

# the Astorian

148TH YEAR, NO. 128

WEEKEND EDITION // SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2021

\$1.50

## CORONAVIRUS



River cruise ships docked at North Tongue Point over the winter.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

## River cruises to return

First stop in Astoria likely in early May

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

American Queen Steamboat Co. and American Cruise Lines have been sailing the South-eastern U.S. for the past month under guidelines approved by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the coronavirus pandemic.

While oceangoing cruises are on hold until at least fall, trips on the Columbia and Snake rivers will likely restart in early May after coordination with state officials and ports between Astoria and Lewiston, Idaho.

Clatsop County Manager Don Bohn described the situation as fluid but said local officials have been told the American Song, one of four regional American Cruise Lines ships, will stop at the 17th Street Dock in Astoria the first week of May with fewer than 40 passengers.

"I've heard that the first ships will be at about 50% capacity," Bohn said. "But I also know that if things go well, they might notch that up.



American Cruise Lines

American Cruise Lines' ship American Song is scheduled to sail to Astoria in early May before heading to the Columbia River Gorge.

But even at the maximum, they were going to be running with about 25% vacancy."

A spokesperson for American Queen Steamboat said the company hopes to begin cruises on its stern-wheeler, the American Empress, later in the spring. A reservation specialist with the company said cruises on the Columbia won't begin until June

and are already fully booked into November.

Overnight river cruises were shut down more than a year ago because of the pandemic. But a conditional sailing order from the CDC has allowed ships to carry up to 250 combined passengers and crew.

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## County hopes to vaccinate more teens

Pfizer doses expected soon

By NICOLE BALES  
The Astorian

Clatsop County teenagers under 18 will soon be eligible for vaccination against the coronavirus at county clinics.

All Oregonians 16 and older became eligible for vaccination on Monday. However, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is the only vaccine approved for 16- and 17-year-olds. The only place in the county that administers the vaccine is the Fred Meyer pharmacy in Warrenton.

The county's vaccine task force anticipates Pfizer doses will be available through the county the week of May 10. The task force is developing a plan for vaccination events. Parents can call the county's public information call center beginning Monday to register their 16- and 17-year-olds.

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## Jewell moves to distance learning after virus cases

Four cases were reported

By NICOLE BALES  
The Astorian

Jewell School closed Thursday after four coronavirus cases were reported.

Superintendent Steve Phillips described the cases as three staffers and one student. He said the school will conduct distance learning in the coming week.

The school plans to reopen to in-person instruction on May 3.

In a letter to the Jewell community posted Sunday, Phillips announced that the school's preschool cohort would temporarily close after a virus case.

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## Merkley hopeful of progress

Democrat warns of Republican obstruction

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley said he is hopeful about the future under the Biden administration but warned that many good ideas still face Republican obstruction.



Jeff Merkley

The Oregon Democrat, meeting virtually with Clatsop County constituents Wednesday in his 443rd town hall since joining the U.S. Senate, celebrated the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan recently passed by Congress, which he said

rebuilds the economy from the ground up, instead of Wall Street down.

Merkley detailed his efforts to improve elections through the For the People Act, which he introduced with U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat.

The bill, a companion to legislation passed by the U.S. House, is a response

to state-level attempts to crack down on alleged voter fraud. It would address voter suppression, so-called "dark money" behind campaigns and gerrymandering — or drawing electoral

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## Astoria gets boost from federal stimulus

City set to receive more than \$2 million

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

Astoria will get more than \$2 million from the American Rescue Plan recently passed by Congress for use on infrastructure.

The amount is part of a projected \$5.3 million being received from the stimulus package by Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart, Seaside and Cannon Beach, based on 2019 census data. Clatsop County will receive \$7.8 million.

The Astoria City Council on Monday created a fund to track the money. City Manager Brett Estes said the first half would go out in the coming months, while the remainder is anticipated by June 2022. The funds can be used through 2024, but were



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Astoria will use stimulus money from the American Rescue Plan to help address infrastructure needs, particularly in water and sewer.

primarily reserved for infrastructure needs.

Estes said the funds could help offset loans for improvements to sewer and water systems that are otherwise paid for by ratepayers.

"We're looking at infrastructure needs, to address our needs in the water master plan that's coming for adoption, looking at sewer infrastructure improvements, the library, also looking at any

pre-disaster mitigation projects," he said.

The city faces numerous large projects, from installing a new headworks at the sewage lagoons and completing a separation of sewer and stormwater drainage to replacing an aging mainline for water coming from the Bear Creek Reservoir. The city has also been trying to renovate the 1960s-era Astoria Library.

"There is not a specific plan or project identified at this time," Estes said. "We're needing to get more specific information, and also be able to look at how we can best use those over the next few years. Additionally, we're looking for any other possible stimulus funds that could come our way."

