

IN BRIEF

Two virus deaths reported in county

The Oregon Health Authority reported two new coronavirus deaths for Clatsop County from the summer.

A 66-year-old woman died on Sept. 12 at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland. She tested positive on Aug. 24 and had underlying conditions.

A 75-year-old man died on Sept. 13 at Providence Portland Medical Center. He had tested positive on Aug. 21.

Both were unvaccinated, the county said.

Clatsop County's reported number of virus deaths now stands at 34. The health authority has recorded 35, but the county maintains that the extra death was not a county resident.

Meanwhile, the health authority reported 12 new virus cases in the county over the weekend and two new cases on Friday.

As of Monday, the health authority had recorded 2,567 virus cases in the county since the pandemic began. The state surpassed more than 5,000 virus deaths since the start of the pandemic, with the total standing at 5,017 on Monday.

The health authority on Tuesday also lifted the mandate on wearing masks in outdoor public spaces because of declining numbers in virus cases and hospitalizations.

City Council will review construction near 11th Street steps

An Astoria homeowner who built into a city right of way next to the iconic 11th Street pedestrian stairs will appeal to elected officials to keep her deck and fence intact.

On Monday, city staff recommended denying Billie O'Neel's request for a license to occupy a portion of land next to the so-called pigeon steps that rise between Irving Avenue and Jerome on 11th Street.

O'Neel, who lives in Arkansas but has owned her Astoria home at the top of the steps for years, had built a deck and fence over a failing retaining wall located in the city right-of-way without first obtaining necessary permissions from the city. A license to occupy would have allowed her to keep what she built on city property.

O'Neel has requested a review of the staff's decision. The matter is expected to go in front of the City Council in early December.

City staff wrote that O'Neel's additions to the property impact "one of the most recognized and iconic vistas" in the city. The improvements were not consistent with Astoria's development code and could make it difficult to access and maintain water and sewer pipes located in the city right-of-way in the future.

O'Neel's renovations also hide the city's retaining wall from view, staff noted, and create a safety issue since any further deterioration "will not be easily visible and may go unaddressed until catastrophic failure occurs."

And there was another issue: O'Neel had not received prior approval or obtained permits or permissions before she built into the city right of way.

O'Neel contends that the city has long neglected the retaining wall and her fix was done with good intentions. She also wants to help fund improvements to colonnades at the top of the 11th Street stairs.

She had hoped applying for a license to occupy would put her back in good standing with the city. Staff say they are looking into other code violations tied to her renovation work.

— The Astorian



Deanna Evans, left, and Esther Steele put together Thanksgiving grocery bags for the South County Community Food Bank to pass out.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Crash: 'We've lost some amazing young men here'

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Paul Nofield recalls Braxton's extensive assortment of colorful and crazy shoes that reflected his personality.

"He had a Nike collection that was wild," he said, adding even when Braxton was wearing professional shoes for work, he often had on wacky socks underneath.

The Braxton family was traveling to Union, Washington, for Escape Lodging's managers retreat at the Alderbrook Resort & Spa when the accident occurred.

Upon hearing of the incident, the mood and the focus of the retreat changed, said Patrick Nofield.

"We gathered all our managers up in a room and talked about the grief and loss and prayed and just tried to be there for each other."

Instead of celebrating the company's success and going through their strategic planning process, Patrick Nofield added, it became a time to explore, "How do we honor our core values by being family right now?"

"This kind of stuff happens every day throughout the world, but when it hits you, it's like, 'How tragic, what a loss,'" he said. "It gives you more empathy."

A tribute to Kobe
At Cannon Beach Acad-

'THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR ALL THE DONATIONS AND PRAYERS. WE LOVE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU.'

Trisha Sweet | Amber Hulbert's sister, who started a GoFundMe to support the family

emy, "It's been a roller coaster," Hull said. "All those things that make life so busy and hectic just seemed to stop. You just are shocked and numb and can't realize what has just happened and what has been taken away."

When he first heard the news about the accident on the afternoon of Nov. 10, his response was disbelief.

"You're like, 'Well, no, they got their information wrong. That can't be what happened,'" he said.

The academy was holding its first Parent Teacher Organization meeting that evening, and throughout it, they continued to get updates about the family, including that Kobe was in a medically induced coma at the hospital.

"That was very tough," Hull said. "Everybody was very caring and thoughtful, and we had good discussions there with the parents."

The school also sent out a message on Veterans Day, so families had a chance to talk about what happened with their students on a day when they didn't have school. It

wasn't until Nov. 12 that news reached the school about the tragedy.

"We talked to the kids," Hull said. "We were very honest, very transparent on what happened and what's going on, and then we listened, too."

The students in Kobe's class immediately came up with the idea of writing notes to place around his desk. They are filled with drawings and messages such as, "We miss you, Kobe" and "I love you, Kobe."

"Our kids, our family, our community, our teachers, they are very strong in supporting each other," Hull said.

The Seaside School District also had counselor Kaile Jones visit the academy on Nov. 15 to provide support to the students. When it became clear there was need for extra time to counsel students, she returned on Nov. 16.

"Every kid that came to her asked to come," Hull said, adding some students were able to go back a second time "after they had a chance to think about it."

Since the crash, Trisha

Sweet, Hulbert's sister, started a GoFundMe campaign to support the family. While the original fundraising goal was set at \$20,000, the amount raised had surpassed \$77,000 as of Monday, with more than 570 donors.

"We are very thankful for everyone that is helping and supporting our family through this rough time," Sweet wrote on the GoFundMe page, later adding, "Thank you everyone for all the donations and prayers. We love each and every one of you."

On Nov. 11, there was a post on Driftwood's Facebook page stating, the Driftwood family "is mourning the shocking loss of our beloved manager, Michael Braxton, who passed away earlier this week in a tragic auto accident."

"Please join us in showing Michael's family incredible support as they move through this tragedy," the post continued. "Your generosity and prayers are deeply appreciated."

Community members and contributors have expressed an outpouring of love and support for the family and shared memories of Braxton and Kobe.

"Our community is getting back and we're getting through this, but we've lost some amazing young men here," Hull said. "It is a loss."

DEATHS

Nov. 21, 2021

KUJALA, Norman Frederick, 90, of Warrenton, died in Warrenton. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

Nov. 20, 2021

HELLBERG, Neil Roger Sr., 86, of Astoria,

died in Portland. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

Nov. 11, 2021

NIEMI, Edward A., 87, of Portland, formerly of Astoria, died in Portland.

MEMORIAL

Wednesday, Dec. 1

MATTILA, Vicki Icel — Burial service at noon, Wilhelm's Portland Memorial Mausoleum, 6705 S.E. 14th Ave.

ON THE RECORD

DUII

• Diego Francisco Escorcia Rosales, 32, of Astoria, was arrested on Saturday at Commercial and Eighth streets in Astoria for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

the Astorian

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Food tax: Is meant to target tourist dollars

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The tax dominated City Council meetings for months, but it was a big item that involved other big items, such as a new City Hall. Though city councilors settled on rebuilding at the location of the present City Hall facility, that discussion is still in its infancy, Steidel said.

Then there is the question of how to budget the food tax. City officials are gearing up to prepare the next fiscal year's bud-

get, but it is still unknown how the tax revenue will be accounted for in those documents. The fire district and the city are not sure what to expect in revenue returns in the early months of the tax.

The food tax is meant to target tourist dollars. It was promoted as a way to get visitors to help cover the costs of needed infrastructure upgrades in the city and rising calls for emergency services.

Proponents emphasized

the passthrough nature of the tax and believe businesses who administer the tax will not suffer as a result. Visitors, they argue, probably won't even notice. Many visitors travel to Cannon Beach from areas that already have sales taxes, they said.

But business owners argue that administering the tax will bring additional costs and the tax could be a deterrent to customers. They worry about the overall impact after nearly two years of pandemic-related restric-

tions and disruptions.

The City Council had considered passing the tax as an ordinance. City Councilor Robin Risley pushed for the matter to go to voters and ultimately voted with the majority to put the tax on the November ballot.

"I felt it was a big enough issue that the citizens should make that decision," she said.

To her, the close vote justified this approach: It showed just how important the issue was to the community, she said.

Peace tree: 'Really tolerant of the ocean and they're drought tolerant'

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In locating the tree, Fleming and Dale McDowell, the city's Public Works director, recognized they couldn't plant it in the park's field or near the swings or under power lines — and sites by the side of the road proved problematic. They settled on a southern area of the park. While still small, the tree could grow from 30 to 45 feet, Fleming said, although don't expect that anytime soon — ginkgo mature slowly.

Ginkgo trees can be

found up and down Holaday Drive, she said. "They're really tolerant of the ocean and they're drought tolerant. One of the criteria for us getting the tree was that we had to have irrigation, and there's irrigation here."

Fleming nurtured the tree in a pot in her driveway until it was sturdy enough for replanting.

"If you plant a tree too far in the ground and actually cut off its air, it'll suffocate it," she said. "You want to lay a shovel handle across it horizontally. You can use

the handle of the shovel to make sure the 'flare' of the tree is not too low."

After planting the tree, volunteers placed soil back around it and added compost over the top.

Fleming will put protective stakes and netting around the tree, and eventually a plaque with the history of the tree will be installed.

The local Kiwanis club

donated the Cartwright Park playground equipment and adopted the park.

Tracy MacDonald, the lieutenant governor of the Lower Columbia Division of Kiwanis, said he appreciated the symbolism of the planting. "We have progressed since the war," MacDonald, a former U.S. Marine, said. "It's been a big shift."

GAME MEAT PROCESSING



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