



Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Concrete slabs sit in a staging area in preparation to be set up as walls for the new Clatsop County Jail in Warrenton.

New county jail set for completion next year

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The new Clatsop County Jail, originally slated for completion this year, is now estimated to open next September or October.

The jail is under construction at the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility, which closed in 2017. Earlier this month, construction crews raised the walls for an addition that will house the jail's general population.

"It's been a moving target, which has been frustrating," Sheriff Matt Phillips, the project supervisor, said.

A combination of supply chain disruptions, labor shortages and rising material costs has slowed progress. The bid date was postponed when contractors involved needed to flee fire zones during the historic wildfires of 2020.

When the county went out to bid, the bids that came back were significantly over the nearly \$24 million construction budget. The project is being financed by a \$20 million bond voters approved in 2018, a bond premium and money from the county.

The county scaled back the design by eliminating a few housing units and making other compromises, such as reducing the number of skylights.

But the new facility — a project overseen by Cornerstone Management Group and designed by DLR Group — will be a drastic improvement, Phillips said.

The existing jail in Astoria, which opened in 1980, has 60 beds — 40 in

See Jail, Page A2

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The new Clatsop County Jail is expected to be completed next year.

CORONAVIRUS

County reaches vaccine milestone

Over 70% vaccinated against the virus

By ERICK BENGEL
and GARY WARNER

The Astorian and Oregon Capital Bureau

Seventy percent of Clatsop County residents are vaccinated against the coronavirus, a goal the county has sought to reach since vaccines became widely available to the public earlier this year.

The county reported on Friday that 27,615 people had been vaccinated. The county's vaccination rate is among the highest in Oregon.

"I think it is a testament to the collaboration of all the health care resources in the county," Mark Kujala, the chairman of the county Board of Commissioners, said in a text message. "It showcases good communications and local media efforts to inform residents of vaccination clinics and why it is important to get vaccinated."

"I'm very proud of this county and hopeful that the momentum continues through the booster dose phase."

The pace of vaccinations peaked during the spring and slowed over the summer and fall. In late June, for

See Vaccine, Page A3

Prosecutors drop charges against former Jewell coach

Body camera footage of interviews destroyed

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

A former Jewell School basketball coach accused of touching a co-worker in a sexual manner got his case dismissed because evidence that could have proved exculpatory was destroyed.

David Allen Samuelson, 64, was accused of repeatedly touching the buttocks of a colleague in 2018 and 2019. He faced misdemeanor counts of harassment and third-degree sexual abuse.

Samuelson said his relationship with the woman, who once coached the middle school girls' team, had been close, that the contact was consensual, and that the relationship occurred outside of school activities. Based on the harassment claims, the school district prevented him from coaching basketball.

See Coach, Page A2

'It was hard for me to carry around those stories'

Merila helps guide clinical operations at mental health agency

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

Shyra Merila, the clinical operations officer at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, has had three promotions in the past five years. In her current role, she oversees the agency's inter-



nal departments and supports the staff.

When she was first hired, as a supervisor and therapist, she looked after the well-being of children and families. For a time, many of the children in Clatsop County who most needed help found themselves in Merila's presence.

These are the kids whose par-

ents are often high on drugs or alcohol, kids who don't know when they're going to eat next. The ones whose parents are jobless, or even homeless; perhaps their family is sleeping on another family's couch. And there are the children who have been sexually abused, including those who have been trafficked.

"It can be really hard to compartmentalize the experiences of young children who have seen just a lot of hardship in their lives," Merila said. "And it was hard for me to carry around those stories."



Erick Bengel/The Astorian

Shyra Merila is the clinical operations officer at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare.

See Merila, Page A3

