

Nurses: ‘It is extraordinary what they do’

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The school district hired medical instructional assistants at each school to assist with the school nurses’ duties during the day.

“It’s certainly a challenge, but there’s lots of support from the district and we all work together as a team,” Johnson said.

The constant communication with parents has been key to keeping schools open to in-person classes.

“I talk with parents constantly, pretty much every day,” Johnson said. “There is always somebody that doesn’t feel good, or we have to follow up because (a student) hasn’t been at school ... Overall, most families are pretty responsible about keeping kids home and calling to tell us what is going on.”

‘Responsible for hundreds of patients’

They also work closely with the Clatsop County Public Health Department. Along with weekly meetings to give schools a chance to ask questions, the health department provides a retired school nurse that they can call at any point during the week.

By following the guidance and protocols, Johnson and Brown will often send several sick students home throughout the day in order to deter any spread of



School nurse Tara Johnson stands at the entrance to a gym that has been repurposed as a lunch room where students all face the same direction at Astor Elementary School.

Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

the virus.

“When we think about infrastructure and ratios, and staffing shortages, we tend to go to clinics and hospitals,” Margo Lulich, the county’s interim public health director, said during the news conference. “But when you really think about it, our school nurses aren’t responsible for two, three, four or five patients. They’re responsible for hundreds of patients every single day.”

“It is extraordinary what they do, particularly in extraordinary times like this, and that we actually do as well as we do is just remarkable.”



Students sit on social distancing markers during a music class at Astor Elementary School.

Squid: ‘This is a dynamic resource and it could grow’

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In general, demand for market squid has been high. Fishermen landed more than 32 million pounds in the United States in 2019 for a value of about \$16.4 million, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s fisheries database.

Market squid are short-lived and, even without the pressures of fishing, the population replaces itself each year, according to NOAA Fisheries.

“As a result, market squid populations can handle a relatively high amount of fishing pressure,” the agency concluded.

Most of Oregon’s landings have come to Coos Bay, Newport and Winchester Bay. Among the few Oregon fishermen who have started to participate in the local fishery, there is a strong desire to maintain it as just that: local.

But many of the boats are from farther afield, seine vessels from California, Washington state and Alaska that faced downturns in the California market squid fishery and Alaska’s herring and salmon fisheries and were looking for new opportunities.

As many as 40 vessels participated in Oregon’s market squid fishery last year and 32 participated this year.

That’s more than the fishery can support, Mulkey and others believe. Troy Buell, the fishery management program leader with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, has heard that a better vessel range might be 20 to 30 boats.

“This is a dynamic resource and it could grow in the future,” Buell told the panel on Friday. “It seems to be more robust now than it has in the past.”

“There could be a day where a bigger fleet could be supported,” he added, “but that’s pretty hypothetical at this point.”

Mulkey thinks the sweet spot might be closer to 15 or 20 boats.

He sees little room for the larger operations more typical in California, where a boat might be able to sit on the fishing grounds for days, attracting squid with fishing lights, while other boats associated with the vessel take deliveries to buyers.

Spawning grounds

In Oregon, the spawning grounds can be very small and appear to be focused more in certain areas. One large light boat could

monopolize a fishing ground, Mulkey argues.

For Josh Whaley, a fisherman based in Brookings, there is a definite desire to find ways to “keep most of the fishery here.”

Local fishermen also wonder how profitable the fishery really is to participants coming from elsewhere.

Mulkey might only land squid two or three days in a month, but he is close to the fishing grounds and he burns far less fuel in a summer than he did when he was going after shrimp.

For Whaley, market squid has worked as a bridge fishery between the end of the Dungeness crab season and the beginning of the shrimp season. The boat Whaley operates, the Miss Emily, fishes for Da Yang Seafood, in Astoria, and the processor encouraged Whaley to enter the market squid fishery. There was good money to be made, the processor said.

It is beginning to pencil out now, Whaley said. Still, the fishery remains supplemental for him, not a staple, not yet.

Mulkey has made market squid a much larger part of his business plan. So far,

he feels like the huge initial investment he had to make to outfit a boat for the fishery — around half a million dollars — has been worth it. Despite the many unknowns, he is optimistic about the future of Oregon’s market squid.

“I feel like there’s been squid here the entire time,” Mulkey said. “They just weren’t being harvested.”

Murphy: Has been working since she was 8

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Seated at the center of an endless flow of information, she has gotten to know the community in a way few have the chance.

That knowledge has a dark side.

Working at the sheriff’s office means putting a face to the people who turn up in the reports, including the victims.

Early on in her time there, a man struck a woman with his car downtown. He was arrested for driving under the influence of intoxicants and went to prison.

After the incident, the dead woman’s family came into the office to pick up her effects and saw her picture on the front page of the newspaper.

“And all of a sudden, they just start screaming, ‘That’s her!’ ‘That’s our daughter!’” Murphy remembered. “And that just sent chills down me.”

These were not characters in a crime story, but real people whose lives were damaged.

Another guy who had gotten a DUII had to lose his concealed handgun license. He came into the sheriff’s office and dropped it off. Then he went up into the hills and killed himself.

His widow showed up to retrieve his belongings. She was nice and pleasant, Murphy recalled. Then Murphy saw her minutes later in the freezer section of Safeway in Astoria and realized she had yet to learn how to switch from talking to victims in a professional setting to making conversation with them in public.

“I think we were both surprised to see each other, and weren’t really sure what to say,” she said.

The hardest report she has had to proofread was about a lady whose young daughter had been killed by the family Rottweiler. Murphy had a daughter around that same age. Her supervisor asked her if she needed help finishing the report. Murphy declined. “But it was hard,” she said.

The job, she said, “does have that emotional toll on you.”

Murphy has been involved in public service since she was young. She served in the U.S. Coast Guard for about a decade, one of the first women stationed at Tillamook Bay. She met her husband, Jay, there in the early 1980s. They now live in Brownsmead.

Her career at the sheriff’s office began as a part-time gig under Sheriff John Raichl at the substation in Svensen, where she organized community events like the bicycle rodeos — a safety fair that teaches little bicyclists how to ride and older ones how to navigate traffic — and the Every 15 Minutes program, an anti-drunken driving effort aimed at high schoolers.

Murphy’s husband is on the sheriff’s office’s Underwater Recovery Team, and her son was once a cadet at the agency.

Murphy has worked since she was 8, when she sold spudnuts — potato-based donuts — door to door. She has worked in occupational health and for the U.S. Census Bureau. Along the way, she has made time to travel on cruise ships and has seen about 30 countries.

When it comes to careers, she said, “No matter what you do, find something you enjoy.”

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