

IN BRIEF

County reports virus deaths

Clatsop County has reported four coronavirus deaths. A 74-year-old man, who was vaccinated against COVID-19, died at an area hospital on Feb. 9, the county said.

No other information was immediately available.

A 68-year-old man died of COVID-19 at his home on Jan. 30, the county said. No other information was immediately available.

A 56-year-old man died at a hospital in Washington state on Dec. 24. No other information was available.

A 63-year-old man, who was vaccinated against the virus, died at his home on July 24.

The Oregon Health Authority, meanwhile, reported two new coronavirus cases for Clatsop County on Tuesday.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 4,584 virus cases as of Tuesday.

County unemployment rate declined in February

Clatsop County's unemployment rate was 4.2% in February.

The seasonally adjusted rate was down from 4.4% in January and down from 8% in February 2021.

The state's unemployment rate was 4% in February, according to the Oregon Employment Department. The unemployment rate was 3.8% nationally.

— *The Astorian*

DEATHS

March 28, 2022
GOODELL, Alan, Wells, 81, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

March 24, 2022
GRAHAM, John "Russ," 71, of Warrenton, died in Portland. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 22, 2022
CHENVERT, Gary, 81, of Cannon Beach, died in Cannon Beach. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

March 26, 2022
HYDE, Anna Henrietta, 96, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

March 25, 2022
FERGUS, Ronald D. "Ron," 73, of Astoria, died

in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

March 22, 2022
SWANSON, Roy, 94, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIALS

Saturday, April 2
CHAMBERLIN, Marcella — Celebration of life at 1 p.m., American Legion Post 99, 1315 Broadway in Seaside.

DANIELS, Ray — Memorial from 1 to 4 p.m., The Loft at the Red Building, 20 Basin St., Unit F.

HISSNER, Jon Allen — Celebration of life at 1 p.m., Astoria Moose

Lodge, 420 17th St.

LUOMA, Allen Edwin — Graveside service at 2 p.m., Greenwood Cemetery, 91569 Oregon Highway 202.

QUALIN, Anthony "Hank" — Funeral at 1 p.m., Elks Lodge No. 1748, 324 Avenue A. in Seaside. Following the service, there will be a potluck.

ON THE RECORD

Assault

- Stephanie May Pressey, 41, of Seaside, was indicted on March 24 for fourth-degree assault and harassment. The crimes are alleged to have occurred earlier this month.

Disorderly conduct

- Michael Wade Hammond, 34, of Astoria, was arrested on Friday near 11th and Commercial streets in Astoria for second-degree disorderly conduct, second-degree criminal trespass and resisting arrest.

Identity theft

- Michael Kein Perez,

33, of Astoria, was indicted on March 3 for identity theft, computer crime, fraudulent use of a credit card and second-degree theft. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in February.

Fraudulent use of a credit card

- Justin Corey Stubbs, 27, of Wilsonville, was indicted on March 15 for fraudulent use of a credit card, first-degree criminal mistreatment, second-degree theft and third-degree theft. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in January.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY
Clatsop County Recreational Lands Planning Advisory Committee, 1 p.m., (electronic meeting).

FRIDAY
Astoria City Council, 10 a.m., working session on Heritage Square, City Hall, 1095 Duane St.



The Lely Vector sweeps along the dairy barn at Tilla-Bay Farms.

George Plaven/Capital Press

Tillamook dairy farmer gets help from robots

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

'WITH ANY TECHNOLOGY, I ALWAYS WARN PEOPLE THERE'S FIVE DAYS OUT OF THE YEAR WHEN YOU WONDER, 'WHY DID I DO THIS?' THE OTHER 360, IT FEELS LIKE A PRETTY GREAT DECISION.'

Kurt Mizee | fourth-generation owner of Tilla-Bay Farms

TILLAMOOK — Kurt Mizee stood and watched as the Lely Vector swept across the concrete barn floor at Tilla-Bay Farms, dispensing feed for 180 dairy cows.

The self-driving robot — nicknamed "The Orca" after the boat from the movie "Jaws" — resembles a giant Roomba vacuum, using obstacle-detection sensors to maneuver along rows of stalls where hungry Holsteins huddled in anticipation.

Automation is rapidly transforming how dairy farmers run their operations, said Mizee, the fourth-generation owner of Tilla-Bay Farms. As labor becomes more scarce, robots are picking up the slack.

"Certainly, it's made us more efficient," Mizee said. "We've stayed the same herd size for over 10 years, but increased our (milk) production 25-30% in that time."

In addition to the automatic feeder, Tilla-Bay Farms has three robotic milkers, where cows voluntarily go to be milked three times per day. The system wirelessly synchronizes to collars fitted on each cow, tracking everything from quality and quantity of milk to how much she has eaten during the day.

Milk from Tilla-Bay Farms is sold to the Tillamook County Creamery Association, a cooperative that makes Tillamook cheese, yogurt, ice cream and other dairy products.

Mizee, who for several years also worked as a regional dealer for Lely North America, said his family's 104-year-old dairy was among the first in the West to invest in the robots. He predicts there will be greater acceptance in the industry to compensate for an ongoing shortage of workers.

"In our own county, every farm is at least one person short, maybe two,"

Mizee said. "In terms of trying to combat costs, this is getting a lot of attention."

Family tragedy

For Mizee, the decision to embrace automation was spurred by tragedy.

Mizee was attending the World Ag Expo in Tulare, California, in 2011 when he got the call. His wife, Wendy, and 8-year-old daughter Shelby had been killed in a head-on crash on Highway 6 outside Tillamook while driving home from a doctor's visit in Portland.

All of a sudden, Mizee found himself a newly single parent to his son, Ryan, while simultaneously balancing around-the-clock demands at the dairy.

"I used to get up at 3:30 a.m. and be here by 3:45," Mizee said. He wouldn't get home until 7:30 in the evening. "That's not a sustainable way to parent."

Mizee purchased the robotic milkers, which allowed him to cut back one employee and afforded much more time he could dedicate to being a dad. The cows effectively set their own milking schedule, coming and going as they please without direct supervision.

The system alerts Mizee via text message if there are any problems or a specific cow has gone too long without being milked.

"We only ever touch the cows that have an issue," he said. "Everyone else is free to do whatever cows do all day."

Between labor savings and increased milk production, Mizee said the system paid for itself in seven years. From there, he began check-

ing out further technological upgrades.

Enter the Lely Vector, a mixing and feeding droid that blurs the line between traditional agriculture and science fiction.

The process begins in the feed kitchen, an extension of the dairy barn loaded with hay in densely packed 4,000-pound blocks.

A robotic claw, or bridge crane, drops from overhead to scoop large clumps of feed that it then drops into the feeder for mixing. Each 1,600-pound load includes grass silage, corn silage, corn grain and a canola-based vitamin and mineral protein mix, carefully rationed to meet the cows' nutritional needs.

Once the load is ready, the feeder emits a series of precautionary beeps before making its preprogrammed rounds. As opposed to one large daily feeding, Mizee said the Lely Vector feeds 18 smaller meals, ensuring the forage remains fresh.

"This is a more consistent feed every time the cow comes to the bunk," Mizee said.

Multiple benefits

Freshness means less feed goes to waste. Whereas in the past the cows might refuse

upward of 1,000 pounds of feed per day, now Mizee said only about a shovel-full goes unconsumed. Those savings add up quickly, especially given higher hay prices due to drought.

Smaller meals also help the cows digest, stabilizing rumen pH — acidity — and producing a higher butter fat content in the milk.

The system is also better for the environment, Mizee said. He estimated the farm burns 20 fewer gallons of diesel per week from driving tractors.

Finally, the time saved by automation has led to a better quality of life. Mizee remarried seven years ago, which he credited in part to on-farm automation giving him the flexibility to start dating again.

The technology available continues to develop, Mizee said. While some farmers may still be skeptical, Mizee said the proof is in the increased efficiency and milk quality.

"You have to have an open enough mind to let the technology do its job," he said. "Because it's a completely different way of operating a dairy farm."

The biggest remaining hurdle, Mizee said, will be training qualified service professionals to maintain the systems. He served on an advisory committee to establish a new agricultural technology degree at Tillamook Bay Community College, which was introduced in 2020.

"With any technology, I always warn people there's five days out of the year when you wonder, 'Why did I do this?' The other 360, it feels like a pretty great decision," he said.

the Astorian

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