



ROGERS TOYOTA BREAKS GROUND ON NEW DEALERSHIP IN HERMISTON

REGION, A3



INTERMOUNTAIN CONFERENCE NAMES GIRLS BASKETBALL ALL-LEAGUE HONORS

SPORTS, B1

EAST OREGONIAN

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020

144th Year, No. 105

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Your Weekend



• **MARCH LUNCHEON AND BINGO PARTY**, Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church parish hall, Hermiston

• **WORKS BY KARA WALKER**, Pendleton Center for the Arts

• **FUNLAND FUNDRAISER: SPRING FASHION SHOW**, Hermiston Community Center

FOR TIMES AND LOCATIONS CHECK COMING EVENTS, A6

Weekend Weather		
FRI	SAT	SUN
		
50/23	32/19	29/15

City councilor fills out his father's term

John Lyon continues
a string of Lyons on
council since 1964

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

MILTON-FREEWATER — John Lyon raised his right hand, his left hand resting on a Bible held by his brother, Nathan. The 50-year-old gazed steadily at City Recorder Leanne Steadman as he repeated the oath.

"I, John Lyon," he intoned, ending with, "will abide by the ordinances and charter of the City of Milton-Freewater, and will perform the duties of city councilor to the best of my ability, so help me God."

The freshman Milton-Freewater city councilor took his seat behind a brand-new name plate and began



M. Lyon



O. Lyon

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OREGON CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

FALLOUT BEGINS

Coronavirus continues to impact the Umatilla basin as governments expand response

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Gov. Kate Brown announced more aggressive action to combat the spread of coronavirus Wednesday night, and the subsequent dominoes began to fall Thursday with local governments expanding their response and event cancellations announced throughout Eastern Oregon.

"Each day we are learning more about COVID-19 and how to be responsible and responsive, while also balancing our actions with the need to react appropriately and not create undue stress, anxiety, panic or fear," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said in a press release. "It is a very difficult equation."

The press release outlines that the Umatilla County Commissioners are stopping short of issuing a state of emergency "in the wake of two confirmed cases among a population of more than 80,000 residents."

Murdock said issuing a state of alert instead is a "semantic distinction somewhere between business as usual and an emergency," but for now the county's No. 1 priority is to limit the local spread of the disease, while still expecting an increase in confirmed cases.

"If the number of cases broadens and grows, there is no doubt we will revisit consideration of an emergency declaration," Murdock wrote in an email.

In Morrow County, Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said the board of commissioners has been speaking with health officials and they're planning to address the outbreak as commissioners in a work session next Wednesday.

As of Thursday, 24 cases have been officially confirmed in the state, but Dr. Dean Sidelinger with the Oregon Health Authority estimated there are likely as many as 250 current cases, and that number could rise to 75,000 by mid-May if action to limit social interactions isn't taken.

Brown officially took that action by signing an executive order Thursday that bans all gatherings of more than 250 people until April 8 and issues new guidelines for workplaces, schools, care



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Mario Bandero, a member of the Wildhorse Resort & Casino custodial staff, sprays down slot machines with disinfectant Thursday afternoon as part of a newly implemented cleaning regimen in an attempt to combat the spread of COVID-19.

facilities and other community events.

Local school districts take action

Following the governor's announcement, Pendleton School District Superintendent Chris Fritsch sent out a press release outlining the measures the district would take for school activities.

Rather than cancel events outright, Fritsch wrote that most events would be "suspended" between March 12 and April 12, meaning the events would try to be rescheduled after April 12, if possible.

All field trips, assemblies that bring outside people, and staff professional development opportunities taking place outside school buildings are now suspended.

Additionally, all after school operations — family nights, parent nights, and indoor activities sponsored by outside groups — are also postponed.

While indoor student activities and performances fall under suspension, Sunridge Middle School and Pendleton High School are pressing ahead with outdoor athletics and having students and staff practice social distancing.

Fritsch said in an interview Thursday that the decision to maintain outdoor sports came from discussions with health experts, although district officials plan to follow-up with the Oregon School Activities Association for more clarification.

While the district's parent-teacher conferences were earlier this month, Fritsch said parents and teachers are going to have to adjust in how they communicate with each other.

"Parent meetings are nice, but email works too," he said.

Fritsch warned that circumstances could change again based on state or county direction. He added that he always has contingency plans if the state imposed

heavier restrictions, but nothing concrete yet.

Hermiston School District reiterated Thursday that for now, it does not plan to cancel classes.

The district cited the same reasons as the Oregon Health Authority — schools are a safe place for children and ensure they get at least two meals per day, the virus has shown to be mild in children and in canceling schools for an extended period of time the district "recognizes that students will still congregate amongst themselves outside of school."

"More concerning," the news release states, "many children may be sent to elderly family members for daycare which presents a significant health risk."

Following guidelines from the state, all activities other than classes, including field trips, assemblies, parent meetings, sporting events, concerts and more, will be canceled through at least April 10.

The district also emphasized that it continues to sanitize the school nightly and work to help students and staff practice good sanitation.

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State puts stop to visits to nursing homes

Restrictions affect 670
nursing homes, assisted
care facilities, residential
care facilities in Oregon

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A sign inside McKay Creek Estates' sliding front doors Thursday morning stopped visitors cold.

In red marker, it said "Under executive order by the Governor, we are not allowed visitors at this time."

The Pendleton assisted living facility placed the sign in the foyer

after receiving a mandate from the state to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus that has proven especially deadly for the elderly.

About a mile away, Willowbrook Terrace gave visitors much the same message. A sign warned, "STOP HERE!" ALL VISITORS AND VENDORS. Due to the COVID-19 virus, we are screening all visitors. Please see the nurse before entering."

Only visitors deemed "essential" will gain entrance into Oregon's nursing homes, assisted care facilities and residential care facilities — physicians, physical therapists, hospice workers and family members considered essential for the individual's well-being and

care or visiting during end-of-life stages. Even essential people must answer screening questions and have their temperatures taken.

"Our No. 1 priority is to stop the spread of this virus," said Fariborz Pakseresht, director of the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Pakseresht and Pat Allen, director of the Oregon Health Authority, announced the new restrictions Tuesday evening. The extraordinary step comes as data from around the world shows that the elderly are most vulnerable to the coronavirus that causes the respiratory disease COVID-19.

State health authorities also directed the facility operators

to limit community outings and work to arrange "virtual visits" for their residents.

The first cases of coronavirus at an Oregon assisted living facility were announced Wednesday night after two residents in a veterans' nursing home in Lebanon contracted the virus. State health officials have sent a "strike team" into the nursing home and will test all of its residents and staff.

Local administrators appear to be taking the mandate seriously.

"We have a really vulnerable population here," said Corey Crisman, administrator at Willowbrook Terrace. "We're trying

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