

CORONAVIRUS: Preventative measures, like handwashing, are recommended

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statewide and on the district's own preventive safety measures, including disinfecting high-touch areas (including school buses) daily with hospital-grade disinfectant and stocking up on other cleaning supplies.

"While the spread of coronavirus is troubling, we must remind ourselves that fear, rumors, and stigma do nothing to stop the further spread of any virus," said Superintendent Dr. Sara Hahn-Huston in a letter to parents. "Facts and science, proven public health measures and common-sense precautions in our personal lives are the best measures we can take to protect our communities."

Coronavirus refers to the family-group of viruses, while COVID-19 is the specific strain causing the outbreak. Common human coronaviruses can cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract infections — such as the common cold — but some, like COVID-19, can also cause more severe symptoms. Reported cases have ranged from mild illness, similar to a common cold, to severe pneumonia that requires hospitalization.

Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms, but older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions, such as heart, lung or kidney disease, have been identified by the Center for Disease Control and Preven-

tion as the most at-risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Dana Hargunani, M.D., chief medical officer at OHA, recommended that those most at-risk take the following steps to stay safe and healthy:

- Minimize contact with people who may be ill.
- Avoid large public gatherings.
- Order prescriptions by mail.
- Take daily precautions: Wash your hands frequently, don't touch your anywhere on your face and clean surfaces.

The most effective preventative methods for the general public are frequent handwashing and covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.

When handwashing, use soap and warm water to scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds; and when coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue and throw it away after use, then wash your hands (if a tissue is unavailable, coughing/sneezing into your elbow or upper sleeve is the next best option).

OHA also recommends that people avoid contact with people who are sick, avoid touching your face with unwashed hands, clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched, and stay home from work or school if you feel sick, or develop a cough or fever. The Hood River County School District requires that students be fe-

CANCELATIONS: Decisions 'not taken lightly'

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Readiness Center.

"We did not take cancellation of this event lightly," said GTA Executive Director Jessica Metta. "While Wind Challenge has been a beloved staple for STEM education in the Gorge for many years, the safety of the students and volunteers is our top priority. We have been monitoring the COVID-19 concerns very carefully and felt it was best to cancel this year's event based on our most up-to-date assessment and in consideration of general public health and safety."

The planning team behind Wind Challenge will reconvene in a few months to consider rescheduling the event for Fall 2020. All previously registered student teams, volunteers, and the community will be informed if the event is rescheduled.

For more information about Wind Challenge, visit windchallenge.org

Barley Draught shows

Gorge band Barley Draught has postponed all four of its gigs in March they had billed as their farewell tour, after 23 years together.

Double Mountain party

Double Mountain Brewery and Cidery has postponed the 13th anniversary party it planned for this weekend, to the tentative date of June 27.

"After a lot of thought and discussion, we have decided to postpone our Anniversary Party and have set a tentative date of June 27," the brewery announced in a press release. "We do not take the decision lightly, but considering the number of people that attends and the current situation with COVID-19, we do think it is in the best health interests for everyone. Should anyone decide to show up, we will be open for normal hours, unless things change over the next week."

Gorge Commission

Chairman Robert Liberty stated, "The long-term advantages of learning how to use online meeting technology will be important during this critical time, as well as for scheduling future meetings as needed. We do not know, yet, whether the April 28-29 meetings can be held in person, or whether we will need to continue online meetings for the next few months," Liberty said.

The March 10 Commission meeting materials are all posted on the commission website. Liberty advised contacting Executive Director Krystyna Wolniakowski, with any questions in advance of our next online meeting "in order to be very prepared on the content while we are exploring how to have productive discussions using new meeting technology."

Wolniakowski can be reached by email at krystyna.wolniakowski@gorgecom-

mission.org, or by phone 509-713-9623.

Cherry Blossom Buffet

Mosier Grange announced Monday that it was canceling its annual Cherry Blossom Buffet, which would have been held April 5, due to concerns about coronavirus.

HR Business Showcase

The Hood River County Chamber of Commerce has decided to cancel the 2020 Small Business Showcase, scheduled for March 12 at Hood River Valley Adult Center, and will refund vendor fees.

Feast of Words

The Hood River Library Foundation fundraiser scheduled for March 14 has been postponed. "We fully intend to hold the event, but we want to do so on a date everyone is comfortable with," said Foundation president Jen Bayer.

ver-free for 24 hours before returning to class after an illness.

For more information, and to check for updated information about the coronavirus, visit the websites for OHA, www.oregon.gov/oha or the

World Health Organization, www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19. Links to the Center for Disease Control's webpage and the John Hopkins University Coronavirus Tracker, as well as guides

for business and restaurant response, are available via the Hood River County's website, www.co.hood-river.or.us (for the County Health Department's page, click "Health Department" under the County

Departments tab). The Hood River County School District is posting relevant information on its website, www.hoodriver.k12.or.us/hoodriver.

MILL: Company now advertising for a total 45 new positions

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ed, with an intricate system of sensors sending cues and instructions to saws via computers that help the mill make hundreds of board-by-board decisions every minute.

Currently the company employs 50 people in one shift, and will soon be going to 95-100 on two shifts, according to Mike Engel, company president.

The company is now advertising for a total of 45 positions, about a third of which have been filled, in operations, yard work and driving, as well as millwrights and mechanics, and other more esoteric sounding positions such as tippie operator, hula saw operator, gang ender operator, twin horizontal gang operator, and more. Positions can be filled by filling out an application in person or going to Indeed.com

"As soon as we're fully up to employment level. That could be between eight and 16 weeks," said Engel, the company president since 2018. Currently employees hail from White Salmon, Lyle, The Dalles, and Hood River County.

Positions start at \$15.25 hourly, with insurance and 401K available.

The mill's annual volume is 95-100 million board feet; this

will take it "upwards of 175 million," Engel said. "It's about an 80-85 percent increase."

The company was formed out of the bankrupt Hanel Mill in 2001, and retooled and reopened in 2004.

"We've been running ever since with the same owners. We've had a lot of reinvestment in technology and equipment, and now it's a really efficient, competitive mill," Engel said. "We've had this mentality for years of putting it on the second shift and now we've pulled the trigger to do it. We made the decision that we have a solid enough crew on our day shift that we can now do this. It's the opportunity in the supply and the lumber market, and we feel like even with low unemployment there's a lot of desire for family wage jobs. We're a solid company."

Logs come from Hood River, Skamania and Klickitat counties.

"Our working circle is anywhere in a 100-mile direction," he said.

Mt. Hood Forest Products installed a gang edger in November 2018, which slices logs into two-and two-by-sixes, along with some equipment upgrades is the planer mill including a lug loader and

automated grading system in 2014 which visually x-ray scans every board and makes an automated, parameter-based decision for grade so that allowed us to run faster and more accurately.

A barker upgrade came in 2014 which made us run more logs per shift per hour, and a lot of asphalt work and log-yard improvements, and green chain improvements, and stormwater improvements.

"A lot of that comes into play with being able to efficiently run a second shift," Engel said.

"Currently, we run Saturdays to get extra production; my goal is by doing two five-day shift we won't be doing Saturdays — it's better for families," he said. He also noted that the shift schedule will have a three-hour gap between so that day workers have time for family events after they get off work and night workers attend ball games and eat dinner with their families before going to work.

"The equipment is built to run 24-7, darn near, but we'll do lighting upgrades so we can see better at night, and we'll continue to switch out for more LED and finalize our LED lighting for energy consumption," Engel said. "We're



Photo by Kirby Neumann-Rea

COMPANY president Mike Engel checks the computer for the automated status of boards as they are routed by size and grade to appropriate bins prior to shipment.

looking a little improvement to our second air compressor, but other than that the equipment is there and ready to run. We don't have any kilns, we don't have a boiler so we have no constraints on log in one end and lumber out the other.

There's time the log truck will roll in, and we'll run it straight to the mill and it will come in the other end of the mill that same wood 20 minutes late and we can take it straight off the outfeed and drive it over and set it on the truck and it

can literally come in and go out the same day as lumber, which is very efficient."

Gov. Brown announces plan for health insurance companies to waive cost-sharing for COVID-19 testing

Gov. Kate Brown announced last week that the state has reached an agreement with several health insurance companies to waive cost-sharing for their customers who need COVID-19 testing.

"I'd like to thank Oregon's insurers for partnering with the state, so that medical providers can issue COVID-19 tests to anyone who needs one," said Brown. "No one should have to ask if getting a COVID-19 test is something they can afford. I hope this agreement sets a framework that other states can follow nationwide."

The agreement means consumers with fully-insured individual and group health plans will not be charged co-payments, co-insurance, or deductibles related to COVID-19 for the following:

- COVID-19 testing at an in-network provider, in-network

urgent care center, or emergency room.

- COVID-19 immunization when it becomes available.

Outside of these instances, regular terms of insurance such as co-payments, co-insurance and deductibles will still apply.

At this time, people with no or minor symptoms do not need to seek COVID-19 testing, said a press release from Brown's office. Testing is being prioritized for people most at risk, such as those with underlying health conditions, and symptoms such as severe cough, fever, or trouble breathing.

The following insurance companies have committed to this agreement so far:

- BridgeSpan Health Company
- Health Net Health Plan of Oregon, Inc.
- Kaiser Permanente

- Moda Health Plan, Inc.
- PacificSource Health Plans
- Providence Health Plans
- Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield

Samaritan Health Plans, Inc. The state is pursuing the same agreement with self-insured health plans, according to the press release.

"We are glad to see the companies that have already stepped up to support their customers. We will continue to build on this agreement to waive cost-sharing related to COVID-19 testing for all Oregon residents," said Andrew Stolfi, insurance commissioner. "We all have a mission to support public health and protect Oregonians from this virus by removing barriers to testing"

In addition to these plans, the state is seeking clarification from the federal government about exceptions to cost-sharing for Medi-

care Advantage plans, and health savings account (HSA) eligible high-deductible health plans.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services has more COVID-19 insurance information available on their website, www.oregon.gov/dcbss/Pages/index.aspx, and offers the following advice for Oregonians with questions about their health insurance:

Individuals with questions about their insurance coverage regarding COVID-19 should contact their insurance provider.

If you have questions about a health insurance company or agent or need to file a complaint, call the Division of Financial Regulation's advocacy team at 888-877-4894 (toll-free) or visit dfi.oregon.gov.

If you have a Medicare plan, contact the state's Senior Health Insurance Benefits

Assistance (SHIBA) program for free information and assistance at 800-722-4134 (toll-free) or visit Shiba.oregon.gov.

If you have a short-term health insurance plan, mini-medical plan, or hospital indemnity plans, check your coverage and contact your provider first. If you have a health-sharing ministry plan,

contact your provider: This health benefit is not considered insurance and does not have the same requirements of a fully-insured health insurance plan.

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