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County moves closer to vaccine target

Doses reach 60% of population

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

Sixty percent of Clatsop County residents are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The county views the mark as progress, but also a sign the outreach has a ways to go.

The county has set a goal of having 70% of the population — 27,533 people — vaccinated to try to reach herd immunity against the virus. The county said 23,835 people — 60% — were vaccinated as of Wednesday.

With the highly transmissible delta variant leading to a surge in illnesses and hospitalizations, the county doesn't know if the original 70% target will be as effective as intended.

"At this point, the more (people) that are vaccinated the better," Tom Bennett, a county spokesman, said.

Vaccination rates in the county have followed Oregon's overall arc, the county noted: high demand when vaccines first became available in the winter, followed by a plummet in spring and summer once all of the people eager to get a vaccine had already done so.

At peak, with the county's weekly mass-vaccination clinics, combined with shots administered in hospitals and pharmacies, doses were getting into thousands of arms a week. Now the number is consistently in the low hundreds.

There are signs that this trend is turning around. In the week ending Friday, the Public Health Department saw about 400 people get a vaccine, up from 200 per week in July, the county said, attributing the increase to an awareness of the dangers posed by the delta variant.

Bennett said that perhaps seeing friends and family contract COVID-19 has helped people realize the seriousness of the virus. "The evidence is pretty clear that even if you contract the virus and you're vaccinated, you're likely to get far less sick," he said.

Among Oregon's 36 counties, Clatsop ranked ninth in vaccination rates, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The health authority reported 24 new virus cases for the county on Wednesday and eight new cases on Tuesday. Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 1,880 virus cases and 13 deaths as of early Wednesday.



'They're public beaches, but they're not accessible'

Event at Fort Stevens showed the importance of improving access for people with disabilities

By GRIFFIN REILLY
The Astorian

Over the weekend, Inés García Fullana got closer to the ocean than she ever had before.

Born with spina bifida, a congenital defect in the spinal column, García Fullana has spent her life using a wheelchair. Many beaches lack the accessible infrastructure that would allow wheelchair users to get close to the water.

Fort Stevens State Park hosted a camping and recreation event for people with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities.

The event, which provided accessible yurts, equipment, meals and activities, was a collaborative effort between David's Chair, Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, Adventures Without Limits, REI and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

All-terrain wheelchairs allowed García Fullana and others to move about the beach in a way that some had never done before.

"You always see it in movies when couples are walking around the beach," she said. "It made me feel in awe. I realized I had actually never done that before. It was a great experience."

West Livaudais, the founder and executive director of Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, wants to do more than provide experiences to just a handful of people. Implementing or recognizing accessible infrastructure, he said, should be a priority for parks across Oregon.

"They're public beaches, but they're not accessible," he said.



Photos by Gary Peterson Photography

TOP: David's Chair, Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, Adventures Without Limits, REI and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department provided accessible equipment for outdoor recreation, like kayaking. ABOVE: Brian Luttrell used an all-terrain wheelchair at Fort Stevens State Park over the weekend.

The weekend event gave participants opportunities in kayaking, camping and hiking that are otherwise difficult to access in many places. Livaudais hopes introducing accessible measures to recreation can raise awareness of how many people with spinal cord injuries and similar disabilities have a vested interest in active recreation.

Adventures Without Limits, a Forest Grove-based organization that emphasizes identifying barriers to outdoor recreation for people with disabilities, entered a partnership with Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection in 2018. Together, and along with David's Chair, another nonprofit dedicated to a similar goal, they've

hosted many events like the one at Fort Stevens.

"Outdoor enthusiasm is alive and well within the disability community," Livaudais said. "The reason you don't see families with people with disabilities or parents with children with disabilities camping or out on a trail or on the beach is not because they don't want to be, and it's not that they aren't physically able."

"It's that there are significant structural barriers."

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, many Oregonians have flocked to outdoor spaces like the coast. Some places have accessible

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After a virus death, a disappointment

Funeral home declined to accept Dix

By GRIFFIN REILLY
The Astorian

Cheryl Hartmann had a plan in place for the day when her elderly mother died.

Knowing how difficult it would be to make decisions in a state of grief, she reached out to Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary in Astoria years ago to organize the arrangements. Upon the death of her mother, Edith Dix, Caldwell's would deal with cremation and provide everything necessary for the funeral.

When Dix, 95, died on Aug. 22 from complications of the coronavirus, things didn't go as planned.



Cheryl Hartmann with her mother, Edith Dix.

A resident care coordinator at the Seaside care home where Dix was living called Caldwell's to let them know of Dix's death and was told the funeral home was not accepting virus deaths.

Hartmann was in disbelief. "This was extremely upsetting for me. I can't tell you how upsetting it was. I felt it was very disrespectful," she said. "People don't choose how they're going to pass."

Reneé Caldwell, the owner and funeral director at Caldwell's, told The Astorian that at the time of Dix's death, the funeral home had run out of personal protective equipment to safely handle virus deaths.

"We were just unprepared. We didn't have all the gowns and everything, the stuff we need to respond," she said. "That was just a one-time thing."

Caldwell acknowledged the PPE shortage was not what they initially told Hartmann. Caldwell also said the funeral home had to decline two other virus deaths.

In the days following Dix's death, Caldwell said the funeral home has restocked PPE and is able to accept people who have died from the virus.

"We were really sorry about the people that we couldn't pick up when we didn't have the gowns and everything," Caldwell said.

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Residents challenge Gearhart firehouse bond

Complaint filed in Circuit Court

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — Two residents who oppose the city's plans for a new firehouse have filed a complaint in Clatsop County Circuit Court asking that a bond measure on the November ballot be suspended or rewritten.

The bond measure would deliver up to \$13 million for a new firehouse off Highlands Lane. The project would replace the aging facility on Pacific Way that is vulnerable to a tsunami.

Jack Zimmerman and Harold Gable claim the ballot title and text are insufficient and vague. "To leave the proposed ballot as (is) puts all Gearhart voters at a

profound disadvantage and renders (Gearhart) voters uninformed to material facts that may shape the votes and future of Gearhart," they wrote.

In the complaint filed last week, Zimmerman and Gable asked the court to suspend the bond measure until the final costs of the project are determined or order the measure be rewritten to reflect that the costs are preliminary.

A hearing is scheduled for Sept. 9.

Zimmerman ran unsuccessfully for City Council in 2020 and 2018 and opposed the new firehouse as part of his campaign.

"We prefer the ballot language be precise as to the station location and as to the need for extensive further investigation with final costing demonstrated by signed

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