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# Astorian

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## County to use Camp Rilea as virus testing site

Partnership between the county, hospitals

By **GRIFFIN REILLY**  
*The Astorian*

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WARRENTON — Camp Rilea will serve as a coronavirus testing site.

In a partnership between Clatsop County, Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria and Providence Seaside Hospital, the armed forces training center will host testing by appointment five days a week starting Sept. 6.

Margo Lalich, the county's interim public health director, made the announcement during a county Board of Commissioners work session on Wednesday.

"We wanted a centrally-located place that would be able to accommodate traffic instead of having to move between different locations, as we're doing now in Seaside and Astoria," said Tom Bennett, a county spokesperson.

"This will provide us a single place where we can do the testing. We also hope to add vaccinations at the same site also."

In recent weeks, the county Public Health Department and local hospitals had reported a shortage of polymerase chain reaction tests, which are considered the most reliable for the virus. Officials had urged residents to avoid seeking tests unless they were exhibiting severe virus symptoms in order to relieve pressure on hospitals and other health care providers.

Bennett, however, said an unexpected shipment of testing supplies now allows for more tests in the short term, though the county still wants to reserve supplies for people with advanced symptoms and the medically vulnerable.

The county has more than 20 local outbreaks, Lalich told commissioners on Wednesday, but she did not disclose any locations or other details.

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## County commissioner wants governor to lift vaccine mandates

Bangs wrote letter to Gov. Brown

By **ERICK BENDEL**  
*The Astorian*

Clatsop County Commissioner Courtney Bangs has penned a letter to Gov.

Kate Brown objecting to the governor's vaccine mandates to contain the coronavirus, arguing that local agencies and industries should be the final decision-makers.

Alarmed by the spread of the delta variant, which has led to a surge of virus cases and hospitalizations across Oregon, Brown has required teachers and other staff at K-12 schools and health care workers to get vaccinated by mid-October.



**Courtney Bangs**

In a letter on Tuesday, Bangs, who represents the mostly rural eastern portion of the county, said she was particularly concerned for support staff, custodians, bus drivers and teachers' aides at schools.

"In rural Oregon, vaccine hesitancy is real and many hardworking Oregonians will be required to choose between the vaccine and their personal freedom (and, thus, job)," she wrote to Brown. "As you can imagine, many will choose personal freedom."

"It is important that even during a pandemic, government is respectful of individual rights and freedoms. In my opinion, we need to reject the type

See *Commissioner*, Page A7

## Riverfront trolley to suspend service

Operators point to a lack of volunteers

By **GRIFFIN REILLY**  
*The Astorian*

The Astoria Riverfront Trolley, struggling to find volunteers, will suspend operations starting Sunday.

"It's a very tough decision," said Frank Kempence, the trolley's maintenance coordinator.

Operators cited a shortage of volunteers, who expressed concern for their health amid the rapid spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus, as the primary reason.

The trolley, one of Astoria's most popular attractions, resumed in July after a 16-month hiatus.

Bob Miller, an operator, said the suspension is especially painful for those who worked so hard to get Old 300 back up and running.

"This hurts. We were having so much fun out there," Miller said.

Even before the delta variant's spread, however,



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Housing is the ultimate goal for Clatsop Community Action's homeless liaisons.

## 'It is a home visit, but their home is outside'

For homeless liaisons, the outreach is often personal

By **ERICK BENDEL**  
*The Astorian*

It's shortly after 8 a.m. on the Astoria Riverwalk, just east of the trolley stop near Safeway. Cheryl Paul and Jodi Anderson, the homeless liaisons of Clatsop Community Action, stroll toward the bushes and greet a 44-year-old man who emerges from a small, makeshift shelter.

"Anything going on?" Paul asks him.

"Oh, just the same," he said, clutching a small coffee in one hand, a bag of tobacco in the other. He's broke and waiting for the beginning of the month. For much of the last three years, he's been homeless.

Paul tells him he's high on the list to get into the Merwyn Apartments, the renovated affordable housing complex downtown.

"Really?" he said. "You may be next, so you need to make sure that you're checking in with them," Paul said.

"OK," he said. He's in the queue for a studio apartment, as long as he follows through with the property manager. "Please check in with her, OK?" Paul urges.

"Uh-huh." "And then we'll help you after that, you know?" Paul said. "Don't spend all your time down here and not check in and miss your apartment..."

"OK."



Cheryl Paul, left, and Jodi Anderson stop at the Garden of Surging Waves.

"... because she can't get a hold of you, you know? Got it?" He said he planned to head that way after he finishes his coffee.

The conversation is casual, but Paul's drift is intentional, structured. She is helping the man, who has autism, map out his day, break it down into little missions that, taken together, could make his life better, or at least prevent it from getting worse.

Paul, the former coordinator of the Astoria Warming Center, a seasonal, low-barrier homeless shelter, has known him for about three years, when he became a frequent overnight guest. Anderson met him when she served dinner there.

Paul reminds the man it is "shower day," a thrice-a-week

service where he can wash up and get some fresh clothes at the warming center. She and Anderson want him to look nice when he visits the Merwyn. And later that day, they tell him, there would be pizza at Ninth Street Park furnished by Filling Empty Bellies.

But, she tells him, make sure you check in with the Merwyn so that apartment doesn't go to someone else. "I want you, you, you to be housed," Paul encourages.

"He's kind of special to us," Paul said afterward. She and Anderson worry about him. He may become frustrated, not show up at all.

See *Homeless*, Page A3

**'WE'RE TALKING ABOUT 1,000 PEOPLE WHO ARE STAYING IN A PLACE NOT MEANT FOR HUMAN HABITATION.'**

Viviana Matthews | executive director of Clatsop Community Action



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

The Astoria Riverfront Trolley will suspend service starting Sunday.

Miller said the trolley had difficulty finding as many volunteers as before the pandemic.

"The numbers are what they are. We're looking at hospitalizations and things with the delta variant and suddenly there's concern," he said. "We're looking out for our people and

we're looking out for our passengers."

The trolley typically ends service in mid-September, so operators are not optimistic service will return in 2021.

"If things get better, we'll be back," Miller said. "But I don't have a lot of faith in that."

## Transit district OKs cuts to bus routes

Changes take effect next weekend

By **ETHAN MYERS**  
*The Astorian*

The Sunset Empire Transportation District has approved cuts to several bus routes on the North Coast due to a shortage of drivers.

The transit district's board voted unanimously Thursday to make the changes.

"It has gone beyond critical (regarding) the amount of drivers that we

have currently employed and the lack of applications currently coming in for drivers," Jeff Hazen, the transit district's executive director, said. "It has gotten to the point where our drivers are working six and seven days a week."

"They are burning out. It is affecting their health, so we are having a lot of sick calls and that just makes matters worse. What we are doing now is not sustainable."

Most of the cuts are to weekend routes, including

See *Bus routes*, Page A7

