



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

The Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival is an important community fundraiser.

Crab fest: Other signature events that usually take place early in the year remain disrupted for now

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“The virtual events in recent years were as fun as we could make them with an online expo, small pop-up events like the Astoria clowns drive-up and the inaugural Festival Feast dining passport that helped connect festival patrons with local restaurants,” David Reid, the chamber’s executive director, said in a statement. “However, we are excited to be planning to return to the festival format we have come to love and be among our friends – ven-

dors, volunteers and attendees alike.”

This year, the crab festival will return to the Clatsop County Fairgrounds from April 22 to April 24. Vendor applications opened earlier this month, and the chamber anticipates around 175 vendors selling crafts, food and drinks.

At past events, the Astoria Rotary Club ran the crab feed as its main fundraiser and source of scholarship funding for local high schoolers.

Thursday’s announcement of the festival’s in-

person return generated some buzz on the event’s Facebook page. Within the hour, the comment section filled with dozens of people tagging their friends, many with multiple exclamation points.

Earlier this week, the Oregon Health Authority projected that hospitalizations from COVID-19 will significantly decline by late March. The state has announced that an indoor mask mandate imposed as a precaution against the virus will be lifted no later than March 31.

Other signature events

that usually take place early in the year remain disrupted by the pandemic.

The annual FisherPoets Gathering, which will take place in late February, will be held virtually. The event will be free online at fisherpoets.org.

Fort George Brewery canceled its Festival of Dark Arts again this year, and is instead holding activities throughout Stout Month in February, including live music.

Tickets for the crab festival will be available online beginning April 1.

Child care: Workers are among the lowest paid in Oregon

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departments that deal with child care. The Early Learning Division in the Department of Education sets learning standards, while the Department of Human Services handles child care subsidies.

Legislators last year directed that the two functions be combined into a single new state department, and legislation under consideration this year will give extra time to form the new Early Learning and Care Department.

Pending legislation, introduced by the House Early Childhood Committee, also would increase subsidies to move closer to paying the actual cost of child care needed by low-income families. Legislative fiscal analysts haven’t estimated that cost yet.

While her committee is working on policy changes, Power said the problems with child care come down to money and how society thinks about the need to care for young children.

Once children are 5, they have access to free K-12 education. In the two-year budget cycle, the state spent \$9.3 billion on K-12 education.

State and local governments pay teachers and other school staff and build and maintain school facilities, but there isn’t similar spending on child care facilities. As a result, child care remains unaffordable for many families, while those providing the care are among the lowest-paid workers in Oregon.

“I often think, ‘What if each family was expected to pay the full cost of sending their kid to school?’” Power said. “I think most people would look at me like I’m nuts if I said something like that, because it just isn’t something that we would expect. Public education

is such a core tenet of our nation, but we don’t extend it to littler kids.”

Staff shortages

Researchers at the University of Oregon have run two ongoing national surveys of families with young children and child care providers throughout the pandemic. In November, the team reported that nearly 60% of child care providers experienced significant staff shortages, compared to just 36% before the pandemic.

More than 85% of child care center directors said they struggled to recruit and retain qualified workers, and nearly 40% said they were ready to leave their jobs or the child care field entirely within the next year.

“These numbers are likely an underestimate, as there have been many reports showing that a large number of providers have already left the child care workforce before we asked these questions,” the report said.

Jessica Boyd, a child care worker and mother of two in Eugene, told the House committee she’s been working in child care for 10 years. More than half her monthly income went to paying for her older son’s child care when he was young, and she left work for two years when her younger child, now 8, was born because she couldn’t afford child care.

Over the past two years, Boyd said, her child care center has struggled to hire workers and reduced the number of children it accepts because there aren’t enough workers to care for them.

“If it wasn’t for my husband, I wouldn’t be able to get by on a child care provider’s wage,” she told the committee. “I could not be self-sufficient on my own income. It’s really discouraging when the people at Taco Bell are making more than me.”

Omicron: ‘Important for people to stick with masking’

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“It’s important for people to stick with masking through the next several weeks,” said Peter Graven, director of the OHSU Office of Advanced Analytics.

The trend is backed up by the averaging of 13 major medical, university and scientific forecast models submitted regularly to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hitting the peak and starting down does not mean the wave is over. Each day will roughly match up with a similar point on the curve, with new infections, severe illness and death.

Graven’s forecast shows Oregon is on track to pass the key number of 400 hospitalizations per day.

Gov. Kate Brown has said she will end the indoor mask requirement when the state has fewer than 400 patients with COVID-19 in Oregon hospitals, or March 31, whichever comes sooner.

In a briefing with state lawmakers late Monday, Graven said he was seeing sustained trends that omicron is very high, but receding.

“I believe we are at the peak and we are kind of bouncing around a little bit as it comes down,” he said.

Hospitalizations are the

most accurate measure of the impact and direction of a virus surge. Graven’s report showed the state would be under 1,000 hospitalizations a day by Feb. 18. It expects cases to drop under 500 around March 23.

Oregon has fared relatively well so far in the omicron surge with lower than projected illness and deaths.

Estimates of severe cases of COVID-19 in OHSU reports near the beginning of 2022 showed up to 3,000 people could be hospitalized in Oregon on peak days in the wave.

“In the current surge, a lot more states went up much higher than us and more steeply,” Graven said.

OHSU projected 80% of the state population followed the indoor mask mandate during recent weeks. That’s a level similar to mask wearing in the Northeastern states first hit by omicron. Oregon had its guard up two weeks prior to the wave moving across the nation to the West Coast.

With masking and a relatively high level of vaccination, Oregon was dealt a less powerful blow than other states where the safeguards were ignored or actively opposed.

The hospitals have filled up during the omicron wave

with mostly unvaccinated people either suffering from severe cases of the virus, or hospitalized for other reasons — surgery, accidents, heart attacks — but blood tests showed they were positive for COVID-19.

The omicron wave was far less damaging for those who were vaccinated, and especially had the booster shot, Graven said.

“Once you get boosted, you pretty much get removed from the possibility of getting hospitalized for much,” Graven said.

The overall result in Oregon has been a lower peak but a flatter curve that spread new cases over a longer period of time.

Graven said the typical wave behavior pattern of “fear and fatigue” was again showing up, with residents taking strong action as the virus numbers mounted, but now tiring of the effort and being quicker to spend time indoors with others, going to restaurants and indoor events.

“That is kind of a true metric of fatigue,” Graven said. “People getting through a surge and trying to get back to normal.”

The Oregon Health Authority, meanwhile, reported 27 new virus cases for Clatsop County on Thurs-

day and 23 new cases on Wednesday.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 4,361 virus cases and 38 deaths as of Thursday.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET VACCINATED.

COVID fatigue is the biggest threat to keeping Oregon schools open and kids safe this winter. But, getting vaccinated is just one of 11 health and safety measures we can take to protect what’s most important. Find out more at Oregon.gov/readyschools.



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