary driver of Oregon's economy," Davidson said.

Construction worker tests positive for virus at Astoria High School

The Astorian

A construction worker at Astoria High School tested positive for the coronavirus.

In an email to school district staff and families sent Thursday, Superintendent Craig Hoppes said

the district is working with general contractor Skanska to investigate the situation.

But, he wrote, "at this time we do not believe this positive case affects any Astoria School District students or staff."

The worker had not had any con-

tact with students or staff.

In December, two subcontractors for Skanska at the construction site also tested positive for the virus. The company was tied to six coronavirus cases at the Astoria Middle School construction site in September.

DEATHS

April 1, 2021

HEACOCK, Constance Joan "Connie," 93, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

March 29, 2021

CAVAYA, Merry Lou, 78, of Seaside, died in Nehalem. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 23, 2021

BIRD, Bernard, 94, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

CAMPBELL, James Jr., 60, of Astoria, died in Portland. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

LARSON, John, 80, of Naselle, Washington, died in Naselle. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 22, 2021

SAGESER, Robert, 92, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom

Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March, 20, 2021

McGRORTY, Steven Sr., 82, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 18, 2021

REYNOLDS, Matthew, 14, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 15, 2021

STUECKLE, Terry, 78, of Pasco, Washington, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 13, 2021

KUHL, Gary, 78, of Warrenton, died in Warrenton. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 11, 2021

WITT, Quade, 25, of Blountville, Tennessee, died in Warrenton. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

DUII

• Jason Peter Velasquez, 41, of Portland, was arrested Wednesday on N.W. Warrenton Drive in Warrenton for driving under the influence of intoxicants, resisting arrest and reckless driving following a crash.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

TUESDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, noon, work session, (electronic meeting).

Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria Library Board, 5:30 p.m., Flag Room, 450 10th St.

Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

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Social workers: 'Always a lot of scrutiny'

Continued from Page A1

Sometimes, people in crisis are ready to be connected to treatment and social services, Whisenhunt said, and other times social workers are trying to work proactively to discourage repeated visits to the emergency room.

"I think that's one of the beauties of us having an ED social worker program is it really helped support Clatsop Behavioral Health staying outside the hospital walls to help keep people from ending up in the ED unnecessarily," she said. "And I know that there's been probably plenty of people they have been able to deflect from coming to the ER because the ER is not a place you want to be. It's really one of the least therapeutic places you can be."

Social workers try to find the least restrictive option for patients. If they cannot find an outpatient program, they look toward inpatient psychiatric hospitalization.

The bar for admission to a psychiatric hospital is lower than the legal threshold for civil commitment. To commit someone in Oregon, a court must find they have a mental disorder that poses a danger to themselves or others or they are unable to provide for basic personal needs like health and safety.

Whisenhunt said many people in crisis do not meet the criteria for civil commitment, so they have to vol-

untarily accept treatment.

"And I know there's always a lot of scrutiny," she said. "Why did they release them? And why aren't they helping them? And the truth of the matter is that we do everything we can to help folks. And there are times where our hands are just tied by the way laws are written."

Another barrier is the lack of slots available for psychiatric care across Oregon.

"What we like to do is try to get them to that higher level of care as quickly as we possibly can," Whisenhunt said. "That has proven increasingly difficult lately. I am sure COVID has contributed to that, but we've always had a psychiatric bed shortage in the state, as we do in many states."

"But it has gotten to a point where it feels like really critical. So (we're) holding patients in the emergency room for several days sometimes, which again, we really don't want to do."

Columbia Memorial does not have a secure room in the emergency department, so they make rooms as safe as possible for people in crisis. Often-times, a staffer watches a patient around the clock to help ensure they do not harm themselves.

Judy Geiger, Columbia Memorial's vice president of patient care services, said the hospital does not have any immediate plans for a secure room, but it has

started discussing the idea.

"We'll look at all our options on that as the situation stays the same or gets continually more challenging getting patients where they need to go," she said.

The crisis respite center in Warrenton was initially supposed to have four secure beds after it opened in 2016, but Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, which operates the respite center, did not fulfill the promise. For people in severe crisis, that often means they are held at hospital emergency rooms or the county jail.

'Nobody can do it all'

In addition to the emergency department, Columbia Memorial has integrated social workers in other clinics and departments throughout its system, including pediatrics, specialty clinics and maternal and child health.

With the pandemic, many adults and children have needed more support.

"I've been in social work 16 years now, and I have never seen people struggle the way they are struggling over this past year," Whisenhunt said. "People who have developed substance use disorder that didn't have it. People who have relapsed. People who have had incredible ex-

acerbations of depression and anxiety. People who said, 'I've never felt this way before and I just don't know what else to do.'

"So that's largely, I think, what the social workers in the clinics are able to do to really help support people and finding new ways to try to deal with what they're feeling and experiencing.

"I'm so proud of CMH for doing this. I think that for many years the community has relied on Clatsop Behavioral Health to do it all, and nobody can do it all. And they've got funding specific to certain populations, and that's really where their focus needs to be. And so for us to say, 'OK, well, let us help with these other folks that really are struggling. And the ones that are under your charge, let us help coordinate with you to help get them the care,' — it's been really huge.

"Because, otherwise, to tell someone, 'Well, sorry, they don't take your insurance. You'll have to go to Portland or pay out of pocket' — for somebody who is already really struggling emotionally, that sometimes tips them over the edge. So we're really just trying to just be a resource for the community in this way, too."

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