



# Hood River News

## CORONAVIRUS UPDATES

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## County decides to keep levy on ballot

By EMILY FITZGERALD  
News staff writer

Exactly 25 people gathered in a conference room — with a small crowd gathered in the hallway outside the door — for a special meeting at 3:30 p.m. on March 19, where the commissioners would decide whether they were going to pull the Public Safety Local Option Levy from the May 2020 ballot. The deadline to pull the measure, if they were going to do so, was 5 p.m. that

‘... Everybody in our county has been impacted directly or indirectly by COVID-19. The overwhelming majority of those impacts have been negative ...’

**Bob Benton**  
Hood River County Commissioner

same day.  
“I’ll try very much to make this go very quickly because I know we shouldn’t all be here, I know there’s more people who want to be here,” said Commission Chair Mike Oates at the start of the meeting, “We’ll see

how this goes.”  
The meeting was adjourned after approximately 9 minutes, with the commission unanimously deciding to keep the measure on the ballot.

“I understand how things have changed economically and financially for so many people in our county,” said Oates, “I also understand what has changed for the need of these services that we provide in those same weeks. It’s as dramatic as it can get. I think the only fair thing to do is to continue to put this on the ballot. I think people understand the situation and will make their decision.”

Oates called for the special meeting after receiving a request from Commissioner Bob Benton to discuss the measure with the rest of the commissioners in light of economic changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I wasn’t aware that we could pull the measure but after I discovered that we could, I thought that having a discussion about it would be absolutely vital to its success or failure,” said Benton during the March 19 meeting.

“Since we made the decision to put this on the ballot, everybody in our county has been impacted directly or indirectly by COVID-19. The overwhelming majority of those impacts have been negative...,” said Benton. “To me, there are two questions that need to be

See LEVY, page A16

## UNIFIED ROBOTICS

## Students, staff bring robotics to students of all abilities



Photo by Kirby Neumann-Rea

**UNIFIED ROBOTICS** program participants, at the Feb. 8 SuperQualifier, from left: Payton Bunch, Aliyah Klapprich, David George, Becky Franks, Jaime Rodriguez, Mose Banks, Ben Garafalo, Jesse Bigelow, Taylor Meckoll, and Haley Stuben.

By TRISHA WALKER  
News staff writer

Last fall, as Hood River Valley High School robotics FTC (First Tech Challenge) and FRC (First Robotics Challenge) students were preparing for the challenges of upcoming qualifying meets, some began an additional project: Bringing the joys of competition and camaraderie to differently abled students.

It began with Hood River Valley High School Math/Engineering Teacher Jeff Blackman reaching out to Learning Specialist Becky Franks. He

had learned of the Unified Robotics program from a colleague in Washington, and he pitched the idea to his robotics students.

And those students ran with the idea. “This group of students created Unified Robotics,” Franks said. “It’s really been their work. They caught the vision for it, put the effort into it, created it and maintained it. They do the instruction for it.”

“Jeff and I just sit back and watch the magic, and facilitate a few things,” she said.

Franks had four students involved in Unified Robotics. Each of those

students were paired with two of Blackman’s.

One of those students, A05 Annex FTC team member Payton Bunch, said that, after learning about the Unified Robotics program, she thought the program sounded like “an amazing opportunity.” Her role has been that of team manager, acting as a liaison between teachers and her peers. She also is in charge of scheduling and organization, with help from teammates, Franks and Blackman.

“Unified Robotics meets once a

See UNIFIED, page A2

## Stay-home order goes into effect

### COVID-19 cases in Oregon now 161; first Hood River County case confirmed

By EMILY FITZGERALD  
News staff writer

Hood River County has its first confirmed COVID-19 case, the Hood River County Health Department announced Sunday afternoon.

“As we have seen in other communities throughout the world, more cases will likely be identified in the coming weeks,” said the

health department in an official release. “Hood River County Health Department is taking these results very seriously and will release any information we can to keep the community informed. However, the privacy of the patient is also a high priority.”

The patient is an adult, county officials confirmed, but no further identifying information has been released due to concerns for the patient’s privacy.

“The Hood River County Health Department is working diligently on all fronts to combat COVID-19,” said Public Health Officer Christopher Van Tilburg in a written statement on Monday. “We will not disclose Protected Health Information for our current or future cases unless necessary for public safety.”

County residents are reminded to stay home and to practice social distancing of six feet while in public, wash their hands regularly with soap and water, and cover their cough.

As of 8 a.m. on March 23 (most recent Oregon Health Authority update at the time of publication), 161 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in Oregon.

A stay-home order for Oregon went into effect around noon on Monday, March 23, and remains in effect until terminated by Gov. Kate Brown. The order, which Brown titled “Stay Home, Save Lives,” is similar to shelter-in-place orders issued by other states, such as Cal-

ifornia and New York, and establishes restrictions on public activity that, if broken, qualify as a Class C misdemeanor.

“In a short time, COVID-19 has spread rapidly,” said Brown in the introductory statement to the executive order. “Additionally, some Oregonians are not adhering to social distancing guidance provided by the Oregon Health Authority, as represented by crowds this last weekend at the Oregon Coast, Smith Rock State Park, the Columbia River Gorge, and other places around the state. To slow the spread of COVID-19 in Oregon, to protect the health and lives of Oregonians, particularly those

at highest risk, and to help avoid overwhelming local and regional healthcare capacity, I find that immediate implementation of additional measures is necessary.”

Under “Stay Home, Save Lives,” all “non-essential social and recreational gatherings” are prohibited, regardless of size, if a minimum 6-foot social distance can’t be maintained, and approximately 30 types of businesses are ordered to shut down (see sidebar, A1, for complete list), in addition to campgrounds, pools, skate parks, outdoor sports courts, and playground equipment areas. All other busi-

See ORDER, page A6

### CLOSED

The following types of businesses are closed under “Stay Home, Save Lives.”

- Amusement parks
- Aquariums
- Arcades
- Art galleries (allowed to offer appointment-only visits)
- Barber shops/hair salons
- Bowling alleys
- Cosmetic stores
- Dance studios
- Esthetician practices
- Fraternal organization facilities
- Furniture stores
- Gyms and fitness studios, including climbing gyms
- Hookah bars
- Retail sections of indoor and outdoor malls
- Indoor party places, including jumping gyms and laser tag
- Jewelry shops and boutiques (allowed to offer pick-up and delivery services)
- Medical, facial and day spas
- Non-medical massage therapy services
- Museums
- Nail and tanning salons
- Non-tribal card rooms
- Skating rinks
- Senior activity centers
- Ski resorts
- Social and private clubs
- Tattoo/piercing parlors
- Tennis clubs
- Theaters
- Yoga studios
- Youth clubs

## COPING WITH COVID-19

### Emergency responses organized

The Joint Information Center of Hood River (EOC), supporting Hood River County Public Health, is coordinating public outreach for Hood River residents — representing a network of local partner agencies.

Last week, the Hood River Board of County Commissioners adopted an emergency declaration for the Coronavirus emergency response. Hood River City Council also adopted an emergency declaration for the COVID-19 emergency response, on March 19.

Hood River County activated the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) last week to support all of our local partner agencies, and community, amidst the current public



Photo by Jaquie Barone

**WILLOW PONDS** residents use the proper “social distancing” gaps as they walk and work out together.

health emergency.

Hood River County Emergency Management director Barb Ayers said agencies have created a web site for shared public information about COVID response in Hood River County at [www.GetReady-Gorge.com](http://www.GetReady-Gorge.com).

COVID public information call lines (updated daily or as conditions change):

English — 541-399-8022  
Spanish — 541-399-8023  
Turn to page A5 for details.

See COPING, page A9

### INSIDE

Business Card Billboard... **A15**  
 Classifieds ..... **A10**  
 Death Notices ..... **A6**  
 Entertainment ..... **A3**  
 EOC Activated ..... **A5**  
 Legal Notices ..... **A9**  
 Opinion ..... **A4**

Police Log ..... **A6**  
 Sports ..... **A7**  
 Yesteryears ..... **A14**

*“This project was all volunteer work, and I was very excited to take this on.” — Artist Kristine Pollard, A8*

### BRIEFS

#### CAT suspends route

CAT will be temporarily suspending all fixed-route services as of March 24. “Due to Gov. Brown’s Executive Order (20-12) to stay at home except for essential needs, we will be temporarily

suspending all fixed-route services and only be operating Dial-A-Ride services within Hood River County as of March 24,” said press release. Call 541-386-4202 to book a ride or ask any questions.

#### Superhero run May 16

Sign ups are underway for the Superhero Fun Run 5K-10K run/walk in support of Kyle McCarthy, 13. Preregistration and more information at [tinyurl.com/superherokyle](http://tinyurl.com/superherokyle).

